

YouthBank in Minnesota, USA

Equity in Action: Youth-Led Grantmaking in a School Community

Overview

Northfield YouthBank engaged young people aged 14 to 19 who resided in the Northfield School District or attended a Northfield school.

The initiative empowered youth to act as grant-makers - allocating funding to youth-led projects designed to address issues affecting their peers and wider community.

Through structured training and adult mentorship, young people were equipped with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to make informed funding decisions and create tangible change for Northfield's youth.

The Model in Action

YouthBank participants:

- Identified priority issues within their community
- Reviewed proposals submitted by youth-led groups
- Allocated grants to projects they believed would create meaningful impact
- Reflected on outcomes and learning

Experienced Adult Advisors provided practical, on-the-ground training and guidance. They collaborated with local organisations and donors to ensure young participants had access to the resources and support needed to transform their ideas into funded initiatives.

Over an eight-year period, Northfield YouthBank contributed \$164,000 to youth-envisioned and youth-executed projects.

CASE STUDY - YOUTHBANK & SCHOOL

What Made This Initiative Significant

Northfield YouthBank demonstrated that:

- Young people can responsibly manage and allocate substantial funding
- School district-based YouthBanks can serve as catalysts for civic engagement
- Structured adult mentorship strengthens youth leadership without limiting youth decision-making
- Long-term investment in youth-led grantmaking generates measurable financial impact

The initiative placed real financial responsibility in the hands of young people — reinforcing both accountability and confidence.

Broader Impact

Through Northfield YouthBank, young people developed:

- Financial literacy and budgeting skills
- Critical thinking and proposal evaluation skills
- Public speaking and facilitation experience
- Confidence in leadership and decision-making

The programme upheld core values of equity and youth empowerment. It amplified the voices of young people — particularly those underrepresented — and actively promoted inclusion and opposition to racism and systemic bias.

By embedding equity into its decision-making processes, YouthBank fostered a culture of fairness, inclusion, and shared responsibility.

CASE STUDY - YOUTHBANK & SCHOOL

Programme Status

Northfield YouthBank is still active.

Its eight-year track record and \$164,000 investment in youth-led projects remain a strong example of how YouthBank can operate within a school district context to create sustained, measurable impact.

The experience continues to inform YouthBank's approach to youth empowerment, equity, and community-based grantmaking.

Key Takeaway

Northfield YouthBank showed that when young people are trusted with real funding decisions — and supported with structured training — they rise to the responsibility.

Over eight years, youth did not simply participate. They allocated resources, shaped priorities, and created lasting impact in their community.

REAL LIVES.
REAL MONEY.
REAL CHANGE.