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Youth Speaks Announces *The Brave New Voices Network Initiative*

San Francisco, CA – Youth Speaks, the renowned arts education program widely recognized as the nation’s leading spoken word program for youth, is pleased to announce the launch of ***The Brave New Voices (BNV) Network Initiative***. **This seven-year initiative includes \$10 million of grants** directly to other nonprofits that work with teenagers in writing and performance.

Founded in 1996 in San Francisco, Youth Speaks has long championed a national movement of young people boldly declaring themselves present through poetry and spoken word. In addition to offering a comprehensive series of arts education programs to over 35,000 youth locally, Youth Speaks produced the first youth poetry slam in the nation in 1997, and launched the Brave New Voices Festival in 1998 (featured for two seasons on HBO).

The BNV Network Initiative is dedicated to building a sustainable field of organizations that intersect arts education and youth development practices with a deep focus on long-term civic engagement and public presentation. Currently, over 75 programs across the United States make up Youth Speaks’ BNV Network. The hope is that by investing in the field as a whole, Youth Speaks can create a pathway for the voices of 21st Century America to have the resonance, opportunity and access they both deserve and demand, while ensuring ongoing, local programs in communities nationwide.

“Ensuring young people are heard and mentored by well-equipped adults and organizations is essential. Small organizations can be highly effective, yet stretched thin and lacking meaningful resources,” notes James Kass, founder of Youth Speaks. “This project aims to change this dynamic. By working as an intermediary, we can provide resources to the people on the ground, working with teenagers every day. Ultimately, stronger organizations mean more opportunities for young people to find and present the power of their voices.”

The BNV Network initiative was launched by two anonymous Bay Area-based supporters, who have been joined by the Ford and Surdna Foundations, both long-time Youth Speaks champions. Roberta Uno of the Ford Foundation says of the initiative: “Ford is proud to support this work, and we hope that this type of initiative will create a model for supporting the entire arts and youth field in the

future. Given that the Ford Foundation's mission is to ensure that people have a voice in the decisions that impact them, the BNV Network Initiative is a smart project for us to get behind."

Grants to Other Nonprofits

Over the next 7 years, Youth Speaks will provide direct multi-year grants to 25 organizations nationwide. Grants range from \$175,000 to \$550,000 a year, and include general operating support, technical assistance, and staffing support. In addition, Youth Speaks will host an annual conference to work with up to 100 grassroots organizations to develop their capacity. Led by experts from within the BNV Network, along with consultants and specialists nationwide, the focus will be on growing a sustainable and robust field of programs nationwide. The Initiative also includes an annual pool of \$200,000 "programmatic grants" available for all BNV Network Member organizations. Additionally, the BNV Network will develop a robust, membership-driven web presence to support and train emerging leaders, engage the alumni base, and house the best practices of the network, as well as publicize and make visible the work happening across the country through the BNV Network.

In order to help launch the Initiative, Kass hired Ninive Calegari, co-founder of 826 Valencia, an award-winning youth program, which has been duplicated both nationally and internationally. She will be working with Youth Speaks' Managing Director, Paula Smith Arrigoni, formerly of the Nonprofit Finance Fund to direct this field-building initiative.

Applications to ***The BNV Network initiative*** are available now at www.youthspeaks.org and remain open until Oct 1, 2014.

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