

*Following are Recommendations for the Foro summarized from Dialogues held March – August 2005 by national and international organizations, substantially composed of young people in the Americas. These Recommendations are presented first by each topical question of the Forum and then followed by each country's national report and summary:*

**Promoting Leadership and Good Citizenship**

*How can the leadership potential and social responsibility of young entrepreneurs advance the Summit Plan of Action?*

**General Findings and Recommendations:**

Often, the voice and ideas of young people are not fully taken into account by governments and business leaders because of youth's relative inexperience in the professional world, their comparative lack of knowledge in specific areas of expertise, or their limited political and financial power.

This observation, however, is too superficial a diagnosis of the problem and fails to recognize that youth can be a crucial font of innovative ideas, creative solutions, and new perspectives. For their part, youth, on the whole, can become too accepting of their lack of voice and too complacent in waiting for their generation's eventual rise to leadership positions. This situation can and must be resolved so that the input and voice of youth is recognized and can contribute to the economic, political and social growth of the Americas.

Promoting Leadership and Citizenship requires a multifaceted approach centered not only on teaching social responsibility in theoretical terms but also learning how to be a leader, as early as possible, through experimentation and real-world, hands-on application. The following recommendations are ideas, approaches and suggestions compiled from and reiterated by youth across the Americas on how to nurture and foster youth leadership and citizenship to advance the Summit Plan of Action:

***Define Leadership*** – The perception that leadership must involve great power and authority and that it is reserved exclusively for a few members of elder generations must be altered. Youth must understand that leaders are needed in every level of society, from the family and community level to the national level. Leadership is not about power but building trust, acquiring a strong knowledge base, and learning to work collaboratively on common goals. With this change in perspective, youth will develop a new confidence in their abilities to induce change. Through hard work, dedication, focus, organization and collaboration, youth can become the leaders needed to combat poverty and strengthen democratic governance.

***Governments Must Foster Youth Involvement*** – The governments of the Americas must actively seek to include the views, inputs and recommendations of youth in the ongoing dialogue on policy formation and decision-making. Political and governmental leaders need to recognize that by including youth, they are expanding the human capital and the pool of resources devoted to finding effective and innovative solutions to the problems plaguing our societies.

***Give Youth Incentives to Participate*** – Youth must recognize the benefits of participating in policy dialogue. To do so, the public and private sectors should highlight the current achievements of young people as a way to encourage youth involvement. Additionally, schools and communities can work with government and civil agencies to recommend the youth most qualified to provide their recommendations. In this way, directly contributing to the nation or region's economic growth would be a personal honor and recognition.

***Hold Forums, Conferences and Online Chats*** – To seek youth input, the governments should organize and support forums that solicit youth input on policies affecting their lives. These forums should be many and varied – informal online chats and communities, formal national conferences, local forums, surveys, etc. The goal is to include youth input from as many youth as possible. Organizations devoted to youth development, like the Young Americas Business Trust, can act as catalysts, either by sponsoring conferences that gather youth recommendations or by encouraging the public sphere to hold such forums.

***Decentralize the Collection of Youth Input*** – Rather than simply held on the national level, the forums, conferences, councils and other events soliciting youth input should be conducted on the local level as well. If local governments and organizations sponsor forums in their communities, more youth will have the chance to participate, thus expanding the pool of ideas. Likewise, these youth will better understand that they can truly make a difference in the region's development and serve as leaders in their social and business communities.

***Youth Must Assume Responsibility*** – While the governments must take crucial steps to create the space for youth participation, youth organizations and youth themselves must simultaneously seize this opportunity and actively seek participation in policy dialogue. Youth organizations must prove their credibility and effectiveness to show that their voices deserve recognition. By organizing and implementing necessary programs, running their organizations efficiently and responsibly, and abiding by the legal regulations and social norms, youth can assure the governments that they should be included and make their voice an indispensable part of the policy dialogue.

By aiding young people in starting their own businesses and in implementing youth development programs, the governments and the private sectors will be giving these youth a sense of pride and of ownership. This sense of ownership will promote responsibility and will create a kind of social contract, in which youth have the confidence, desire, responsibility and energy to work diligently to fight poverty, create jobs, and strengthen their democratic governments.

***Develop a Plan of Action*** – While providing input and recommendations is the crucial first step, youth must also formulate a Plan of Action that outlines how they believe the goals and objectives of the Summit should be carried out. In this way, youth will show that they are serious about contributing to the region's growth and that they have the skills, abilities and desire to be integral actors in bringing the Summit's goals to fruition. Youth must view the Summit as a launching pad for increasing their contributions to creating employment and fighting poverty.

***Build a Culture of Collaboration*** – In the effort to encourage social responsibility, youth must recognize that effective leadership and good citizenship can be pursued only through collaboration, networking, and the exchange of information and ideas. Youth must work collectively to gain recognition and credibility and to pool the resources, funds, and knowledge needed to succeed in starting new businesses. The resources and databases of current youth organizations should be networked and shared before new organizations, which may serve redundant purposes or act as competition, are opened. This consolidation and networking will promote cultural exchange, foster diversity, and create a spirit of solidarity. As a collective whole, youth will have much more influence in how the Summit's goals are implemented.

## **Improving Competitiveness and the Entrepreneurial Environment**

*How can governments, civil society and the private sector collaborate to reduce barriers to business start-up and create an improved environment and access to finance young entrepreneurs?*

### **General Findings and Recommendations:**

The governments and the non-profit sectors through the Americas already have many programs that aim to encourage entrepreneurship and improve competitiveness and the enterprise atmosphere, but more work needs to be done.

The countries of the Americas contain substantial youth populations and the region as a whole is plagued by high levels of poverty. Young entrepreneurs, who have the potential to create jobs and boost economic growth, are currently struggling with obstacles to business start-up on top of the high unemployment rates.

For example, Latin American countries have very high regulatory obstacles with respect to business ventures, particularly those associated with entrepreneurship. With this in mind, few businesses try to register formally and instead choose to remain informal. Many up-and-coming entrepreneurs own informal assets that cannot be used as collateral to obtain loans and thus become dead capital.

The most important issues and recommendations with respect to improving the entrepreneurial environment include creating forums for dialogue, providing networks of information, establishing and supporting agencies to assist in fundraising, cutting the red tape that hinders opening new businesses, developing new policies, and harnessing the technological achievements of developed countries to directly benefit developing countries. Ultimately, the public and private sector should work hand in hand to help end government corruption, give more responsibility to youth (with the notion of ownership), and align the government, civil society and the private sector.

The following issue areas outline recommendations for the Americas, compiled from youth, on how to Improve Competitiveness and the Entrepreneurial Environment:

***Fund and Foster Start-Up Companies*** – It is necessary that the government, civil society and private sector assume responsibility in the process of creation and pursuit of acquiring knowledge. At the same time, we request that the Banks and other credit entities improve their financial assistance for the knowledge acquisition not only in its initial phase, but also in taking major risks, offering lower and competitive rates and being more flexible with the established payment plan for young entrepreneurs.

The creation of funds for seed capital, the elimination and reduction of import duties, and the eradication of land holding taxes must be the primary objectives. The private sector can give other incentives such as providing advertising for young entrepreneur's products and providing additional guidance and databases for start-ups.

It is fundamental to improve financial access! The capital and financial resources should be handed in to non-profit organizations, subject to less regulation than the public sector and more inclined to finance the sectors who are at a disadvantage. The formulas should be revised to determine the credit qualifications, in favor for more flexibility for small businesses or starting businesses, to allow them to obtain bank loans.

In terms of government regulations, the tax rates for start-up businesses are generally three times that of large firms, a situation which must be addressed in order to bring costs down and allow small businesses to compete with large companies. Correspondingly, simplifying the tributary system in general would help considerably. For example, through fiscal stimulus that focuses as much on the drive of an entrepreneur as in the private sector which promotes entrepreneurship. Also, it should promote to award by means of incentives, like tax exemptions, to those investments directed to the development of entrepreneur projects.

***Support Small and Micro Businesses*** – We must create less hostile environments for the creation of small and micro businesses. High interest rates and excessive bureaucracy make the business start-up process extremely difficult for youth in the Americas. Thus, it is imperative to continue to create public policies aimed at supporting small businesses. Additionally, it is necessary to highlight the important role played by organizations such as the Young Americas Business Trust in the development of youth start-up businesses. If aided by governments, civil society and the private sector, entrepreneurship will continue to expand and flourish at a much faster and more successful rate than it has in the past.

***Increase Networking and Information Sharing*** – Networking is essential in keeping young entrepreneurship vibrant in the Americas. Currently, the governments and the private and public sectors do not share enough resources in their efforts to advise and fund young entrepreneurs. Online databases and sites must be created to allow youth to access information, learn about successful predecessors, buy and sell goods, advertise, and create virtual stores with each other to market their products. Accessing information and identifying potential business partners are critical for establishing the roots necessary to start a business and to gain capital.

***Simplify Property Rights*** – Simplifying property rights is necessary for increasing entrepreneurial competitiveness. Transferring property is currently too costly and a burden for most young entrepreneurs. Additionally, the courts need to be reformed so that property disputes are not log-jammed in court for years, creating burdensome costs and halting business creation.

***Create Disincentives for Entering the Informal Market*** – The informal market continues to be a negative aspect underlying many of the countries' economies due to the fact that it reduces tax revenues and excludes people from basic protections. The governments must reform their property rights laws, provide funding, create more efficient judicial systems, and help businesses obtain credit to access loans in order to make the formal market more attractive.

***Develop Rural Infrastructure*** – By creating strong infrastructures and networks, providing funding, and promoting new business sectors tailored to specific regions, youth in rural regions can open businesses and earn a living wage. Additionally, these youth should participate in forums, dialogues and exchanges to create networks of support and information.

### **Fortifying Education and Training**

*What strategies are most effective in giving young entrepreneurs the skills they need to improve their living conditions and create employment in their communities?*

### **General Findings and Recommendations:**

In large number, youth across the Americas highlighted Fortifying Education and Training as one of the most crucial steps in the effort to train successful young entrepreneurs and reduce poverty. The current gap in business and entrepreneurial skills that exists between finishing formal

education and entering the workforce must be bridged to ensure that the youth of today can strengthen the economy and democratic governance tomorrow. The key in bridging this gap is twofold: first, school curricula must place greater emphasis teaching business skills and second, the teaching methodology must focus more attention on practical application, creativity, independence, and real-world situations.

Strengthening formal education, however, is only one element in creating better educated young entrepreneurs. Governments and the public and private sectors must also support workshops and continued training programs that educate entrepreneurs on how to use the latest technology and access the best business resources. The following recommendations are based on inputs from youth across the Americas, obtained via survey, online discussions, and videoconferencing:

### **Education**

***Increase Education Funding*** – To make serious and important changes in education, governments must fully commit to making education a top priority. Government and community leaders must recognize that future economic growth and social development is largely determined by how much we invest in the present, particularly in youth education and training.

#### ***Content:***

***Emphasize Business and Entrepreneurial Skills*** – Primary and secondary school curricula should place greater emphasis on skills and applications needed to succeed in the business world or to start a new business – management, finance, accounting, investment, organization and planning. Furthermore, secondary-school students should take classes in subjects that focus specifically on the entrepreneurial environment and on dealing with uncertainty and the innovative spirit – opportunity detection, risk management, creativity and independent thinking. Having an innovative business concept and basic business skills is not sufficient to become a successful, young entrepreneur. A young entrepreneur must also understand how to recognize a viable business idea that would attract investment from one with little chance of survival, where to turn for the necessary resources to implement the idea, and how to deal appropriately with setbacks and failures.

***Develop Business culture-*** Support craftsmen and cultural promoters so as to develop viable business opportunities.

***Completely Integrate Technology*** – Technology training should be an integral part of every aspect of primary and secondary education, not a separate course or topic. Young people, and especially young entrepreneurs, will rely on technology in their jobs and businesses regardless of their field of expertise. As early as primary school, using computers, the internet, and other technological equipment should become second nature for youth. School projects and assignments should include technological requirements: students should submit work online, learn to research and find necessary documents online, participate in virtual chats and study groups, create web pages, etc. This goal requires that the government commit to technological advancement in schools.

***Encourage Independent Thinking, Creativity, and Confidence*** – Primary schools, as well as secondary schools, should emphasize projects that encourage students to create new ideas, innovate and “think outside the box.” By promoting independent thinking, schools will be bolstering students’ confidence in their abilities. By coupling this objective with increased emphasis on business and entrepreneurial skills, students will learn to be employers and economic leaders, not just future employees.

***Education of languages*** - We suggest that local government and the international community promote the study of different languages so as to promote international business and communication amongst young businessmen (businesswomen) in the Americas.

### **Methodology:**

***Teach Entrepreneurial Skills Earlier*** – Teaching methods in primary schools should emphasize creativity, brainstorming and independent thinking. School projects and assignments should encourage novel solutions and approaches to show that there is not one set path to business success.

***Teach Youth to Apply*** – Education systems must better teach entrepreneurial and leadership skills in primary and secondary schools and higher education. However, this emphasis on understanding theory or philosophy represents only the first step. Youth must also be taught how to apply these skills earlier through school projects, internships and mentoring programs. If youth can experience the business world and practice their entrepreneurial skills while still in school, they will be prepared for the opportunities that will be more likely to open for them. Conversely, governments will be more likely to solicit their input and appropriate the resources necessary to fund youth development programs, education systems and businesses.

***Focus on Practical Experience and Hands-on Learning*** – In order to teach youth to apply their skills, schools must partner with local businesses and organizations to provide internships and mentors for their students. Business classes should have business outreach programs so that students can simultaneously learn business theory and apply their skills in their communities. These types of programs would create links between students and their communities, making it more likely that they will stay involved in local businesses and contribute to their communities' development.

***Promote Collaboration, Teamwork, and Networking*** – Primary and secondary education should emphasize collaboration and teamwork in its curriculum, both in class and through assignments. Youth must recognize that to be successful entrepreneurs, they must collaborate with other businesspeople, share knowledge and information, and network their products and services. Including team work early in youths' education should help instill a greater respect for diversity and temper cultures of individualism.

The governments should recognize the forms of teaching entrepreneurship in their countries and try to coordinate activities so as not to duplicate efforts. Furthermore, the platforms should be reinforced with information. It should promote and facilitate the creation of networks of information and influence state organizations to take into account the topic of entrepreneurship like a tool to develop a country economically and socially.

### **Training**

***Governments Must Increase Funding*** - Changes in the education system, while still a positive step, will not alone ensure that young entrepreneurs will have the necessary skills to open businesses and enter the workforce. These youth must also have access to continued business training. To accomplish this goal, governments must allocate more funds to training programs that foster youth development. These funds should be directed either to government programs or to programs run by private and public trusts, such as the Young Americas Business Trust and its network.

***Develop and Support Hands-on Programs*** – Programs aimed at providing business training and entrepreneurial skills to youth should not follow the tradition format of passive lectures and seminars. Instead, these training sessions should be interactive, allowing young entrepreneurs to participate in dialogues with other trainees and experiment with technology being presented. Furthermore, these programs should not simply train youth how to do something but should instead train youth to be leaders in implementing the new ideas, concepts, programs and technologies in their communities. Programs, such as the Young Americas Business Trust’s Business Labs and Business Matching, serve as examples of how to interactively train youth.

***Mentorship***- Tying successful young businessmen during the crucial stage of the beginning of the business.

***Create and Present Networks and Online Community*** – Organizations that train youth in entrepreneurial skills encourage youth to build relationships and network with other youth working in the same fields. Such networks might revolve around online communities and databases that allow youth to access information, take online courses, participate in discussions, contact like-minded entrepreneurs, seek guidance and offer their advice to others. The Young Americas Business Trust has created such a platform at [www.myybiz.net](http://www.myybiz.net) to allow youth across the Americas to link their work, businesses, and training with that of others.

***Offer Legal Training*** – The governments or civil society organizations should sponsor sessions that train young entrepreneurs in understanding their countries’ legal requirements for opening a business as well as the regulations that must be followed. If youth truly grasp the regulations and restrictions before starting a business and know the best course of action, young entrepreneurs will have a better chance of successfully launching their business.

***Provide Ongoing Evaluations and Guidance*** – Following training sessions and labs, the sponsoring organizations should provide a continued source of advice and review to the participants. In this way, trainees are not alone in applying their new knowledge but have a safety net that will evaluate their progress and provide continued advice as needed.

***Support and Donate to Organizations like YABT*** – In order for entrepreneurial training to be successful, the governments and public and private donors must contribute financial resources to youth organizations such as the Young Americas Business Trust. With such funds, YABT and like-minded groups can further network youth organizations across the Americas, train even more youth with successful programs like YABT’s Business Labs, and build stronger roots in more regions throughout the hemisphere.

### **The Use of Technology as a Platform for Entrepreneurs**

*How can the use of technology and the Internet be most effectively and widely used to create employment and business opportunities for young people and to increase their success and competitiveness?*

### **General Findings and Recommendations:**

Technology contributes significantly in promoting young entrepreneurship and moving it forward. Thus, it is essential for young entrepreneurs in the Americas to have the same technological advantages as most developed nations in order to progress. Undoubtedly, technology always has the potential to transform innovative ideas into actual businesses, which in turn create numerous jobs.

With increasing inequality throughout the region, the governments and public and private sectors need to work collaboratively to combat poverty and provide equal business opportunities for all youth. This trend towards widening social and economic injustice may jeopardize not only social cohesion and political stability at the local and national level but may also affect economic growth. Technology can serve the unique role of equalizing the playing field: if internet access is made universal, all young entrepreneurs will have access to online courses, study groups, advice and guidance, information, and possible business partners.

The following recommendations should be implemented so that technology can serve as a business platform for young entrepreneurs:

***Universalize Access to the Internet*** – People in all countries need to have direct access to the information age. Without access to the internet, youth cannot access online networks with educational resources, marketplaces, and business partners. Without stable internet access, technology training is useless. The governments' goal should be to provide every individual, including those in remote areas, access to computers and the internet at a reasonable cost.

***Build Technology Centers*** – The creation of technology centers would help close the information gap which exists in so many developing countries and provide internet access at reasonable costs. Technology Centers would also assist in networking, both virtually and in person.

***Incorporate Technology into Education*** – Technology is one of the key components in establishing the entrepreneurial spirit and must be included in primary education by making more IT professionals and technology teachers available. Primary and secondary school, as well as university, curricula must emphasize technology. Schools should include internet training and researching as an essential component in every subject field, and students should have to use online resources to complete assignments, including online research, website creation or design, online submission of work, and online collaboration and study groups. In addition, classes should include projects that require online communication and dialogue, understanding search engines, and communicating with other entrepreneurs from around the region.

***Strengthen Networks*** – The internet must be used for online forums, chats, virtual classrooms, study groups and collaborative communities to promote the exchange of information and experiences between the youth. This will create a network of young entrepreneurs in order for them to find potential business partners, access academic resources, and participate in virtual marketplaces.

***Create Virtual Classrooms*** – Through online networks and communities created by the governments and the public and private sectors, young entrepreneurs should be able to access online courses in business training. In this way, youth will have low-priced access to continued education and classes, which they can take when it is convenient for them.

***Organize Virtual Marketplaces*** – Online platforms and databases allow young entrepreneurs to advertise and market their goods and services at minimal costs. Additionally, these platforms and databases can allow entrepreneurs to purchase the necessary goods and services to support their businesses.

***Promote the creation of local and regional contents***- influence the government to implement and improve the use of Internet to provide information to the youth to help create their own entrepreneurship opportunity.