

# Enabling youth action pilot: A review of initiative design and stakeholder perceptions

## Executive summary

March 2025

Summary developed by Emily VanderKamp based on a report by:  
Alexis Stern, Shannon McCullough, Alex Newson and Arena Lam  
WestEd

Study managed on behalf of the IB Research department by Tim Gallagher





## Background

The International Baccalaureate (IB) commissioned WestEd to conduct a review of the IB's pilot youth strategy, including three initiatives that fall within its scope: the Festival of Hope, the HundrED Youth Ambassador Programme and the Global Youth Action Fund.

- The Festival of Hope brings communities together to engage in youth-centred action, to elevate youth voices, and to inspire collaboration to address complex challenges and develop innovative solutions. The IB provides funding, guidance, and branding support, while schools and communities take the lead in organizing their own events, either in collaboration with the IB or entirely independently.
- The HundrED Youth Ambassador Programme is the product of a collaboration between the IB and HundrED, an organization focused on identifying and fostering educational innovations. The goal of the HundrED Youth Ambassador Programme is to empower and support young people aged 13–19 to develop skills aligned with the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

- The Global Youth Action Fund provides small IB-funded grants to students and student groups aged 12–19 who propose projects to positively impact their communities while addressing one of the SDGs. The programme combines financial support with mentorship opportunities, and aims to fund up to 150 projects annually.

Launched in 2022 and 2023, these initiatives share a common focus on empowering young people to create a better world. The IB developed a pilot framework for an IB youth strategy to support alignment between the three initiatives and to help define and integrate their work within the context of the IB's broader mission and organizational strategy.

The review summarizes preliminary information and stakeholder insights to support the continued development of the three initiatives and the IB youth strategy moving forward. To this end, the review aimed to document the collective potential impact of the three initiatives, identify challenges faced by key stakeholders, and extract lessons learned from stakeholder experiences.

## Research design

The researchers collected and analysed a combination of survey ( $n=87$ ) and interview ( $n=24$ ) data, reflecting the perspectives and experiences of a sample of IB staff and consultants, youth participants over the age of 18, school staff, and youth organizers and speakers.<sup>1</sup> WestEd

also reviewed public and internal IB documents, as well as data previously collected by the IB and HundrED, to learn about the initiatives and to answer questions about participant numbers and demographics.

<sup>1</sup> This review involved only a small fraction of the young people and school staff who have engaged with the three initiatives since their inception. It is noteworthy that interviewees were largely selected and referred by initiative leads based on existing relationships with IB staff, and for that reason their experiences may not be representative of the larger population of participants in the three initiatives. Therefore, findings from this review may not be generalizable to the larger population of people who have interacted with the initiatives over the past two years.

# Findings

## Reach

Collectively, the three initiatives had impressive reach across the globe.

- **HundrED Youth Ambassador Programme:** Between 2023 and 2024, 1,114 applicants were accepted across 94 countries.
- **Global Youth Action Fund:** In 2023 and 2024, 603 youth applied for a grant, and 187 projects were funded across 58 countries.
- **Festival of Hope:** In 2022 and 2023, at least 37 live events took place, including three conferences.

Figure 1: Overview of youth strategy participation



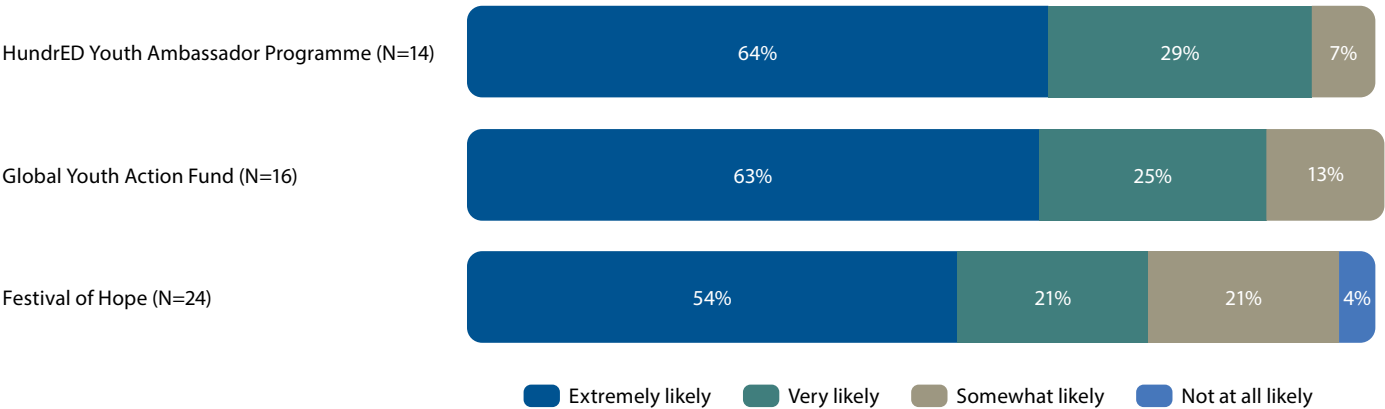
Note: Data collected by the IB and HundrED from 2022 to 2024.

## Stakeholder perceptions of initiatives

The evidence suggests that participants in the HundrED Youth Ambassador Programme, the Global Youth Action Fund and the Festival of Hope found the initiatives to be relevant and useful to them.

In interviews, all types of stakeholders generally expressed positive perceptions of the initiatives they participated in. While interviewees also discussed challenges regarding the three initiatives, these comments were typically couched in terms of enthusiasm about the continued growth and improvement of the initiatives. Additionally, the majority of survey respondents reported that they would recommend the initiatives to other young people (figure 2).

Figure 2: Likelihood participants will recommend initiative to another young person



Note: This figure displays data from a survey conducted by WestEd in 2024. Because of rounding, not all rows add up to 100%.

Youth participants described a number of expected and unexpected benefits of the initiatives. Across the initiatives, these benefits included **opportunities to grow in confidence as leaders, to be trusted and taken seriously by educators and other adults, and to build the skills and resources needed to enact change in their communities.** Participants highlighted the inspiration and personal support they received from the IB as organizers and speakers for the Festival of Hope, the funding and opportunities to develop real-world skills through the Global Youth Action Fund, and the sense of global community and international connections fostered by the HundrED Youth Ambassador Programme.

Interviewees and survey respondents were also asked about five key initiative outcomes identified by the IB as potential areas of impact. These initiative outcomes were acknowledged by the majority of participants, though their emphasis and relevance varied across different initiatives.

- Young people think in new ways about how to address complex global challenges.
- Young people experience greater trust, hope and sense of connection with the broader community.
- Young people see themselves as official stakeholders within the IB community.
- Young people are empowered to take action.
- The IB is seen as a thought leader in elevating student voice.

## Next steps for development

The review highlights that the next stage of the initiatives' development should focus on balancing sustainability, depth and scale while strengthening alignment between them. Each initiative has distinct strengths that offer valuable learning opportunities for the others, creating potential for greater collective impact. Key areas for growth include expanding access, enhancing alumni engagement and systematizing best practices. Strengthening connections between the initiatives can further support their long-term success and reach.

## Conclusion

This review underscores the early progress and potential of the IB youth strategy to empower young people and align with the IB's broader mission of creating a better world. The initiatives provide meaningful opportunities for youth to engage as leaders and changemakers while integrating diverse perspectives and building on innovative practices. These initiatives are well positioned to advance the IB's strategic priorities and global vision for youth strategy.

By iteratively improving initiative designs, leveraging lessons learned and fostering collaboration among stakeholders, the IB can maximize the effectiveness and scalability of the initiatives. Ongoing data collection and analysis will be essential for sustaining progress and ensuring that these programmes continue to meet the evolving needs of youth participants and partner communities. Through these efforts, the IB can further enhance its role as a global leader in empowering young people to shape a more equitable and sustainable future.