



Smithsonian

Latino Center

Since the summer of 2014, the Latino Center embarked on a longitudinal study of the Young Ambassadors Program (YAP) with the hopes of unpacking the impact of this creative youth development program. This long-term impact study encompassed both traditional and informal research methods and started with a simple question: What did we hope to learn? We narrowed our focus into two areas; the impact of YAP on the individual and their impact on communities at-large.

What we have learned over the past five years of long-term evaluation is that in order to achieve the mission of YAP we must create a program that is not age-specific but provides support at crucial life stages and transitions. If we really want youth programs to impact communities, we need to empower young people to co-create these initiatives and offer opportunities to practice what it means to be a community conscious leader.

As we enter the thirteenth year of YAP's programming, the Latino Center aims to continue co-designing meaningful experiences with one of its most important stakeholders: young Latino leaders. This is crucial for us as a museum and an Institution, since investing in young people and fostering community conscious leaders develops our future advocates, collaborators, donors, employees, supporters, stakeholders, and visitors. The Latino Center gratefully acknowledges major and continued program support from Ford Motor Company Fund.

To learn more about the YAP Impact Study and its lessons for the field of museum education and youth development, please read the recently published [article](#) in the National Arts Education Association's online journal *View Finder*.

For more information on YAP or access to the full report, please email keye@si.edu.

~Emily Key
Education Programs Manager



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Submitted by **audience focus**

YOUNG AMBASSADOR PROGRAM ALUMNI LONG TERM 2017 EVALUATION
May 2018

The Young Ambassadors Program (YAP) is a national program for graduating high school seniors aimed at fostering the next generation of Latino leaders in the arts, sciences, and humanities via the Smithsonian Institution (SI) and its resources. YAP is a college preparatory and leadership program encouraging participants to explore various academic and career opportunities through the lens of the Latino experience, including:

- Promoting higher education by providing access and exposure to various academic/career disciplines and Latino role models in these areas;
- Development and continued building of 21st century skills; and
- Fostering pride in the Latino community and culture with the aim of encouraging continued contributions.

The YAP Alumni Network allows the Smithsonian Latino Center (Latino Center) to create a comprehensive continuing education experience for the Young Ambassadors. Creating a robust alumni network allows the Center to provide:

- Exposure, access, connections, and resources for all alumni;
- Education and career development experiences and networks;
- Mentorship and personal development assistance; and
- Opportunities to impact local communities across the country through civic engagement and philanthropy.

Through building of this network, the YAP program has evolved into a **life-long opportunity for enrichment, development, and resource access** via the Smithsonian and its valuable partners thereby creating a growing community of emerging Latino leaders. In addition to the YAP specific long-term impact (the learning outcomes), we hope to support the premise that youth development

programs—through multiple learning touchpoints over time—have the ability to shape civically engaged citizens that catalyze action and change in their communities.

The full focus of both the YAP summer experience and its Alumni Network is to transform high school students into **Community Conscious Leaders: Individuals that see leadership as a position of service and not of power**—that take action not just for their own benefit, but also for their community.

METHODOLOGY

The study was guided by the following questions:

- What is the long-term effect of sustained participation in the Young Ambassador Program?
- Where are YAP alumni currently in their academic/career path?
- How does participation influence YAP alumni academic and career decisions?
- How do YAP alumni currently connect (or wish to be connected) to program and to the Latino Center?
- What prompts YAP alumni to stay connected to its Alumni Network and to the SLC over time and how does continued connection support:
 - Civic Engagement and Philanthropy
 - Personal/Interpersonal Development and Growth
 - Culture and Community/ Civic Engagement
 - Leadership
 - Communication



Figure 1: Map showing survey respondent locations

The study consisted of two methodologies: an online survey sent to all alumni and seven mini-case studies of alumni from 2006 to 2015. This study was informed by the 2014 YAP Alumni Network Pilot Study, which guided the development of the online survey and case study protocol. In addition, other informal observation methodologies are included in the Appendix of this study.

Where are YAP alumni currently in their academic/career path?

This study found that the percentage of YAP alumni who completed an undergraduate or graduate degree is much higher than the national average for Latinos (see Figure 2). Half of the sample indicated that they are still working on a college degree among those who attended YAP in 2014 or later.

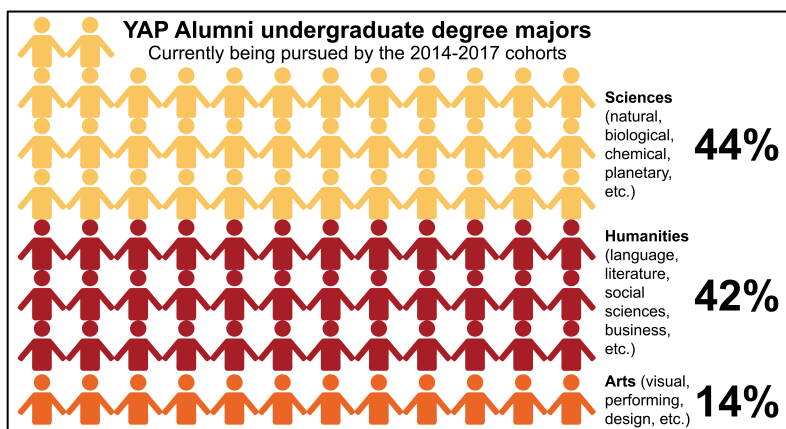


Figure 2: YAP Alumni Bachelor's Degree Majors

Many participants who have attended since 2014 and are working on a bachelor's degree are also working full or part-time suggesting that there is a need for paid internships or other professional development opportunities that the Alumni Network can offer.

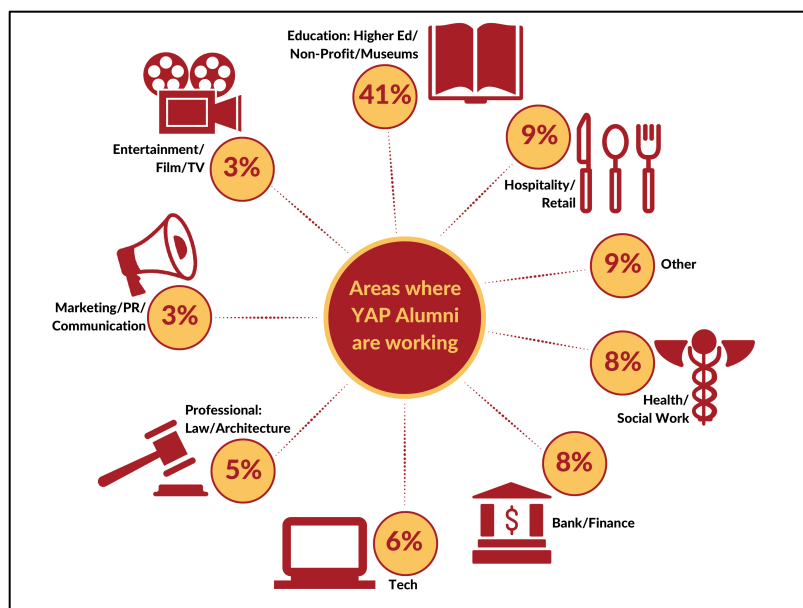


Figure 3: YAP Alumni Industry Infographic

Most alumni indicated that they were working in the field of education, including K-12 school, higher education, and in education departments at museums or other non-profits (see Figure 3). There were no other strong patterns in the fields or industries where YAP alumni worked.

How does participation influence YAP alumni academic and career decisions?

When alumni were asked to tell us a story about their YAP experiences' long-term impact, many participants noted that YAP deeply influenced their academic and career choices. In addition, meeting professional Latino role models was also noted as an important ongoing influence in their lives.

How do YAP alumni currently connect (or wish to be connected) to program and to the Latino Center?

Most alumni noted that they stayed connected to the YAP Alumni Network via social media and by participation in YAP-sponsored alumni events. For those alumni who were not highly connected, many had specific plans to increase their participation in the alumni network in the near future. When asked to tell a story about the long-term impact of their YAP experience, many described their participation in the Alumni Network as a key benefit.

What prompts YAP alumni to stay connected to YAP Alumni Network and to the Latino Center over time?

Four outcome areas were developed through a series of evaluation studies on the summer YAP experience (2012 – 2014). These outcome areas were then applied to the alumni study framework.

***“I am who I am
because of YAP.”***
2010

Of the four outcome areas, Personal & Interpersonal; Culture & Community; Leadership; and Communication, Personal and Interpersonal outcomes were highest rated and most frequently referenced in the open-ended responses. Culture and Community and leadership were equally rated, while the Culture and Community category was more often referenced in the alumni impact stories and the mini-case studies. All of the outcome areas were ranked relatively highly, meaning there is no statistical difference across how the alumni rated the outcome categories. Program participants continually achieve the outcomes and this effect remains strong over time.

IMPLICATION OF FINDINGS

The Washington Week experience is a game-changer:

Whether alumni described growth in personal and/or professional terms, there was an awakening in young people's awareness of and connection to their role in their community. It was a deep and resounding experience that has only intensified and expanded in the lives of the participants over time.

YAP Influences Choice of Study and Career:

When YAP participants arrive for the summer Washington Week experience, most have ambiguous ideas about what they want to study in college or about possible professional career tracks beyond general or vague ideas. By introducing YAP participants to people of Latino heritage who are accomplished in their fields of education and non-profit cultural organizations, a wider world of academic and career possibilities opens up for them. The study shows that a high percentage of alumni currently work in education and non-profit cultural organizations, suggesting that YAP can influence young people's desire to work in these areas.

YAP views youth development as holistic human development:

When a young person becomes a part of the YAP family, the focus is not just about academic degrees and career choices but, most importantly, about one's sense of belonging—of being a whole person.

The Alumni Network moves intentions into actions:

While the YAP summer experience has been shown over years of evaluation to be a powerful experience for participation, by itself, it is not enough. Continued participation in the YAP Alumni Network strongly suggests that participants find the support to transform a relatively short period of time in their lives (about two months including the Washington Week experience and summer internship) into a life-long pattern of engagement, learning, and support. A unique aspect of YAP is that it mixes 1st generation immigrant students and alumni with 2nd, 3rd, and 4th generations. This allows for a richer sharing of knowledge, resources, and experiences within the network.

Creating a genuine sense of Nuestra Familia is essential:

The bond created from the first encounter with YAP and fostered by the Alumni Network is the cornerstone of YAP. Without this firm commitment by the Latino Center to build trust with its alumni, continuing to provide them with professional development and opportunities to network, the Latino Center would not be able to engage in the current level of co-creation and engagement.

"I felt so privileged to have that experience to the point that I'm constantly thinking about ways to use that privilege to help others."

2008

Meeting and continuous engagement with mentors/role models is critical to success:

Research on the importance of mentors in the lives of high school students—particularly in immigrant and at-risk populations, has been well documented (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2013). Similarly, studies show that mentoring on the college level helps students feel more connected and engaged on campus, ultimately improving students' outcomes (Coles, 2011). This effect is particularly strong for under-represented students. Other studies note the importance of continual mentoring for young professional women, minorities, and under-represented populations (Pozin, 2012; Wright & Wright, 1987). The length and consistency of mentoring is also a key factor in success (Bruce & Bridgeland, 2014).

The Latino Center's approach is unique in that it is committed to creating and sustaining continual access to a wide range of informal and structured mentorship opportunities for its YAP alumni (see Figure 4). Stories from alumni attest to the ongoing value of these connections. In forming and sustaining this family, YAP alumni provide each other with valuable resources, information, and support. In addition, the Latino Center provides educational experiences and support networks for YAP participants and alumni. The whole *familia* benefits; they share knowledge that leads to success academically, personally, and professionally, thereby deepening their understanding of the value of and need to continually support these networks. It also encourages the replication of the YAP idea in their own communities and professional fields.

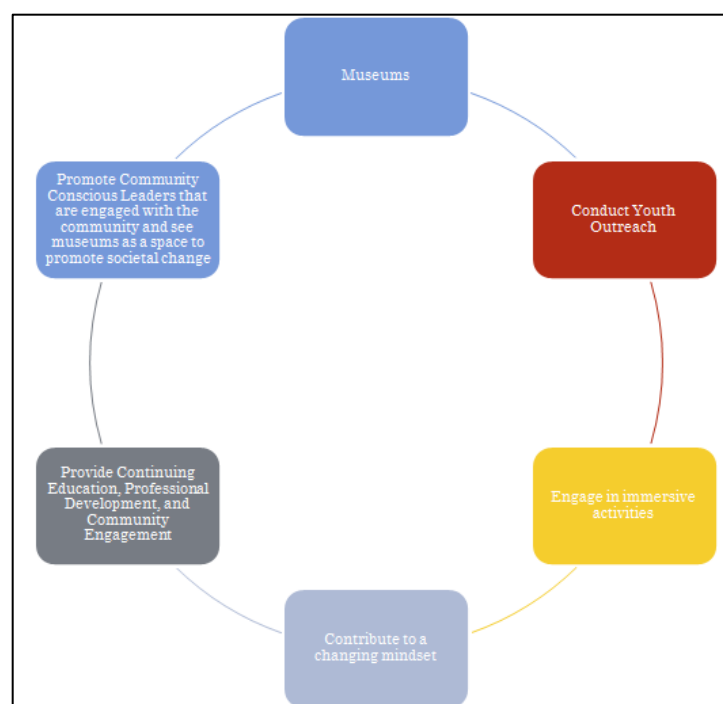


Figure 4: SLC Youth Development Model

The Alumni Network influences civic engagement:

YAP alumni have a strong sense of the importance of continued civic engagement. They are informed and passionate about human rights for all. Most YAP alumni note that this more integrated concept of civic engagement can be traced to their initial interaction with the YAP summer experience and was supported by continued connection to the YAP Alumni Network.

YAP Alumni Network appeals to millennial's sense of philanthropy:

Philanthropy to YAP alumni is much more than a monetary donation, although they have increased their contributions as they have moved higher in their professions. Essentially they see philanthropy as a kind of humanism that seeks to foster understanding and build bridges. The Latino Center's approach to fostering life-long philanthropy in general and a specific interest in support the Latino Center is in keeping with recent research on how millennials perceive philanthropy (Case, 2016).

"It's magic to be able to give the gift of self confidence to someone."

2015

Specifically, this generation is inspired to act charitably because of an intrinsic passion for a cause. The YAP experience and Alumni Network feeds this passion. Peer-to-peer engagement is a critical influence on and vehicle through which millennials charitably give and volunteer. Again, the YAP program's commitment to long-term connection—to nurturing the *familia*—is a key factor in its success. When millennials are given multiple opportunities to use and develop skills, they are more motivated to support that organization. YAP gives its participants a range of ways to be directly involved with the Latino Center and when they give money they are assured that their dollars are making a direct contribution to a cause.

" It's about giving or engaging with your community or the world with the same spirit that YAP and the Latino Center instilled in me - the spirit to go out and build bridges, foster understanding."

2010

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE: THOUGHTS FROM THE LATINO CENTER

With YAP and its Alumni Network, the Latino Center's goals for the future are to continue to develop life-long learning and engagement opportunities providing support at crucial life stages and transitions. Qualitative and quantitative feedback shows that there is a desire to see even more peer-to-peer intergenerational opportunities throughout the YAP experience, both during the summer program and as part of the Alumni Network. While the younger cohorts have knowledge to share with the growing Latino PK-12 school-age population, the older cohorts are embarking on new professional pursuits and can serve as mentors for the upcoming YAP generations. If the Latino Center wants to stay true to the idea of a holistic youth/human development program, looking into the future, it must address the need for dialogue and learning/giving opportunities across the generations. This includes refinement and focus on fostering trust and bonds through online and onsite experiences, including:

1. Personalizing *Conexiones* regional reunions
2. Focusing on providing targeted continuing education and professional development for our alumni, such as:
 - expanding the intergenerational mentorship model formal mentorship/internship program (with internships both at SI and partners across the country)
 - refining the informal webinar series to provide safe spaces to discuss challenges in personal and/or cultural development, as well as academic or workplace/early and mid-career development issues
 - refinement of the alumni advisory group to provide "board like" training and experiences
3. Focusing on strengthening the community engagement model (*Alcancemos*) by allowing alumni even more opportunities to take ownership of the types and locations of engagement, and incorporating additional ways to share Smithsonian resources in communities across the country

Throughout this process of creating *familia* through co-created and shared experiences (both on the individual as well as community level), the Latino Center aims to provide an alternative definition to leadership development: one that shifts the focus from solely academic/professional development to the development of a whole individual, fostering the notion of community conscious leadership. This means taking the "Pay It Forward" approach and scaling it to the next level to develop young citizens who can be both visionary leaders and community agents (boots on the ground). This starts with developing a changing mindset and view of civic engagement tied to personal and professional development and responsibilities that culminates with building program experiences and pathways over time allowing alumni to practice this type of civic engagement. Ultimately, YAP catalyzes participants to be brave and take action, becoming community conscious leaders.