

## Kaufman Interfaith Forward: The Next Generation Summary

Atif was a tenth grader in Holland, Michigan when he first participated in the inaugural youth programming offered by Kaufman Interfaith Institute serving 8<sup>th</sup> grade through high school students. Of his experience Atif said, “As a Muslim youth in a predominantly White, Christian community I have faced discrimination and misunderstanding about who I am, my whole life. Kaufman programs have given me a place where I belong, in community with friends of every religion or no religion at all.”

Mackenzie, a Christian and senior in Jenison, Michigan, reflected on her participation with profound eloquence stating, “I have found beauty and truth within many traditions different from my own. It has been so valuable to grow alongside individuals who are driven towards creating oneness instead of sameness.”

The youth programming offered by Kaufman Interfaith Institute, housed in the Division of Inclusion and Equity at Grand Valley State University, is a success story... *but for far too few*. That is why, buoyed by the overwhelming response to tried and true programs over the last three years, the Institute is establishing Kaufman Interfaith Forward: The Next Generation (KIF) for the next three years and beyond.

KIF will offer mentorship and training on implicit bias, power and privilege, intersectional identities, being an ally and influencer as well as foundational tools of presentation, professional speaking and storytelling. Yes, the themes expressed here seem lofty and challenging, but the work is driven by the young leaders involved. That means programs are engaging, motivating, interactive, active, impactful and fun.

Students will be engaged in two meaningful ways; in summer day camps and through a year-long scholars program concurrent with the academic year. Funds received will provide access to day camps in the summer, coaching from trained staff, mentoring from college students, trainings and workshops from college professors and experts in the field, and will assist in funding the community initiatives identified by the scholars themselves. Over time, as resources expand, more youth will be served.

Through KIF and our network of six universities, two seminaries, more than 30 partner organizations and congregations and with the participation of seven school districts we have provided dozens of teenagers from multiple spiritual paths with a deepened understanding of one another’s faith traditions and cultures and engaged them in the diversity of West Michigan in the spirit of collaboration and understanding. With appropriate funding we can serve, at minimum, 50 students annually, half of whom will in turn serve hundreds through their initiatives, tripling our individual impact and creating a foundation towards systemic change in West Michigan.

Today, Atif and Mackenzie are applying the lessons they learned with Kaufman in completely disparate and equally valuable ways. Atif is taking his passion for interfaith understanding, music (making beats), and diverse cultures to a community organization called I Am Academy. He shares, “I plan to fuse these passions by teaching these middle-high school age Black youth the fundamentals of producing music while dialoguing about our backgrounds and beliefs.” Mackenzie enthusiastically shares, “This year, my goal is to host monthly events through my school that highlight diverse traditions and help to promote the idea of finding unity in diversity.” She’s already lining up panels!

Students are eager to make the world a better place. Recognizing the movements, activism, and leadership their generation is bringing to our global community, Kaufman Interfaith Forward, with your support, will give them the platform and resources for making positive change.

## **Kaufman Interfaith Forward: The Next Generation Additional Information**

### **Program Budget:**

The Program Budget demonstrates necessary growth over a three-year period. Expenses are categorized in three specific areas. Overall programming represents costs associated with Program Staff, Day to Day Management and Evaluation. Additional cost areas include expenses related specifically to the Summer Camp, the Scholars Program and the Student Initiatives. Growth is projected to cover costs related to additional student participation leading towards two, week-long, overnight summer camps by year three.

2022-2023: \$98,000  
2023-2024: \$121,000  
2024-2025: \$170,000

### **Program Participants:**

KIF anticipates representation moving forward will look similar to previous youth programming. Religions represented previously and anticipated for future participants include but are not limited to: Christianity (multiple denominations), Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Baha'i, Agnosticism, Atheism.

### **Links:**

2019 Day Camp Video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gNqVuuE1iVY>

Day Camp Story:

<https://www.schoolnewsnetwork.org/2018/06/27/students-explore-many-ways-of-worship/>

Meet Vishnu – a Kaufman Scholars Program Participant

<https://www.schoolnewsnetwork.org/2019/11/22/unity-is-always-important/>

Of his time with Kaufman, Vishnu shares:

Being an Interfaith scholar has helped me improve my leadership skills, learn about the different religions represented within my community, and understand the intricate socio-political issues that plague our society today. The lessons I have learned about systemic racism, inequity, and religious discrimination have impacted the speeches I deliver and the arguments I advance during Speech and Debate competitions. This program has helped me build the skills I need to become a better leader, as well as enabled me with the resources needed to help my community.



### **Contact Information:**

Kyle Kooyers,  
Associate Director [Kooyersk@gvsu.edu](mailto:Kooyersk@gvsu.edu)  
616-331-5718

Zahabia Ahmed-Usmani,  
Program Coordinator [Usmaniz@gvsu.edu](mailto:Usmaniz@gvsu.edu)  
616-331-5702

To learn more, visit: [www.GVSU.edu/Interfaith](http://www.GVSU.edu/Interfaith)