



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Whitney Museum of American Art
Youth Insights Professional Development & Evaluation
April 2009

Committed to enhancing professional development of its staff, the Whitney Museum of American Art (WMAA) Education Department implemented an evaluative thinking component into practice through an evaluation of the Youth & Community program, *Youth Insights* (YI). In a series of Evaluative Thinking workshops led by Audience Focus Inc (AF) researchers, WMAA Education staff developed and implemented evaluation strategies to assess the effect and benefit of YI. By identifying the key values and benefits of the YI program, Education staff created a baseline that can be used to make strategic decisions when modifying, improving, or reinventing YI and other education programs. Additionally, the museum staff sought to use this evaluation as an opportunity to build organizational capacity, learning how to develop protocols and instruments and how to collect data from visitors.

To assess the effect and benefit of YI, AF researchers worked with WMAA education staff to develop a list of benefit statements. The development of these statements unfolded as part of a three-step process: 1) WMAA staff worked together to generate a list of key values and participant benefits; 2) an initial focus group was held with YI alumni to determine benefits from the participants' point of view; and 3) combining the input of WMAA staff and YI participants, a benefits matrix was created (See Appendix A). This benefits matrix was then used as a tool to measure the effect YI has on participants, as well as locate program strengths and weaknesses.

The 2008 YI program evaluation included youth from both program strands, Artist in Residence and Contemporary Community. Findings from both strands show that YI participants benefit in broad and diverse ways. While many of these benefits were suggested by staff prior to the evaluation, new benefits emerged through the data. Overall, participants said that their experience in the YI program helped them to gain more knowledge and insight about how museums operate and helped prepare them for future careers. Participants also said that YI helped them gain more knowledge and understanding about art and artists and that they had fun while learning. Artist in Residence participants emphasized the importance of working with "real artists," saying that this close interaction helped them learn how to think critically about art and helped open their minds to different interpretations and perspectives. Participants from this strand also gained inspiration to create their own artwork and express themselves in positive and creative ways. Data from this strand also showed that youth view YI as an environment that supports an open and safe platform where they can express themselves and voice their opinions without fear of being put down or ridiculed. Contemporary Community participants said that they learned more about how to teach art to children and felt like they were making good use of their time by making a commitment to civic engagement.

Such findings suggest that YI is successful in helping youth develop in positive ways. Research on youth programs in other community organizations and learning institutes has identified many elements that need to be present if the program is to be successful in helping teens develop intellectually, emotionally, and socially – most of these elements are present in the YI program. Using the findings from this and future evaluations, WMAA staff can implement changes that make YI even stronger in the coming years.