



**PACIFIC FOREST AND WATERSHED LANDS STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL
YOUTH INVESTMENT PROGRAM**

**FOCUS GROUP REPORT:
BAKERSFIELD, SAN JOSE, RICHMOND AND CHICO**

JULY 2005

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I. BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF FOCUS GROUPS

In early 2005, the Stewardship Council (SC) retained Tides Foundation to help its Youth Investment Committee design a grantmaking program. The grantmaking program's goals are to:

- Improve the lives of underserved youth by providing wilderness and environmental educational and recreational opportunities;
- Add and enhance recreational facilities and parks in underserved communities; and,
- Make lasting investments and improvements in the social, physical, and environmental infrastructure of low-income communities.

The goal of conducting focus groups was to better understand the common needs and possible differences among diverse communities by engaging local stakeholders. The focus groups also presented an opportunity to refine, confirm/challenge our findings to date. Together with the interviews conducted with 40 internal and external stakeholders, and the funding landscape report, the information learned from these focus groups will better inform the design of the Youth Investment Program's grantmaking program.

Methodology

Tides sought to represent the diverse nature of the territory's communities, and identified locations that were accessible to communities of varying ethnicities, urban density, and varying proximity to green spaces, including parks and state and national parks. In addition, Tides considered that three listening sessions had already been held in Oakland, Sacramento, and Fresno, and believed it important to solicit from other regions. As a result, the focus groups were held in:

- San Jose, CA
- Chico, CA
- Richmond, CA
- Bakersfield, CA

Tides staff identified a small planning committee for each location, and solicited recommendations for attendees from them, as well as from SC Board Members. A total of 148 individuals were invited by these committees and Tides. Thirty-eight individuals participated in the sessions, and included individuals who are youth participants, outdoor education and wilderness program directors and administrators, CA Parks and Recreation staff and management, and other community leaders.

II. SESSION DETAILS

Four focus groups were conducted by two Tides staff: Catalina Ruiz-Healy and Sarah Lohrius, as outlined below:

LOCATION	COUNTIES INVITED TO SESSION	NUMBER OF PEOPLE	SESSION DATE
Bakersfield	Kern, Kings, Tulare, Santa Barbara, Fresno, San Luis Obispo	10	June 21, 2005
San Jose	San Mateo, Santa Clara, San Benito, Santa Cruz, Monterey	12	June 22, 2005
Richmond	Contra Costa, Alameda, Napa, San Francisco, Sonoma	9	June 23, 2005
Chico	Sacramento, Butte, Plumas, Sutter, Tehama, Shasta, the Sierras	7	June 24, 2005

III. RESULTS

The four focus groups confirm the notion that Youth Investment Program (YIP) will be attempting to fill a great need in the field. Underserved youth in all of these regions have trouble accessing parks and open spaces, as well as outdoor education and wilderness programs.

It also validated conclusions from the extensive interviews and research that has been conducted to date: the biggest impediments to participation continue to be financial resources for participants, access to transportation; and access to safe and nearby parks in urban areas. Many participants noted, too, that the nature of the problem was not a dearth of programs, but the lack of access to them.

This section includes the aggregate results of the four focus group sessions. Appendix I includes detailed summaries of each focus group.

A. Memories & Experience

A great majority of participants shared that their formative attitudes and feelings about outdoor and/or environmental experiences were developed as young people, with a great number of experiences taking place with their families, school or Native community.

- Their relationships with parks was much more varied, and depended much more on how their parents perceived its safety. Of those who had positive experiences, many valued the park as a clean and safe space that was open late at night.
- There is overwhelming consensus that family-based programming and activities are seen as the most effective strategy for providing underserved youth access to outdoor and environmental

education, and parks. Participants in all focus group prioritized this as a key lesson to share with the Youth Investment Program.

Some illustrative quotes:

“Going to camp in 6th grade is a long-lasting memory. It was one of my highlights of elementary school.”

“I went to the beach just last year, and found a lot of peace.”

“Looking back at what’s most memorable for me, they would be the outdoor activities I did with my family and when I was in Boy Scouts and when my kids were in Boy Scouts.”

B. Defining the Underserved

- Participants tended to be more comfortable exploring the definition of underserved in relation to environmental education, outdoor experiences and access to parks in their own communities, rather than generalize about who specifically was underserved. The point was made in more than one focus group that given the current state of the public education system, all young people were in one way or another underserved.
- Notwithstanding, communities of color were identified across the board as specifically underserved. Issues contributing to being underserved included the lack of culturally-appropriate outreach to understand that parks, in particular, are for everyone’s use; lack of understanding or appreciation on the part of families about or for outdoor activity; and an absence of mentors or adults with similar backgrounds with whom to relate to during these activities.
- Interestingly, the idea of young people lacking family connection and support emerged as a key theme when discussing underserved communities. Most participants attributed this as a function of families needing to work at least full-time and not having time for recreation.

Some illustrative quotes:

“Native Americans bring different values to recreational activities. They don’t necessarily relate to conventional recreational programs—would like to see programs involving the whole family. A lot of families want to gather plants, make baskets. The Sierra National Forest are the Mono Indians people lands, but families see their sacred lands being desecrated and roads being built over them.”

“Some kids don’t have access to a neighborhood park because their parents don’t want their children to walk a mile to a park. Others have access, say, to a neighborhood pool, but they don’t have bathing suits.”

C. Community Needs

Participants were asked, “What kinds of programs does your community need to reach the Youth Investment Program’s goals?” Regardless of location, answers again were remarkably consistent across sessions.

- ***Continuous and reliable programming.*** Participants highlighted the need for consistent and reliable services, and constant maintenance and operation of parks.
- ***Scholarships, Jobs and Gear.*** The need for programs to offer financial resources for families to be able to afford participating in programs and activities was underscored. Many noted that scholarships, program-related jobs, supplies, activity gear, and staff compensation were also stressed.
- ***Culturally-appropriate.*** In all four sessions, trust emerged as a key component of any successful strategy for reaching underserved young people. One of the key needs participants highlighted in order to build this trust was programming that resonated with the diverse communities in California. For example, Native families enjoy open spaces where families can gather; Latinos enjoy parks with fields on which to play soccer; and young people prefer to not pick up garbage and participate in decision-making. Young people also prefer to have the option of working in this field for real compensation, rather than for free as volunteers, since many times young people have financial obligations and constraints, and are forced to choose the “job at the mall” instead.
- ***Public Education.*** Interestingly, many participants across the territory called attention to the need for there to be more targeted outreach and education about the value and safety of outdoor activities and programs. Many noted that in urban settings, people do not feel safe going to parks; and in rural settings, people do not have a sense of ownership of the land. Several participants also pointed out that there needed to be specific outreach for parents, since without parental consent young people are less able to participate. Schools were also identified as a key target, and particularly science teachers.

Some illustrative quotes:

“I’d like cleaner parks. I’d like transportation to get to the parks. I’d like them to be safe. Those are my needs.”

“There are plenty of programs that take youth out to wilderness areas, but there’s a fear among the kids that they don’t have the right gear and this intimidates families and deters them from venturing into wilderness areas.”

“They live at the base of the park, see it every day, but never get to use it. They don’t feel like it’s theirs, even though they pay taxes on it. They don’t feel like they can use the park—nobody speaks their language or looks like them when they get there. It is important that public servants look like their communities.”

D. Challenges

Participants then were asked to consider “What are the specific challenges your community has in having or providing access to these kinds of programs?” Not surprisingly, financial resources were identified as the key challenge. In addition, participants identified the following three issues as key challenges to reaching underserved communities effectively.

It is again important to note that supply of programs was not necessarily the challenge, but rather, providing direct, consistent and welcoming access to them.

- ***Transportation.*** Indisputably, access to transportation is, according to participants, the single most critical barriers to providing access to underserved communities. Many organizations in the room actually shared stories about having to rent vans or borrowing cars in order to go camping or transport young people to a particular activity.
- ***Staffing.*** Staffing in general was underscored as a key need, and participants stressed the value of having staff and/or role models who reflect and understand underserved communities lead activities and programs. Others emphasized that young people would more easily develop long-term relationships with cultural peers. Hiring culturally-relevant role models also was identified as a strategy for encouraging young people of color to consider careers in the environmental or recreational field.
- ***Perception about safety.*** Interestingly, the issue of public safety emerged as a key challenge for programs working to reach underserved communities. Many participants noted that young people often do not feel safe using parks or public spaces. Others commended that parents sometimes do not feel it is safe to send their child camping, or white water rafting.

Some illustrative quotes:

“If the transportation component could be dealt with, that would be a major step toward getting more kids involved with the many state park and national park resources.”

“In our parks, there are no mentors, no coaches, no continuity and no constant oversight, and people can’t go into those parks...facilities are locked because it is dangerous to leave them open.”

E. Opportunities

When asked to respond to, “How can a grantmaking program help your community provide underserved youth access to parks and environmental and outdoor education programs?” participants were ebullient with ideas and opportunities for the Youth Investment Program.

- ***Support family-oriented programs.*** This emerged as one of the top priorities in all of the sessions. Participants highly recommend that the Program support projects that are family-oriented and that provide the opportunities and means for families to do things together.
- ***Support existing programs that work.*** Participants again and again highlighted the idea that the issue about reaching underserved youth was one of capacity and access and not availability. Therefore, supporting existing, as opposed to new programs was focal point in each session. Participants also stressed the opportunity that the Youth Investment Program has to invest in programs that are working well.
- ***Support collaboration.*** Surprisingly, there was deep commitment to the concept of collaboration among organizations to deliver programs and services. Many noted that their own programs would not be able to accomplish what they do without the help and collaboration of other organizations. They highly encourage the Youth Investment Program to support organizations that collaborate with others in their communities.
- ***Support culturally-appropriate staffing and programming.*** This was identified as a key way to build long-term relationships with underserved youth; youth want to have relationships with adults who look like them and understand their cultural points of reference.
- ***Support indirect costs such as staff and utilities.*** Participants strongly advocated for the support of costs that most funders do not fund—namely staff and “overhead” costs such as gas, utilities, etc.
- ***Support transportation and equipment costs.*** Participants underscored the importance of financing transportation costs, as well as equipment costs. Some suggested purchasing vans and gear that in its absence would prevent young people from participating. Most of these would be one-time capital investments.
- ***Support the upgrade and maintenance of facilities.*** Despite Proposition 40 monies, participants highly encourage the Youth Investment Program to support facilities, as several noted that without adequate spaces, programs will only face another barrier in effectively reaching underserved youth.
- ***Support stipends and real job opportunities in parks/rec and outdoor programs.*** Given the financial realities faced by a majority of underserved youth, participants felt very strongly about providing support for young people to be compensated for working in “real” positions such as counselors, or in positions to make decisions, as opposed to being brought in to clean up sites.

Some illustrative quotes:

“I can think of about a dozen projects off the top of my head that are good, strong programs that are under funded. It would be very effective to put money into organizations that already have developed expertise, that have the facilities or most of the facilities that they need, equipping with them supplemental staff, materials...maybe some help with transportation and capital dollars.”

“Need to look at the whole family. Part of what we’re trying to do is to change cultural attitudes about the value of open spaces and the environment. Families need to be an important part of it, and we need to broaden it to mentors, too.”

“The programs that work best in our community are the ones that have the most parent and family support. The ones that you get the parents engaged in. They’re screaming their heads off at soccer games because they want to be there encouraging their kids. And they’re seeing an end result...My kid was not active and playing video games all day. Now he’s active and playing soccer four times a week.”

“Kids can spend an entire day in the Redwoods, crawling through trees without any equipment, and it’s great, cheap outdoors, but they’ve got to get someone to get them there and let them know that you don’t need to the 2000 All-Around Bike.”

“When we want to get new people into the outdoors and into recreation, it’s very important that they see people like themselves there, either as participants or staff. If I don’t see people like me, I’m not going to go.”

IV. CONCLUSIONS

- The four sessions' participants had a shared understanding and vision about how the Youth Investment Program can achieve its goals. There was clear consensus about transportation, staffing and perceptions about safety being key challenges to consider. This is an enormous asset for the Youth Investment Program as it allows it to develop relatively focused strategies, rather than customized strategies for each region.
- They also shared common needs in their respective communities: access to and not supply of programs was the primary culprit to underserved youth. Continuous and reliable programming; financial support for scholarships, jobs and gear; culturally-appropriate programming and the need for public education—particularly aimed at parents—were all identified by the four locations as key community needs.
- While the content and issues discussed in each focus groups did not differ greatly from one another, the emphasis and importance placed on certain issues did vary somewhat. For example, public safety was identified earlier and more adamantly by the Richmond focus group, than by the other groups. Access to safe parks also seemed to be more of a priority for Richmond and San Jose than for Bakersfield and Chico. However, the need for culturally-relevant programming was brought up at relatively the same time and with equal emphasis by participants across the sessions.
- Despite an appearance of relative homogeneity of needs, it will be important for the Youth Investment Program to remain proactive about listening to local communities' needs to ensure that its strategies continue to be responsive to real needs.

APPENDICES

INDIVIDUAL FOCUS GROUP SUMMARIES

FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY

BAKERSFIELD

Facilitator: Catalina Ruiz-Healy

Date: June 21, 2005

Focus Group: Bakersfield

Number of Participants: 10

In June, Tides Foundation conducted a focus group of individuals in Bakersfield, California for the Pacific Forest and Watershed Lands Stewardship Council (SC). The group was one in four focus groups conducted with the aim to obtain community input on the front end of the development of SC's Youth Investment Program (YIP). There were 10 participants in the focus group from the following fields: parks and recreation, youth development and environmental education. Information was gathered in five areas: participant memories and current experience of the parks or outdoors, definitions of the terms being used by the YIP, community needs in the realm of YIP's currently defined grantmaking goals, challenges that arise when trying to meet these goals, and prioritization of the issues that the YIP should focus on.

This summary will provide quotes from participants and note the general direction of the conversation that occurred, particularly the trends and surprises that emerged from the discussion.

MEMORIES AND EXPERIENCES

Participants were asked to share their favorite memory of the outdoors, as well as the park was nearest to their current home and how often they visited that park.

Themes about these park/ wilderness experiences were characterized by

- Availability of different activities available for different interests (4)
- Activities with the family and/or with a community of people (2)
- The enjoyment of the serenity and beauty of a place in nature (4)

Activities that people described that they enjoyed included hiking (3), organized team sports activities (2), adventure sports (mountain biking, ropes course, white water) (1), and the experience of being away from the "rat race" (3)

Participants were then asked to consider what park was nearest to their home at the moment and how often they visited that park. There was a range in proximity and access. One person talked about the park across from his home, a medium of grass in the middle of the street which was saved for use as a park by the neighborhood residents. Another participant said the closest park was 18 miles away. Distance and safety were raised as issues of concern.

DEFINITIONS

During the second portion of the focus group, the facilitator outlined YIP's working definitions of the terms underserved, youth and environmental education. Participants were asked what they would add to these definitions, and how they would describe underserved youth in their community.

Environment

- Transportation to parks
- Need for more neighborhood parks
- No safe place for kids to go
- Environmental education setting
- Teen pregnancy
- Gangs
- Language barriers
- high rate of pregnancy and drop-out

Urban Communities:

- Not park-rich—kids don't have access to a neighborhood park.
- Sometimes access to a facility available, but no equipment (There's access to a neighborhood pool, but the children don't have bathing suits.)
- pressure to build new facilities, but taxing the government's ability to do that.

Regional differences were highlighted.

Rural communities:

- small town
- not enough to do for young people

Mental Health

- Feelings of fear or intimidation to participate in wilderness activities because they feel they do not have the right gear
- Need for educating that they have a role in preserving these natural areas

At Kern River the lack of education is prevalent. On any given day, primarily after the holidays it's awful to see dirty diapers, garbage and clothes. There needs to be an education of the community, but it seems that most are coming from large urban areas. There's a need for multi-lingual signage within parks emphasizing respect and conservation.

Much of the conversation centered on the need for **culturally and linguistically competent programs** educating youth about public land and stewardship, teaching them that the land is part of the culture. There is a need for educating these communities that these public parks and spaces belong to them.

These communities live at the base of the park, see it every day, but never get to use it. They don't feel like it's theirs, even though they pay taxes on it. They don't feel like they can use the park—they're not educated that they can use these public lands. They feel intimidated because nobody speaks their language or looks like them when they get there.

Specific needs that relate to the identity of Native Americans

- Lack of federal recognition as a tribe limits access to resources (There are no federally recognized tribes in Kern, Ventura and San Luis Obispo counties.)

[Ventura, San Luis Obispo, and Kern River Valley] areas have poor American Indian youth. In other communities there are facilities for other at-risk ethnic youth. Here there is a high concentration of poor American Indian youth, but there is nothing to serve the specific needs of these youth or their families, that they can have ownership of or have vested interest in...

Native Americans bring different values to recreational activities. They don't necessarily relate to conventional recreational programs—would like to see programs involving the whole family. A lot of families want to gather plants, make baskets. The Sierra National Forest are the Mono Indians people lands, but families see their sacred lands being desecrated and roads being built over them. This is a poor community, but you see a lot of people like from the Bay Area who sell their houses and come up to build these big houses and they keep people out because it's now private land. It's disempowering.

COMMUNITY NEEDS

The third portion asked “What kinds of programs does your community need to reach YIP’s goals?”

Parks

- Absent facilities (vs. barriers to available facilities)
- Safety
- Parks and recreation ideally also serve the purposes of environmental education. Doesn't have to be an either/ or situation.
- Staff-intensive activities, structured activities in parks –sports teams, educational programs—orient people to the parks, get them to come back independently.
- Sometimes there is money to purchase the land or facility is available, but there are no resources to operate, manage or run programs.

Environmental Education

- Community gardens teach children about agriculture, nutrition, etc;
- Programs with a recreation component

Wilderness Education

- Programs that outfit students for wilderness experiences and train teachers afterward provide good models

Jobs/Job Readiness

- Opportunities for jobs or further education.
- Paid internships that benefit the needs of program and builds skills in the young person

Other Community & Program Support

- Important for young people to see people of their cultures working in the environmental fields, with decision making power, being paid well.
- Need for visible role models. Empowers them to envision doing a job other than picking fruit for example. Need for building youth leadership.
- Difficult to find people within tribal community to fill environmental positions. They don't get engaged in environmental education early on.

CHALLENGES & PRIORITIES

Considering these youth needs naturally led participants to answer the next questions: “What are the specific challenges your community faces in providing access to these kinds of programs?” and “How can a grantmaking program help your community provide underserved youth access to parks and environmental education programs?” Below are the top challenges that the group identified, strategies to meet these challenges, and possible YIP funding directions:

1. Access

There was a clear sense from the focus group that access to parks and resources was a real concern and that it was limited by both physical and cultural barriers. Some of the challenges the group identified included:

- Cultural and linguistic gap
- No public transit—For example, to go to Yosemite, have to fundraise to charter buses.

The participants proposed a couple of strategies to address the physical barriers to access. They included:

- Build and add on to existing parks to increase green space, go back into neighborhoods
- Support for recruitment of volunteers, docents
- Funding for facilities and programming that’s permanent
- Purchasing equipment that will outlast the program—gear, computers

2. Funding

The Bakersfield participants expressed frustration at the limitations of government funding and foundation support. They also had specific recommendations for how the YIP grantmaking program can better address these issues.

- Important for recreational program to be sustained over long periods of time—this is a challenge due to government budget cuts, and the nature of grantmaking—grantmakers want to see something new and exciting. They don’t necessarily want to support and sustain the good thing that is already happening. There’s no sense of continuity with changes and turn-over in staff. Irregularity of programs is a problem.
- Funders should understand that you cannot use the usual metrics for measuring success. Building the concept of wilderness takes time and you cannot use the usual metrics.
- Have COLA adjustment to grants.
- Important to have multi-year grants
- Sustainability—knowing that there will be access to funding for long periods of time.
- Structure a grantmaking program that favors organizations that team, allows for shared resources, collaboration

3. Safety

Participants were concerned about safety on two fronts – the safety of young people in the wilderness and the safety of young people in urban parks. Participants felt that without public safety, parks are wasted. Instead of an amenity it becomes a blighting issue. Participants suggested the YIP explore the strategy of providing outdoor education and fire safety to address the first concern, and suggested supporting the maintenance of facilities as a way of addressing the safety issue in urban parks.

4. Youth Engagement

There was a general sense in that young people needed to be drawn in to participate in these sorts of programs. With programs that are not culturally appropriate or that don't engage the young people where they live as a primary barrier to engaging youth, the focus group suggested several strategies for overcoming this challenge.

- Provide internships, preferably paid, for high school students to get them interested in the environmental field, natural resources arena.
- Support programs that use teachers from the constituency they are serving and have cultural and linguistic capacity.
- Support programs that allow for teachers who have an ancestral relationship to the land.
- Support opportunities for jobs or further education.
- Provide paid internships that benefit the needs of program and build skills in the young person.
- Support programs that encourage long-term relationship development - that start with young children and continue to support youth as they grow and develop.
- Support programs that address all the different issues from gear, to access, to recreation opportunities to hard and fast science learning to role models, to an idea about the future (job and education)- WildLink is a good program model.

5. Governmental and Community Support of Youth

Not only did the focus group discuss how current programs and facilities do not engage underserved, young people, the participants discussed how establishments actively discourage participation. Some of the examples people gave included:

- Facilities are not inviting to minorities. Stereotyping happens. They don't feel welcome. "The lake is fished out--the Hmong did it. There's trash there-- the Mexicans did it."
- Lack of access to areas to perform Native practices. For example, gathering (of wild plants) areas for native peoples is not feasible—public lands are sprayed with pesticides, private lands are off limits.
- For Native community, their values are often undervalued and when they work with other groups, sometimes their values are compromised. There's a difference between collaboration and integration.

The focus group suggested that the YIP support two strategies that might counteract these circumstances.

- Education in minority communities that these parks and lands are open for their use and enjoyment.
- Programs that encourage community development/ building community. This includes the need for communities own their own buildings and have ownership over, that can help preserve their particular culture. Having buildings, buying facilities crucial to developing cohesive community, expensive to operate and maintain.

6. Family Programs

There was a trend among the participants to emphasize the importance of involving the whole family. Participants viewed this as a key step in engaging these underserved communities.

“If you make the whole family come out, they are experiencing it with their children and they have more of a foundation that is being built.”

During the final portion of the focus group, participants were asked to take five minutes and reflect on the conversation so far and then select the four most important issues they felt YIP should focus on.

FOLLOW UP

WildLink was a program that was used as an example and mentioned several times by different participants as a model program that works. It is described as an interagency program that takes youth from urban areas and goes to Yosemite, spending 5 days in the wilderness. Yosemite Institute staff outfit the youth completely. There are follow-up teacher trainings and family days.

BAKERSFIELD FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS	
NAME	AFFILIATION
Mary Adelzadeh	North Fork Rancheria
Tom Anspach	Camp Keep
Alan Christensen	City of Bakersfield
Fanny Lingenfelter	North Fork Rancheria
Clinton Mungary	Kern Indian Education and Community Resource Center
Jim Oftedal	Central California Consortium
Kristina Ortez	NHEC
Saundra Plett	San Joaquin River Parkway
Ben Vue	VSBDC
Tina Williams	Cold Springs Rancheria

**STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL YOUTH INVESTMENT PROGRAM
FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY**

SAN JOSE

Facilitator: Sarah Lohrius
Date: June 22, 2005
Focus Group: San Jose
Number of Participants: 12

In June, Tides Foundation conducted a focus group of individuals in the San Jose region of California for the Pacific Forest and Watershed Lands Stewardship Council (SC). The group was one in four focus groups conducted with the aim to obtain community input on the front end of the development of SC's Youth Investment Program (YIP). There were 12 participants in the focus group from the following fields: parks and recreation, youth development and environmental education and one youth. Information was gathered in the following areas: participant memories and current experience of the parks or outdoors, definitions of terms being used in the YIP mission statement, community needs in the realm of YIP's currently defined grantmaking goals, challenges that arise when trying to meet these goals, and prioritization of the issues that the YIP should focus on.

This summary will note the general direction of the conversation that occurred, particularly the trends and surprises that emerged from the discussion.

MEMORIES AND EXPERIENCES

Participants were asked to share their favorite memory of the outdoors, as well as the park was nearest to their current home and how often they visited that park.

The answers to the first question fell into a couple of groupings. The number of times an answer fell into the grouping is stated after the bullet:

- first time in the outdoors/wilderness (2)
- playing their neighborhood (3)
- activities with their family (4)
- activities at school or in a youth group (3)

Participants discussed the feelings that made these experiences particularly memorable. These included being intimidated by an unknown environment (i.e. the outdoors and elements such as storms and lightning were often seen as intimidating), and being excited by the opportunity to overcome these fear. They also mentioned having a space away from their regular lives to gain a different perspective. Those playing in their neighborhoods spoke about the importance of having access to a safe, clean environment, especially because they were out until late hours. Family stories brought in the idea of ritual and comfort – going to a familiar place every week, month or year. School or youth group memories all involved wilderness camping excursions

Current uses of nearby parks showed that participants either used them for recreational jogging (5), hiking (1), activities with their children (5), or that the park was under construction (1).

DEFINITIONS

After listening to YIP's working definitions of the terms underserved, youth and environmental education, participants were asked to add to these definitions, as well as describe the underserved youth in their community. When discussing underserved youth in their community, the group identified many indicators for the underserved youth.

In the home:

- poverty, guardians working long hours for economic survival
- drug abuse – self and in the home
- lack of mentors and role models
- lack of family support, communication, and connection
- lack of physical space, privacy, and outlets to anger
- early pregnancy

In the educational and institutional support systems:

- those that are over-reliant on the system could be seen as under-served
- immigration status
- youth and guardian lack of information, no access to assistance (legal, medical, housing, educational programs, support services)
- poor English
- undiagnosed learning disabilities
- drop-outs
- lack of youth-focused programs (more available for adults or for children)

Mental Health:

- low self esteem, hopelessness
- no opportunity to be recognized
- little sense of direction, unclear expectations, no clarity for young people about what it means to be a youth
- isolation, mental health issues
- on a positive note: many youth from this background are very resilient

Environment:

- gang involved and gang impacted
- lack of transportation leads to lack of access
- violence

“Kids feel hopeless.”

A participant mentioned that their organization recently did a focus group of youth to talk about their top areas of concern. This group is held yearly and what emerged as a top issue this year that has not in the past is the lack of family connection and support.

COMMUNITY NEEDS

Participants were asked “What kinds of programs does your community need to reach YIP’s goals?”

Parks

- San Jose is closing down a lot of its parks – need to keep them open and continue to add new ones
- sports areas that youth can take advantage of – not just tot lots or dog parks, but basketball courts etc.
- skate parks are extremely popular
- maintaining and upgrading existing facilities

Environmental Education

- environmental leadership programs teach students in a hands-on way, and knowledge is filtered back to their community
- school garden projects that bring in older students to mentor younger students and help students make sense of the environment around them while incorporating youth planning
- school garden projects that bring in older students to mentor younger

Wilderness Education

- outings and excursions – the experience of being outside their regular environment is essential
- programs that allow youth to conquer their fears of the wilderness are essential and life changing

Recreational Activities

- kids clubs
- late-night activities – give youth somewhere to go that is safe – tying in graffiti arts and music
- weekend and summer activities

Family Activities

- weekend trips and other events that bring the entire family out together

Jobs/Job Readiness

- youth jobs and summer jobs

“I think there should be more programs that expose youth to nature ... I could go to the park and see basketballs flying all over the place but how often does a youth actually go to the beach? Or actually to the forest to see Redwood trees? How often do they get to see water, sand and wind? Just those three elements can all of a sudden have one major effect on one youth.”

CHALLENGES AND PRIORITIES

Considering these youth needs naturally led participants to answer the next questions: “What are the specific challenges your community faces in providing access to these kinds of programs?” and “How can a grantmaking program help your community provide underserved youth access to parks and environmental education programs?” Below are the top challenges that the group identified, strategies to meet these challenges, and possible YIP funding directions:

1. Funding

Adequate funding was seen as the largest issue for organizations trying to provide services to youth. This is especially true for the following:

- outdoor adventure programs where equipment costs can be prohibitive
- family-oriented programs which are expensive and more difficult to run
- when capital expenses are involved, which are unattractive to funders
- government grants were cited as being particularly stringent in their requirements for specific outcomes and measurable objectives that are sometimes unreasonable or difficult to track

I live in the San Joaquin Valley and there was only a certain group of people who could go to places like Yosemite and the Grand Canyon. And I could never be one of those people because of the economic status I found myself in. But one day somebody made the effort and said, ‘Come on. Let’s go.’ No backpack. No sleeping bag...and just given that chance opened so many doors.

One strategy discussed was leveraging resources to implement innovative programs that involved collaboration with different agencies.

2. Safety

A youth participant in the focus group spoke about gangs recruiting new members, at younger ages, using recreation centers and other such gathering places. The recreation centers and youth gathering places that are open need additional security and a larger number of attentive staff that are engaged with the youth so that they are aware of dangerous behavior going on behind closed doors and out in the open.

3. Youth Engagement

There was a general feeling that environmental education needed to be made more appealing to youth. A participant mentioned that the Monterey Bay Aquarium convened a youth group to address why there wasn’t a lot of diversity in the aquarium’s attendance. What emerged as part of the discussion was that youth are very often brought into environmental programs only to do trash pick-up or other environmental restoration activities. They are not engaged by these types of activities and feel like they are just being used as another body to pick up trash.

To keep youth engaged, the participants discussed:

- youth involvement in the planning of their environmental education. Currently, there is a lack of this and youth are not empowered by or learning from the environmental

education they are getting. They need to be given the opportunity to invest in their own communities and in themselves.

- mix restoration activities with outings or involve sports
- make environmental education culturally relevant and appealing by addressing the connection and spirituality that exists with the land – young people really respond to this. This can be using native traditions with native youth, but doesn't mean that traditions can't also be created.
- engaging youth with a mobile rec room that goes to their home and engages them in art and creativity – giving staff a chance to get to know them and for them to get to know and trust the staff.

4. Access

There was also a sense that youth and their families did not know what was available to them, or if they did know, they did not have a way to access those programs or parks.

Strategies included:

- making funds available for travel – in particular, bus passes and gas were mentioned – these are often not attractive to funders, but very necessary for youth access to facilities that are available. San Jose youth bus transport is \$50 a month and foster children are no longer eligible to get a bus pass as a benefit.
- keep parks and recreational spaces in low-income communities, and concentrate programs on low-income, urban powerless people
- door-knocking and house meetings in areas where people don't know what programs are available to them. People get excited when they realize what programs they have access to.
- youth advocates and mentors that are knowledgeable about resources available.

5. Governmental and Community Support of Youth

Participants discussed the “youth discrimination” that exists in adults making planning decisions. Adults are often fearful to see youth convene and fearful of providing places such as basketball courts that foster that convening. They feel they are going to get gangs or youth from other areas if they put up a basketball court.

Similarly, voters often don't want to support development of facilities and programs where youth convene because they are either fearful of it, or don't understand the importance of the programs or facilities.

The group discussed the following:

- With so much competition for parks and open spaces, it was seen as essential that what is already there be kept open, maintained and upgraded and that new spaces be developed.
- Public education of the needs of youth was also seen as essential to developing support for these needs.

6. Mental and Physical Health and Wellness

There was discussion at-length about the need to look at mental and physical health and wellness in the context of environmental and outdoor education for underserved youth. This topic also tied into youth engagement in and access to the programs that are available.

The gap in sports programs available for all levels of competition was discussed – at a point, competition in sports becomes too much and youth often drop out because they don't feel like they have the ability to play.

Diabetes and obesity also factor into youth being able or feeling comfortable to participate in outdoor activities. A lot of emotions become involved in these activities: youth often try to hide the fact that they are embarrassed, scared, can't swim, or are in a new environment. They can be embarrassed by their bodies and often will wear long shorts and t-shirts to the pool or the beach. They might not have the correct outdoor equipment to participate in an activity and that might cause them to be embarrassed. Their personal identity can be challenged, which is intimidating, but necessary and good when approached correctly.

Some strategies that were discussed:

- providing advocates, mentors and teachers that can deal with these emotions with sensitivity, that look like the youth, that can relate to them, that the youth trust, and that can be there for them on a consistent basis
- programs that don't always give awards to or limit participation to high-achieving students. Often, low-achieving students need a different sort of stimulus to motivate them
- increase the number of programs promoting health and wellness, teach youth how to reduce stress, relax and deal with conflict
- organizational consistency was identified as an issue to be addressed – with constantly shifting infrastructures and program goals, youth are not given a steady base on which to rely

7. Family Programs

Family involvement was seen as a comprehensive way to address many issues that underserved youth are dealing with. More family-oriented activities and programs would reach more people in the community, allow guardians and youth to understand each other better, and give them the opportunity to know what their children and involved in.

SAN JOSE FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS	
NAME	AFFILIATION
Teresa Alvarado	PG&E
Rafael Cruz	Mayfair Initiative
Ana Espinosa	City of Watsonville
Christa Gannon	Fresh Lifelines for Youth (FLY)
Bob Hennessy	San Jose Conservation Corps
Jose Huntedo	Barrios Unidos
OT Quintero	Barrios Unidos
Mary Ann Ruiz	San Jose Parks Commission
Raul Tornel	Catholic Charities Youth Service
Frank Torres	Fresh Lifelines for Youth (FLY) – Youth
Glen VanderZee	Alum Rock Union School District
Linda Vu	NAACP

**STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL YOUTH INVESTMENT PROGRAM
FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY**

RICHMOND

Facilitator: Sarah Lohrius
Date: June 23, 2005
Focus Group: Richmond
Number of Participants: 9

In June, Tides Foundation conducted a focus group of individuals in the Bay Area region of California for the Pacific Forest and Watershed Lands Stewardship Council (SC). The group was one in four focus groups conducted with the aim to obtain community input on the front end of the development of SC's Youth Investment Program (YIP). There were 9 participants in the focus group from the following fields: parks and recreation, youth development and environmental education. Information was gathered in five areas: participant memories and current experience of the parks or outdoors, definitions of the terms being used by the YIP, community needs in the realm of YIP's currently defined grantmaking goals, challenges that arise when trying to meet these goals, and prioritization of the issues that the YIP should focus on.

This summary will provide quotes from participants and note the general direction of the conversation that occurred, particularly the trends and surprises that emerged from the discussion.

MEMORIES AND EXPERIENCES

The focus group participants were asked to share with the group their favorite memory of the outdoors. Below are the memories that were shared.

Most participants discussed experiences as young people – some as young children and some in their teenage years. These experiences took place with their families, school programs and within the Native community. One participant shared that he had not had any real outdoor experiences. Some of the outdoor activities that they shared included:

- Camping
- Local field trips
- Exploring the wilderness all around home
- Local parks

Participants related their stories and several different feelings and values that they connected with those experiences. They included feeling connected to a larger world and empowered to feel that connection. Participants felt solitude, peace and spiritual connection. Some participants described the experiences as exposing them to a world beyond their block. And one participant described his experience rolling down a hill in a park as fun and free.

"We grew up going camping and going to the ocean. Being indoors was not the normal thing. I didn't appreciate how much I got to do until I took kids from the Boys and Girls Club to the ocean and they didn't know what the ocean was."

Participants were then asked to consider what park was nearest to their home at the moment and how often they visited that park. Most of the participants take advantage of local parks frequently, with two participants finding their opportunities to commune with nature sailing in the Bay.

DEFINITIONS

During the second portion of the focus group, the facilitator outlined YIP's working definitions of the terms underserved, youth and environmental education. Participants were asked what they would add to these definitions, and how they would describe underserved youth in their community.

The participants felt uncomfortable talking about underserved in general, making the point that all youth are underserved in some way, especially in the educational environment of California. Participants felt more comfortable exploring the definition of underserved youth in relation to environmental education, outdoor experience and access to open spaces.

With this context, participants explored the elements that contributed to youth being underserved. They fell into a few areas:

Environment

- No access to parks
- Unclean, unsafe parks
- Fewer opportunities through the schools
- No Transportation

In the Home

- Without consistent, dependable guidance and mentors
- Families that don't participate in outdoor activities
- Families that don't have advocates
- No involved adults

Mental Health

- Children without opportunities to have fun
- No sense of community
- Focused on survival

"They don't have dependable places or people to look out for them. They don't have a place they can go and look forward to."

"Kids who attend school districts that don't have outdoor educational experiences live in neighborhoods that do not have safe and clean parks, and have parents that do not participate in outdoor activities."

COMMUNITY NEEDS

The third portion asked "What kinds of programs does your community need to reach YIP's goals?"

Some of the areas of need that participants pointed to include:

Parks

- Facilities – safe, clean parks and places to go
- Transportation

Environmental Programs - Qualities

- After school programs
- Programs that are relevant to young people
- Consistent programs

Jobs/Job Readiness

- Job training/skill building

Other Community & Program Support

- Leaders and advocates
- Ways to cut through the bureaucracies
- Productive collaboration between organizations – access to information – knowing what is available
- Provide CBOs with the available resources telling them what other organizations and resources are
- Indirect costs

“I’d like cleaner parks. I’d like transportation to get to the parks. I’d like them to be safe. Those are my needs.”

“Last year, we took the kids to a park and one kid had a gun. Then we took them to another park, and there was an altercation. Then we took them up to the hills and the kids found a bag of heroine...when we talked to the kids about what was going on, they talked about feeling threatened or being threatened...They were scared to go to the park.”

CHALLENGES & PRIORITIES

After considering the community needs in terms of parks and environmental education opportunities for youth, participants were asked “What are the specific challenges your community faces in providing access to these kinds of programs?” Another question they were asked to consider was: “How can a grantmaking program help your community provide underserved youth access to parks and environmental education programs?” Below are the top challenges that the groups identified strategies to meet these challenges, and possible YIP funding directions.

The participants discussed several challenges to reaching underserved youth through their programming. They fell into a few categories.

1. Access

Participants talked a lot about concrete barriers that prevent young people from gaining access and prevent the practitioners from implementing their programs. These challenges included:

- No space
- City bureaucracies prevent them from utilizing public spaces
- Lack of information of what is available
- Financial barriers to parks, campsites, and other resources
- No transportation
- No volunteers

To address these challenges the participants emphasized supporting transportation and facilities as a priority for the YIP. The group also suggested providing stipends and support for youth to attend

existing parks and programs. One participant voiced great interest in supporting the reintegration of environmental and outdoor education programs into the schools.

2. Youth Engagement

Participants talked about the importance of trust to bring young people into programs. The things that seem to get in the way of building this trust include:

- Underestimating the intelligence/potential of youth
- Dwelling on negativity
- Lack of youth ownership of programs
- Lack of consistent, committed people involve

One strategy that the participants thought was imperative in addressing this issue is creating opportunities for youth to talk about what they want and what they need. Other strategies that the group mentioned included supporting programs and parks that reflect the culture of the constituents, educational programs in different languages, and information about the native people at the parks

3. Safety

The other issue that was raised consistently throughout the conversation was one of safety. Even in communities where there are parks or spaces for young people, the young people do not feel safe to use them.

4. Family Program

The participants in Richmond felt that it was critical to get families involved in these programs to have long-lasting influence on the communities.

“The programs that work best in our community are the ones that have the most parent and family support. The ones that you get the parents engaged in. They’re screaming their heads off at soccer games because they want to be there encouraging their kids. And they’re seeing an end result...My kid was not active and playing video games all day. Now he’s active and playing soccer four times a week.”

5. Funding

In terms of grantmaking programs, participants emphasized:

- Need to support community based organizations directly
- Need to support indirect costs – payroll & PG&E
- Reporting requirements should be commensurate with grant amounts
- Supporting and fostering collaboration and partnerships
- Consistent, long-term funding

RICHMOND FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS	
NAME	AFFILIATION
Solis J. Aguilera	Native American Health Center Youth Services
Neal Desai	National Parks Conservation Association
Marc Epstein	Norcal Environmental Student Network
Alice Gathogo	Ma'at Youth Academy
Irene Molina	Girl Scouts
Sherry Padgett	Bay Area Residents for Responsible Development
Judy Reed	Boys & Girls Club
Crystal Salas-Patton	Native American Health Center Youth Services
Robert Wilkins	East Bay YMCA

**STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL YOUTH INVESTMENT PROGRAM
FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY**

CHICO

Facilitator: Catalina Ruiz-Healy
Date: June 24, 2005
Focus Group: Chico
Number of Participants: 7

In June, Tides Foundation conducted a focus group of individuals in the Chico and Sacramento regions of California for the Pacific Forest and Watershed Lands Stewardship Council (SC). The group was one in four focus groups conducted with the aim to obtain community input on the front end of the development of SC's Youth Investment Program (YIP). There were seven participants in the focus group from the following fields: parks and recreation, youth development and environmental education. Information was gathered in five areas: participant memories and current experience of the parks or outdoors, definitions of the terms being used by the YIP, community needs in the realm of YIP's currently defined grantmaking goals, challenges that arise when trying to meet these goals and prioritization of the issues that the YIP should focus on.

This summary will provide quotes from participants and note the general direction of the conversation that occurred, particularly the trends and surprises that emerged from the discussion.

MEMORIES AND EXPERIENCES

The focus group participants were asked to share with the group their favorite memory of the outdoors. Participants told of memories that they had shared as children with their families and as parents with their kids. Some of the activities that participants recounted included:

- Soccer
- Backpacking
- Camping
- Playing in the creek
- YMCA resident camp
- Boy Scout activities – as a scout and with his kids

Participants were then asked to consider what park was nearest to their home at the moment and how often they visited that park. All of the participants live close to a park and utilize a park frequently. The farthest a participant lived from a park is 1 mile and participants visit a park from 1 to 7 times a week.

DEFINITIONS

During the second portion of the focus group, the facilitator outlined YIP's working definitions of the terms underserved, youth and environmental education. Participants were asked what they would add to these definitions, and how they would describe underserved youth in their community.

In this discussion, participants defined underserved youth as a fundamental issue of access – in the environment and in the home.

In the Environment

- Participants emphasized the need to look at young people who are geographically disconnected from opportunities for higher education, as well as financially disadvantaged young people.
- No space
- No transportation
- Unsafe communities/parks/activities

In the Home

- Participants felt it was also important to look at cultural barriers to experiences with the outdoors. If the family of a young person from an urban area has not had experience with outdoor recreation, the young person will not be exposed to it.
- People may live in rural areas but don't have the training to know how to appreciate it
- Families don't have the money or time necessary to take kids out to the woods
- Language barriers
- High level of poverty
- Danger of drugs/incarceration/gangs
- No geographic knowledge/awareness of their area
- Recreation is not a priority for their family – for a number of reasons

“One of the things we encounter all the time in Northern California is that our kids may not be financially disadvantaged but they are geographically disconnected from universities and there's a much lower number that go to college. And we wind up not getting some of the grants that we'd be eligible for because financially they're not disadvantaged...but it's a lack of access.”

“I've seen some sites coming back saying urban youth are not having these outdoor recreation – especially minority populations because they don't have the family history - culture.”

COMMUNITY NEEDS

The third portion asked “What kinds of programs does your community need to reach YIP's goals?”

Parks

- maintaining and upgrading existing facilities

Environmental/Wilderness Education

- Experiential education that integrates many different elements
- Teacher education programs with support and follow-up to ensure that teachers have the resources and opportunities to use their knowledge.
- Programs with clear programmatic philosophies – that supports empowerment, socialization, team-building, and leadership development

Other Community & Program Support

- Opportunities to connect diverse constituency groups
- Opportunities for service providers to collaborate
- Inventory of current programs

Family Activities

- Ways to involve the family and change the culture

CHALLENGES & PRIORITIES

After considering the community needs in terms of parks and environmental education opportunities for youth, participants were asked “What are the specific challenges your community faces in providing access to these kinds of programs?” Another question they were asked to consider was: “How can a grantmaking program help your community provide underserved youth access to parks and environmental education programs?” Below are the top challenges that the groups identified strategies to meet these challenges, and possible YIP funding directions.

The focus group in Chico spent a good deal of time thinking specifically about the best ways to use the funds from the Youth Investment Program. They explored some general ideas about how to direct the funds and some very specific plans for the grantmaking program.

1. School Programs

Unlike other groups, the Chico focus group emphasized the role of teachers and supporting in-school programs as critical to reaching youth that are not usually reached. Some participants felt that piquing the interest of and providing the necessary resources to teachers was a crucial step in reaching the young people. They suggested several strategies for addressing this need:

- Need to focus on teacher pre-service and post-grad education and get the teachers interested and they will plug the kids into the other programs
- Follow-up after one shot programs/camps in school – kids aren’t getting any science in the elementary school - need outreach to classroom teachers
- Training for teachers and recreation and parks professionals – training about how you motivate and how you encourage awareness about the outdoors environment – not necessarily science training
- Curriculum development

2. Access

Participants in Chico also pointed to transportation and clean and safe facilities as imperative and achievable goals. They identified many existing parks and programs that need support to maintain and update their facilities and to reach out to underserved communities. The group strongly recommended that the YIP provide support for:

- Transportation
- Facilities maintenance

“If the transportation component could be dealt with, that would be a major step toward getting more kids involved with more valuable activities ...there are so many state park and national park resources.”

The participants in Chico felt that the best way for the YIP to address issues of access is to focus strategically on existing environmental education programs and not on the vast expanse of parks.

Some suggested ideas include:

- Focus on environmental education as a more directed strategy with long-term influence - \$3 million would have limited impact on the behemoth parks and recreation system
- Support programs that bring different groups of young people together – connecting urban and rural across income levels
- Throw it all in an environmental camp
- Provide support for kids in poor communities to attend and participate in existing programs
- Enhance/promote existing programs with proven track-record

“I can think of about a dozen programs off the top of my head that are good strong programs that are under funded. Putting money that already have developed expertise, that have the facilities or most of the facilities that they need, equipping them with supplemental staff, supplemental materials, and maybe some help on transportation and capital dollars. Some of this stuff is weathered and old and may need to be fixed up to be safe.”

3. Funding

The participants had some very specific recommendations for the YIP program and how it can shape its grantmaking. Some of the specific ideas that participants suggested for the YIP included:

- Mini-grants/seed money for curriculum development
- Two separate strands of funding – parks & recreation and environmental education – with different specific goals and criteria
- In the first three years, focus on infrastructure – bolster existing facilities & programs. In the following phase, arrange for young people to use those facilities.
- Support collaboration but do it carefully because in some areas there may not be available collaborators.
- Define specific educational goals by which to evaluate proposals.

It’s going to be important to identify the goals on the educational side. The basic “Kids. Woods. Good.” is not enough. It’s important to come up with some higher level goals.

The Chico participants were surprisingly emphatic about attaching certain requirements to the YIP grants. To that end, they suggested:

- Leverage the money by requiring grantees to find matching grants, which can include in-kind matches.
- Make the grants dependent on implementation.

There are a lot of programs where teachers get trained and then they are so busy with all the things they have to do that they don’t use it. I would like to see this grant be dependent on implementation. You have to affect a minimum - I don’t know what the minimum is – but this amount of kids between the ages of 12 and 18 have to have an experience in the outdoors connecting with nature for x numbers of hours.”

CHICO FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS	
NAME	AFFILIATION
Jane Adams	California Park And Recreation Society
Heidi Hatcher	Whiskeytown Environmental School
Scott Lawrence	Feather River Recreation and Park District
Kim Niemer	City of Redding Community Services
Dave Steindorf	American Whitewater
Anne Stephens	Chico Unified School District
Anna Treanor	Chico Area Recreation and Parks District

APPENDIX II: FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

1. Welcome and Introductions (5 minutes)

-series of focus groups to gather information to better understand the needs and opportunities in your community and develop a responsive grantmaking program

-list of funding ideas

-goals of YIP

-representing your own opinion, not of an organization necessarily

-comments are non-attributed and anonymous

-go through our definitions of underserved, environmental education, etc

2. Warm up question: (15 minutes)

-please share your favorite memory about a recreation program or park

-go through our definitions of underserved, environmental education, etc

- a. What would you add to these definitions? (individual and community indicators)
- b. How far from your home is the nearest park? How often do you go?

3. Questions (60 minutes) (Each person to write down their thoughts first)

- a. How would you describe underserved youth in your community?
- b. What kinds of programs does your community need to reach the YIP's goals? (on easel)
 - i. Parks
 - ii. Enviro and wilderness programs
- c. What are the specific challenges to your community has in having or providing access to these kinds of programs? *Access? Staff? Resources? Availability?*
 - i. Parks
 - ii. Enviro and wilderness programs
- d. How can a grantmaking program help your community provide underserved youth access to parks and enviro ed programs?
- e. What else should we know so that this grantmaking program is most effective and responsive to your needs?

4. Prioritization (15 minutes)

- a. If you had to select the four most important things/issues the program should focus on, which ones would you choose?
- b. What are the two most difficult things about focusing on these

5. Follow up: (if time permits)

- a. Who currently provides these kinds of programs? Who's the best?
- b. Lessons learned

6. Closing (2 minutes)

-last thoughts: words to wise

-receive summary of session and gift certificate

-use of focus groups

-thank you