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Voices for the New Millenium

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Voices of the New Millenium Pioneers Arts Partnership for Strengthening Community Building Field

Chicago, IL - Voices for the New Millenium (VNM) formally launches its two-year community building initiative to create, support and strengthen existing and emerging arts-based programs in-school and after-school. Our vision is to leverage the role of the expressive arts (literary, visual, performance, digital media) by using the internet as a catalyst for individual creativity and community connection at large. Working with schools, arts organization, and community technology centers (CTCs) around Chicago, VNM is forging an innovative *hybrid* (offline and online) distributed (local and global) community network to support and encourage creative expression, communication and social change amongst inner-city youth.

According to a recent report to the Carnegie Foundation by Shirley Brice Heath, the ability of traditional institutions of school, family, and church to take responsibility for the positive development of young people can no longer meet the full needs of today's children and youth between the ages of 8 and 18. By recognizing youth as resources instead of problems, arts-based community organizations value the talent and interests of young people as key factors in the development of individuals, as well as their larger communities.

In light of the conditions affecting Chicago minority groups (latinos and blacks), VNM is both timely and pragmatic in its solution to the increased gap in school and technology spending between rich and poor districts, and the steady decline in state funding to support arts-based programs in low-income neighborhoods. Although studies have shown that more money isn't always necessary or even strongly linked to higher scores on achievement tests, best practices reveal that arts organizations provide fertile contexts for cognitive and linguistic development not available elsewhere for most adolescents.

VNM will work in partnership with a wide range of community schools, arts organizations, and cultural centers (museums, libraries, and CTCs) to create workshop programs and artist residencies in various settings that help participants foster self-esteem, social awareness, nonviolence and cultural diversity through creativity (poetry, theater, visual arts, video) and the web (publishing, collaboration, social networking). Our goal is to teach important skills (literacy, critical thinking, computer literacy, foreign languages) by offering arts-based technology-integrated programs.

There already exists a number of organizations doing good work in the Chicago arts and technology non-profit community (After School Matters, Street Level Youth Media respectively), yet this movement has yet to fully align its efforts with the global youth community building movement (YouthActionNet). Our mission extends beyond simple provision of arts and technology training, as we seek to increase the capacity of individuals and communities by using the web to voice, share and connect. While the workshops promote creativity and digital media literacy, the website **connects** participants through an open democratic collaborative environment; **provides** hypertext, streaming sounds and images of

the faces, places and creative traces of other voices of the new millenium; **facilitates** the planning and delivery of additional workshops and; **promotes** self-expression, global communication and social change.

Voices of the New Millenium is a not-for-profit organization that presents innovative programs in youth development and character education through arts and media technologies. We are artists and educators who believe in creativity and technology as powerful tools for individual empowerment and sustainable community building.

The 9 participants are:

CPS | University of Chicago Internet Project (CUIP)
Chicago Arts Partnership in Education
Voices for Illinois Children
Street Level Youth Media
Young Chicago Authors
Southwest Youth Collaborative
Little Black Pearl
Harold Washington College
DuSable Museum of African American History

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