



Back on
Track

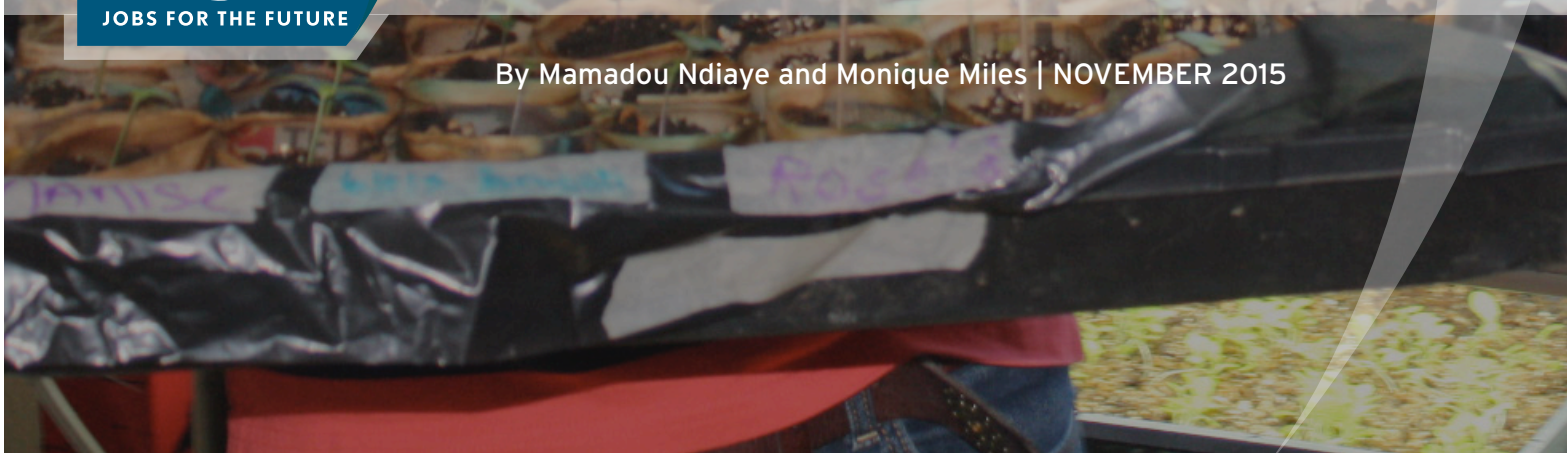


JOBS FOR THE FUTURE

DESIGNING FOR SUCCESS

LESSONS LEARNED IN OPPORTUNITY YOUTH
INCENTIVE FUND SITES

By Mamadou Ndiaye and Monique Miles | NOVEMBER 2015





JOBS FOR THE FUTURE

Jobs for the Future works with our partners to design and drive the adoption of education and career pathways leading from college readiness to career advancement for those struggling to succeed in today's economy. Across the country, we work to improve the pathways leading from high school to college to family-supporting careers. Our work aligns education and training to ensure that employers have access to a skilled workforce.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

As associate director at Jobs for the Future, **Mamadou Ndiaye** helps design, document, codify, and scale Back on Track programs aimed at increasing the quality and quantity of pathways to postsecondary credential attainment and jobs for older youth who have left school without a credential or who have obtained a diploma or GED but are not college ready. His work spans districts, states, national youth-serving networks,

intermediaries and community colleges. Mr. Ndiaye is currently the lead staff providing technical assistance and coaching in Opportunity Works, an initiative funded by the Social Innovation Fund, managed by JFF and the Aspen Institute, which supports a group of community collaboratives that are implementing Back on Track designs for opportunity youth. Mr. Ndiaye has more than 15 years of experience in program design and systems development in alternative education for off-track/out-of-school youth and adults. Mr. Ndiaye holds a Bachelor's of Science in management from Northeastern University and a Master's of Education from the University of Massachusetts, Boston.

Monique Miles is the director of the Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund and the deputy director of the Aspen Forum for Community Solutions at the Aspen Institute. Prior to joining the Aspen Institute Monique was the director, Postsecondary Achievement at the National Youth Employment Coalition (NYEC). In her role at NYEC, Monique oversaw the Postsecondary Success Initiative, a three-year national pilot that supported 10 community-based organizations across the country to design and implement postsecondary programming, in partnership with local institutions of higher learning, for students who were disconnected from education. The partnerships were designed to reengage disconnected students through bridge programming, including the delivery of developmental education and social supports during the first year of college. Monique holds a Bachelor's of Science from Springfield College and a Master's in Education, Policy & Management from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. She also serves on the Advisory Board of Tulane University Cowen Institute of Public Education Initiatives. Cowen Institute of Public Education Initiatives and is a trustee of Pomfret School

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the following Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund site leads for doing interviews with us and providing feedback to help shape this paper and for their work on behalf of opportunity youth: Amy Barad, Nicole Jolly, Kim Oliver, Alex Johnson, Kathy Hamilton, Marjorie Parker, Junious Williams, Robb Smith, Paulo Gregory, Philip Leaf, George Miles, and Suzanne Anarde. Our thanks and gratitude also go to our colleagues Adria Steinberg, Lili Allen, Cheryl Almeida, Yelena Nemoy and Steve Patrick for their support, thoughtful editing and guidance and leadership on this work.

Finally, we would like to thank our JFF colleagues, Sophie Besl and Rochelle Hickey, for editorial support and graphic design.

We are grateful to our generous funders and supporters of pathways work, including the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, and The California Endowment.

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PHOTOGRAPHY courtesy Boston Day and Evening Academy, 2011

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INTRODUCTION

Although Shawnice Jackson worked hard to complete high school, the challenges of navigating financial aid, choosing the right postsecondary institution, and taking courses while working were overwhelming. For Shawnice—raised by her widowed great-grandmother—the transition from high school to college was difficult and confusing. After a few semesters of being burdened by college costs and inundated by the demands of college life and supporting her aging great-grandmother, Shawnice dropped out of school.

What happened to Shawnice is not uncommon. There are 6.7 million youth between the ages of 16-24 in the U.S—defined as “opportunity youth”—who are disconnected from school and employment.¹ The impact of disconnection experienced by young people like Shawnice affects families, communities, and the broader economic landscape of the United States. Young people of color are over-represented among opportunity youth, and African American and Hispanic youth represent one the fastest growing demographic segments in the United States. Furthermore, the vast majority of opportunity youth live in parts of the country—including rural, tribal, and urban communities—that already suffer disproportionately from lack of economic investment, high rates of violence, failing schools, and chronic unemployment.

However, there is tremendous hope for and among these young people. Opportunity youth represent enormous potential for our nation’s economy, as well as a powerful case for the advancement of future

generations of low-income children and families. Since its inception in 2012, the Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund (OYIF) has focused on reconnecting these young people through community-based collaborations that effectively remove barriers, connect the many systems that touch their lives, and build and deepen education and employment pathways. Using a collective impact approach, OYIF communities have brought together multiple stakeholders—including community-based programs and schools, postsecondary institutions, government agencies, employers and youth leaders—to address barriers facing opportunity youth.

Working together collaboratively, these stakeholders seek to design and implement comprehensive Back on Track pathways with the goal of reengaging disconnected youth and putting them on a path to postsecondary and career success. Back on Track pathways models, developed by JFF, are successful in reengaging opportunity youth through features such as high-quality instruction, postsecondary transition counseling, and first-year postsecondary supports to ensure success.

By focusing on the development of educational and career pathways that reconnect youth to school

and jobs with family-supporting wages, community collaboratives afford opportunity youth the chance to interrupt the multi-generational cycle of poverty that threatens the vibrancy and economic health of far too many families and communities.

That is precisely what 22 OYIF communities have started to do. They are doing it by bringing together multiple stakeholders to achieve one key goal: design the pathways that will open doors to postsecondary and career success for opportunity youth.

We begin this paper with a brief history of the OYIF. We then highlight key strategies used in OYIF communities to design and implement pathways, and share critically important early lessons in pathway design. By sharing these lessons we seek to help create a robust body of knowledge about best practices in pathway development for the organizations that serve opportunity youth across the country. We hope that this paper will influence the efforts of practitioners, funders and policymakers as critical stakeholders and champions across the field in our efforts to advance outcomes for opportunity youth.

Figure 1. Conditions for Achieving Collective Impact²

Common Agenda	All participants have a shared vision for change including a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions
Shared Measurement	Collecting data and measuring results consistently across all participants ensures efforts remain aligned and participants hold each other accountable
Mutually Reinforcing Activities	Participant activities must be differentiated while still being coordinated through a mutually reinforcing plan of action
Continuous Communication	Consistent and open communication is needed across the many players to build trust, assure mutual objectives, and appreciate common motivation
Backbone Support Organizations	Creating and managing collective impact requires a separate organization with staff and a specific set of skills to serve as the backbone for the entire initiative and coordinate participating organizations

THE OPPORTUNITY YOUTH INCENTIVE FUND

Building on the work of the White House Council for Community Solutions to highlight examples of Collective Impact efforts, the Aspen Forum for Community Solutions (AFCS), in partnership with Jobs for the Future (JFF), launched the Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund.³ The OYIF aims to achieve three overarching goals:

1. Demonstrate higher rates of reconnection to education and employment among opportunity youth and future generations;
2. Catalyze adoption of effective approaches in education and career attainment leading to productive careers for opportunity youth and enable increased adoption, replication and the scaling up of these approaches; and,
3. Leverage system and policy changes to remove barriers that hinder positive outcomes for opportunity youth.

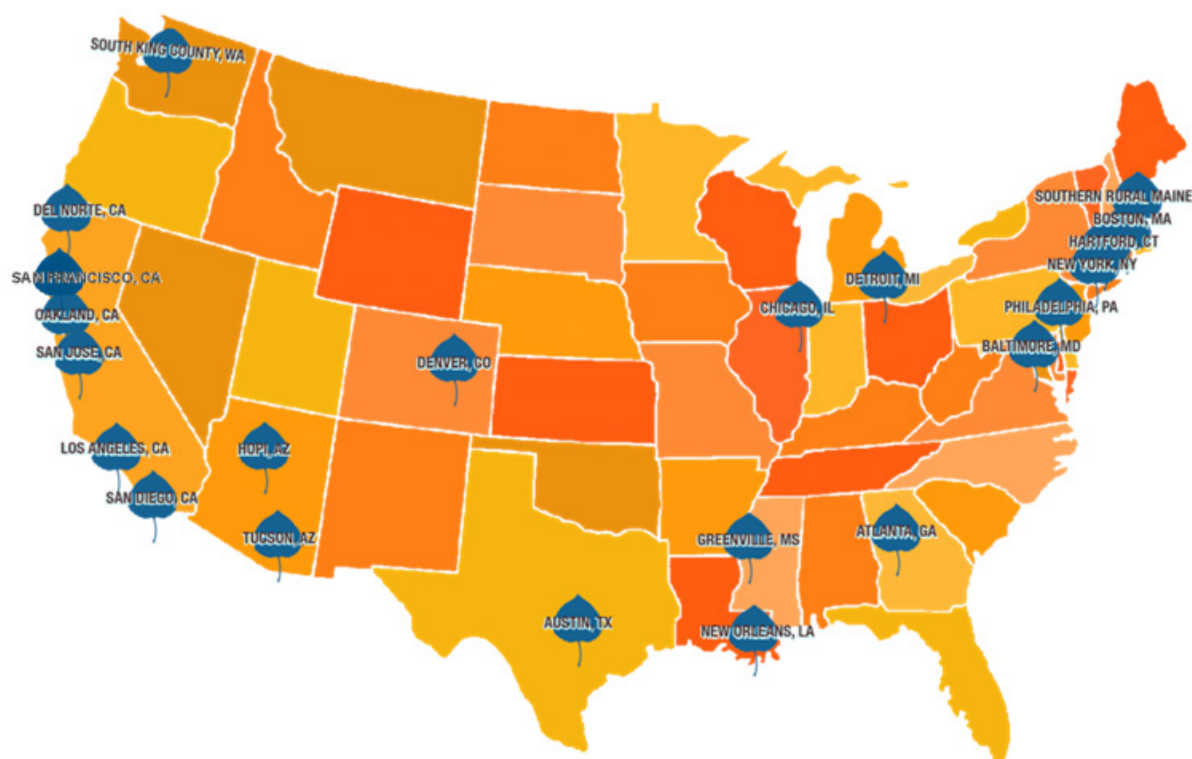
The OYIF seeks to support communities to design and implement postsecondary and career pathways to create sustainable community change.

In 2013, the OYIF awarded one-year planning grants and three-year implementation grants to 23 U.S. communities—urban, tribal and rural—that either had an existing cross-sector collaborative focused on opportunity youth or were committed to forming one.⁴

OYIF partners also focused on building a learning community among grantees to inform practice and share expertise. Twice a year AFCS and JFF organize OYIF grantee convenings offering workshops by subject matter experts from OYIF communities, as well as national organizations on pathway design, data, employer engagement, youth leadership, and other relevant topics. In addition, the OYIF design team and core partners organized asset mapping visits to each community and wrote feedback memos outlining key strengths and challenges of

each collaborative in three priority areas: 1) building effective pathways, 2) collaborating for impact, and 3) using data to guide decisions and assess impact. The memos included recommendations for improvement in each area, which communities subsequently used to inform their pathway design processes. Overall OYIF sees itself not just as a funder, but also as a key broker connecting communities and providing the appropriate channels for sharing expertise and lessons learned.

Figure 2. Map of OYIF Communities



A COLLECTIVE IMPACT APPROACH TO PATHWAY DESIGN

To join the OYIF, communities had to form new cross-sector collaboratives focused on opportunity youth or strengthen existing ones. In setting this requirement, the OYIF hoped to be a catalyst for communities using collective impact to inform pathway development aimed at improving education and employment prospects for opportunity youth. OYIF communities have leveraged planning grants and organized around the Collective Impact framework to inform and drive what they hope to achieve.

In each community a backbone organization has primary responsibility to lead the work of organizing a cross-sector collaborative comprised of a range of stakeholders, including but not limited to community-based organizations, local philanthropy, the workforce investment board (WIB), employers, state agencies, school districts, postsecondary institutions, research and data institutions, and opportunity youth themselves. The collaborative focuses on elevating issues faced by opportunity youth and aligning resources to improve outcomes for them. AFCS, FSG—a nonprofit consulting firm specializing in strategy, evaluation, and research—and JFF teams provide strategic consultation and technical assistance support to move the process forward.

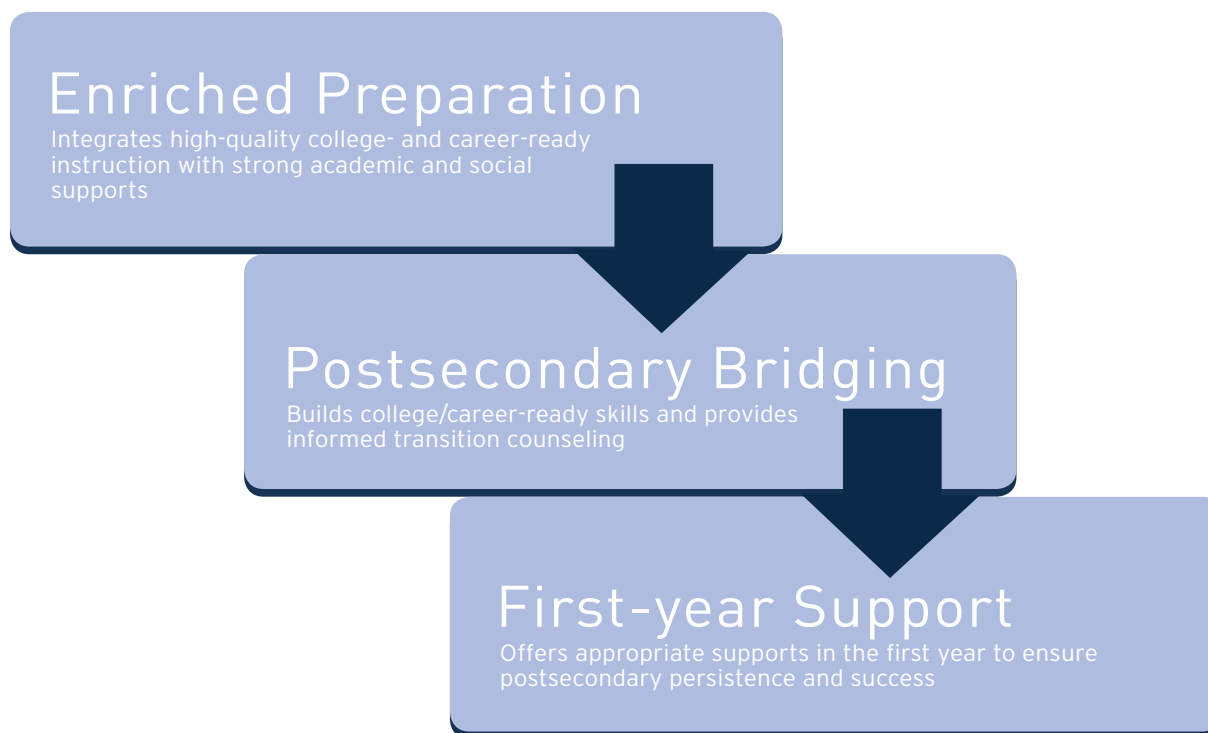
In all communities the first order of business was to figure out how many opportunity youth existed locally. This was done using a combination of census data and longitudinal studies on high school graduation and postsecondary attainment, including data from school districts and other sources. Based on that information, OYIF cross-

sector collaboratives embarked upon the process of designing education and employment pathways necessary for opportunity youth to reach their full potential.

As conversations among collaborative members got under way, the need for a common language to discuss their work began to emerge. To address this need, JFF shared its evidence-based Back on Track framework.⁵ The framework lays out three phases for the field to implement and scale programming to help opportunity youth realize their postsecondary and career aspirations: enriched

preparation; postsecondary bridging; and first-year support. After experimenting with features of the Back on Track framework and various efforts to map existing services, several OYIF communities seized upon an idea that emerged in one of the cross-site learning institutes: develop a graphic representation of a prospective pathway in their community, and delineate key components to propel young people towards postsecondary and career success. The graphic would help unify the cross-sector collaborative around a collective vision for pathways in the local community.

Figure 3. JFF's Back on Track Through College Model



The following section provides sample visuals that select OYIF communities used to represent the services needed to increase chances for youths' success.

PATHWAYS AT A GLANCE

HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT

Hartford devised a strategy to create programming based on young people's level of job readiness. Through the use of education and career pathways, Hartford's collaborative seeks to:

1. Meet youth where they are (i.e., multiple entryways to service),
2. Provide ongoing and consistent personalized guidance and support including case management, and
3. Provide on-ramps to help opportunity youth enter and succeed in education and career programs, positioning them to earn a fair living wage in high-demand, high-growth regional sectors.

ALAMEDA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

Opportunity youth enter Alameda County's pathways through various forms of referral including self-referral and referrals from collaborative members such as social service agencies, the probation department, and Workforce Investment Opportunity Act-funded Youth One-Stops. The first point of entry in the pathway is the Reengagement Center Network (RCN) where youth are assessed and referred to provider partners that offer services in the following seven areas: education, employment, subsistence, life skills, legal services, health and social services, and family and social development. The Alameda County collaborative has two main goals: 1) to help youth complete a postsecondary credential, an associate degree or four-year degree, or admission to an apprenticeship program; and 2) to put youth on a path to achieve employment in a growth sector of the local economy.

Figure 4. Hartford, Connecticut's Pathway at a Glance

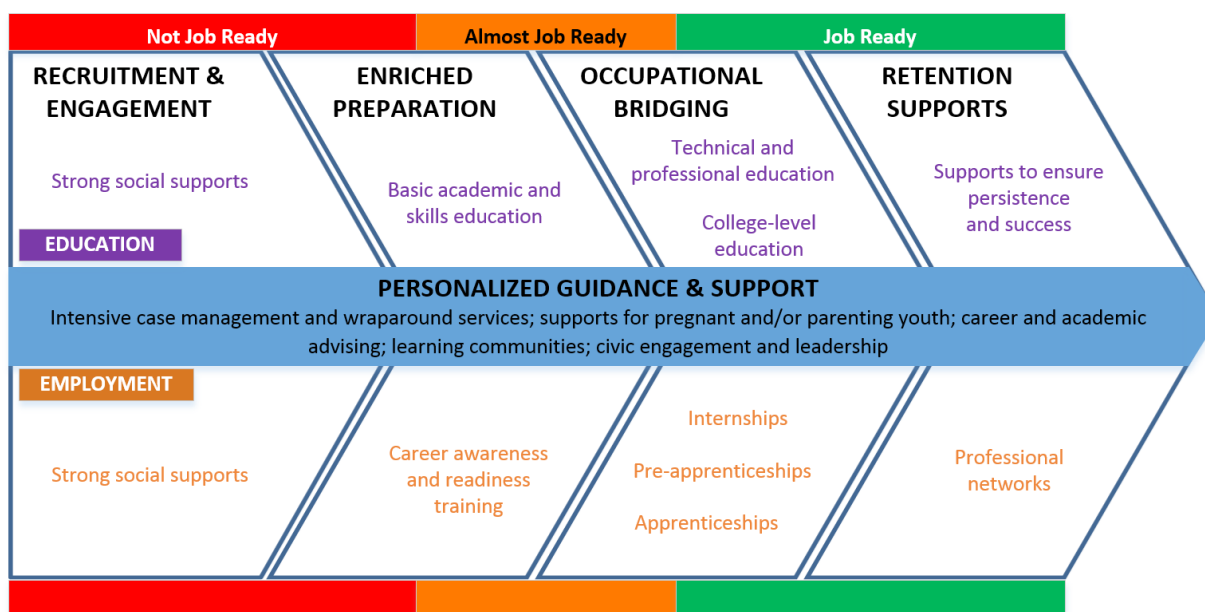
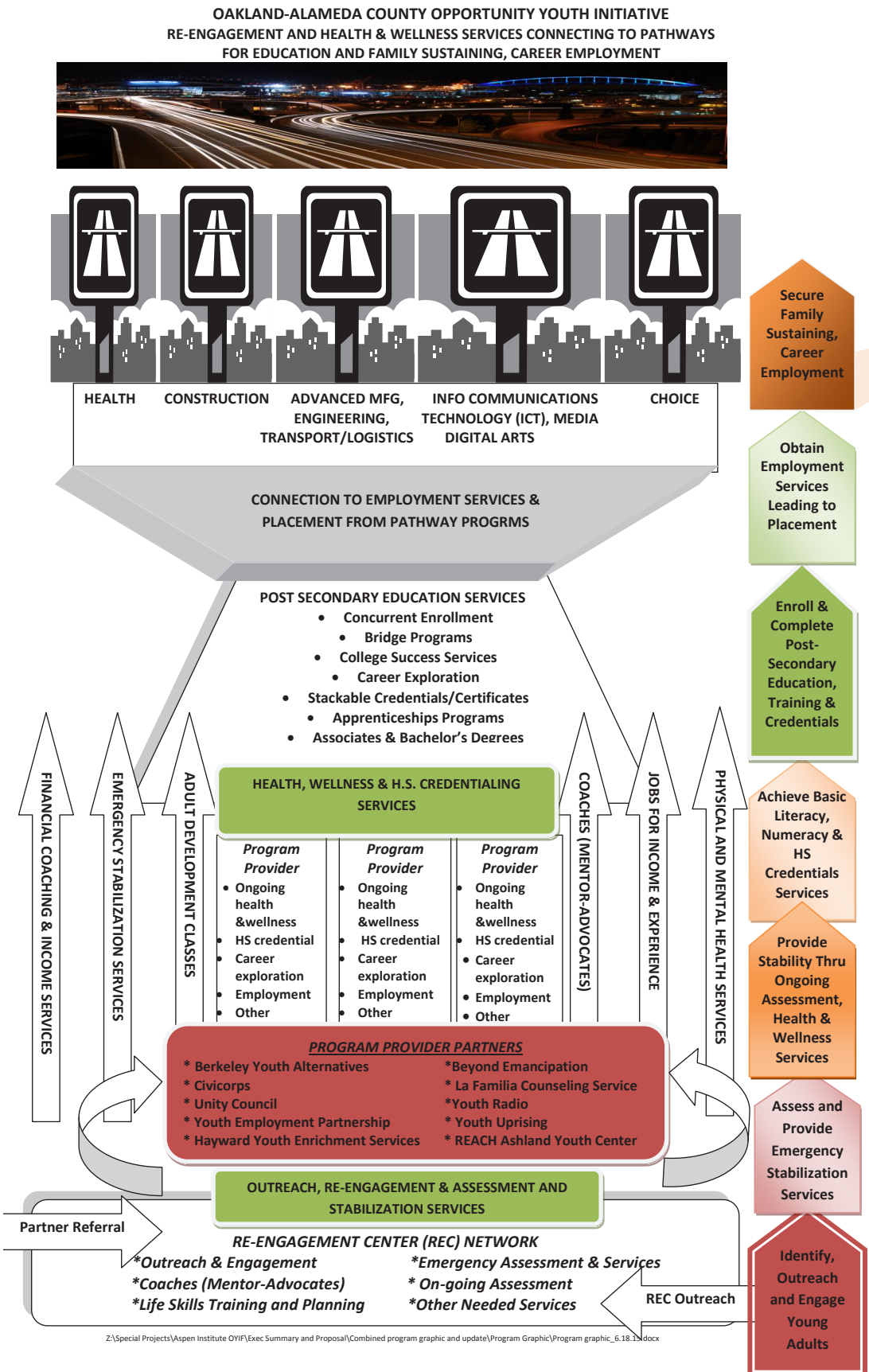


Figure 5. Alameda County, California's Pathway at a Glance

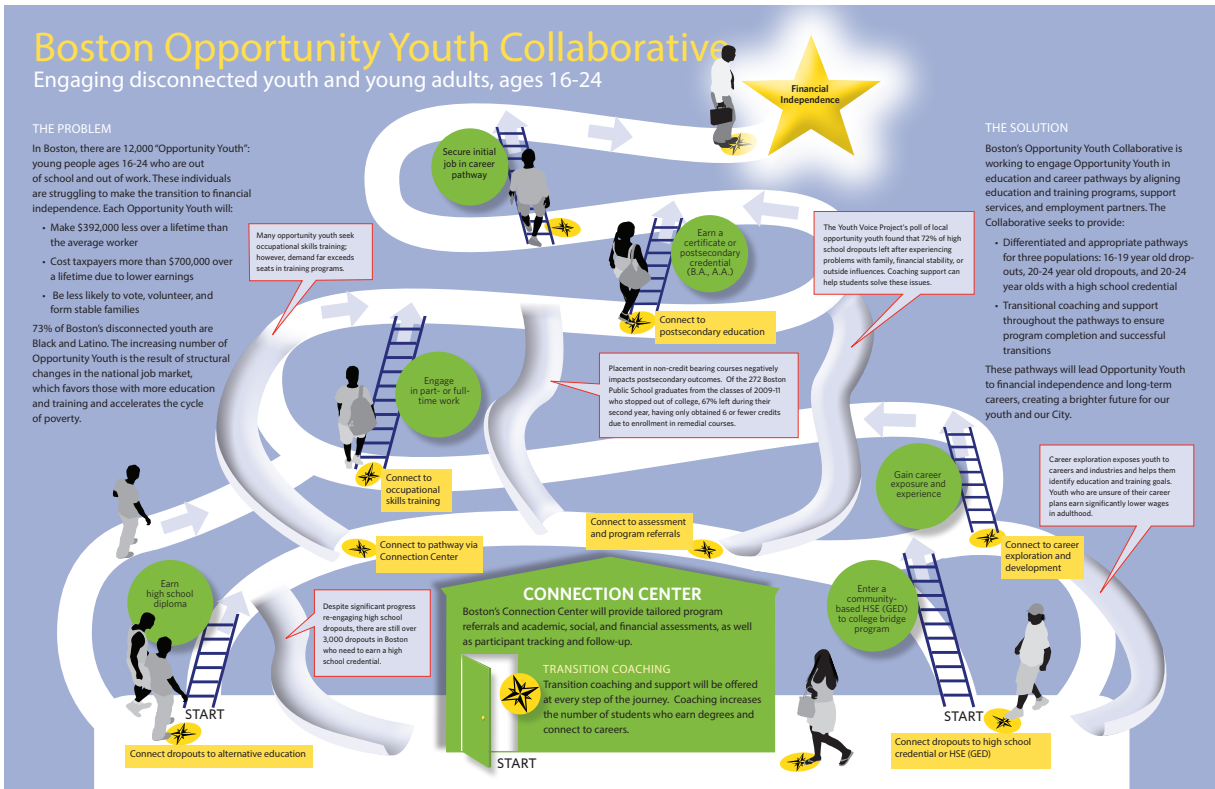


BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

Boston Opportunity Youth Collaborative's pathway map depicts the multiple entry points and options available to opportunity youth to help them attain career-oriented employment and financial independence. The process starts at the Connection Center put in place to reengage the segment of opportunity youth aged 20-24, who have a high school credential but have not taken the next step toward a postsecondary or career credential.

Connection Center staff recruit participants through aggressive community outreach, as well as from programs such as High School Equivalency and Alternative Education. Once at the Connection Center, opportunity youth are assessed and referred to the appropriate program option—based on their postsecondary and career aspirations—which the collaborative has categorized into the following three areas: occupational skills training, postsecondary bridging and retention support, and employment services.

Figure 6. Boston, Massachusetts's Pathway at a Glance

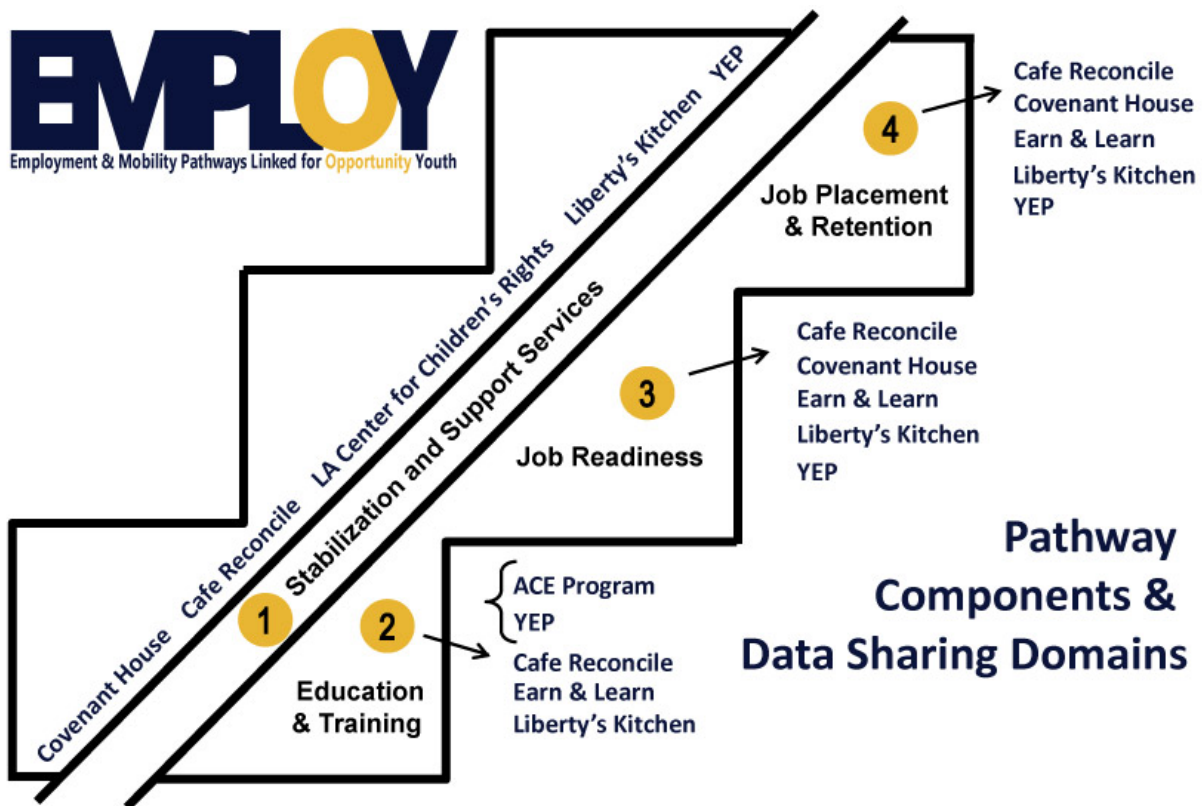


NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

The Employment and Mobility Pathway Linked for Opportunity Youth (EMPLOY) collaborative directs opportunity youth to an appropriate and desired program regardless of where they initially reconnect to the pathway. EMPLOY's broader focus is to help youth enter high-growth, high-demand pathways

for the New Orleans region, which include advanced manufacturing, creative digital media, bio-innovation and health, and hospitality. Several components are critical to this approach: data sharing among partners to assess what's working and inform practice; stabilization and support services; education and training services; and job readiness, placement, and retention services.

Figure 7. New Orleans, Louisiana's Pathway at a Glance



New Orleans, Pathways at a Glance represents both our pathways model as well as our data-sharing domains, and reflects a decentralized approach where youth can expect to be directed to an appropriate as well as desired programs regardless of where they initially connect. Youth receive stabilization and support services from key partners at Covenant House, Youth Empowerment Project, and Louisiana Center for Children's Rights, in addition to education and training services from Liberty's Kitchen, Café Reconcile, Delgado Community College, and Tulane's Earn and Learn program, and job readiness, placement, and retention services from many of the same partners. While youth have agency in choosing a career path, we have a focus on high-growth, high-demand pathways for the New Orleans region which include advanced manufacturing, creative digital media, bio-innovation and health, and hospitality. We are currently developing more robust pathway visuals that will capture the delivery of services, youth post-programming outcomes, requirements of high-growth, high-demand employment opportunities, including barriers into those jobs, and existing gaps that hinder movement along a career pathway.

EMERGING LESSONS

In the process of designing and implementing their pathways, OYIF communities have learned important lessons about using collective impact in combination with JFF's Back on Track model to drive pathway development. In each of these communities the collective impact five-part framework and the Back on Track three-phase model have served as frames of reference as stakeholders meet to design, implement, and evaluate their pathways. We hope that these lessons will be instructive to the many U.S. communities exploring interventions to unlock the potential of local opportunity youth.

Evidence of successful pathways will take time to assemble and will depend on communities' willingness to adapt to additional lessons learned and their commitment to integrate evidence to scale successful strategies.

LESSON 1

Creating a visual representation of the pathway not only helped identify which components were redundant or missing, but also provided clarity of action and buy-in for OYIF collaboratives.

The idea of creating visual representations of pathways in OYIF communities emerged during one of the cross-site institutes. While the process of creating the visual varied from community to community, the concept was quickly accepted and widely implemented. For example, the Boston Opportunity Youth Collaborative used this process to gain agreement about what the collaborative was trying to accomplish, including all programming components required to ensure opportunity youth successfully reconnect to education and work. They hired a graphic designer to help them with this task.

“We started with something that looks like chutes and ladders,” says, Kathy Hamilton of the Boston Private Industry Council (PIC), one of the co-backbones leading the OYC. She describes the process as “starting with clay” and collectively going through various phases and iterations during which members heard from key stakeholders—including youth—and integrated that feedback to create a design that everyone approved precisely because they had actively participated in its creation.

The Hartford OYC also undertook a multistep process to create its visual pathway representation. Starting with a focus group of 37 opportunity youth—many connected to existing programs—the OYC conducted a larger survey to hear from 269 opportunity youth on issues such as their hopes and aspirations, their educational and career goals, and missing elements of programs that currently served them. Findings were aggregated and not only used to design the Hartford OYC’s pathway visual but also to inform a youth leadership approach among the collaborative’s member programs. Site lead Kim Oliver reports that as a result of these activities, the youth focus group has helped them recruit eight young people who are now active members of the Hartford OYC collaborative.

LESSON 2

The Collective Impact five-part framework—a common agenda, shared measurement, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support—has provided a solid and critical foundation for pathway design efforts.

The Collective Impact approach has enabled OYIF communities to implement an organized approach that leverages working groups to accomplish the shared goals of the collaborative. For example, the EMPLOY collaborative in New Orleans has set up working groups organized around specific areas: pathways, policy, data, ad hoc and governance. Each working group has identified specific goals in its respective target area and works with key stakeholders that have specific content expertise to contribute toward shared goals. Together, the working groups advance the collaborative’s common goals.

EMPLOY has found the Collective Impact approach to be a catalyst for identifying and using shared language across the collaborative. Agreeing upon terms to define the work and articulate key outcomes has been critical to successfully driving a shared agenda. For example, “pathway” is a key term the EMPLOY collaborative defined in the early stages of work. Soon after coming up with a common definition of the term, collaborative leaders worked across sectors and systems to articulate together the key features of a pathway. As the work of the collaborative deepens in the coming years, this early-stage agreement on language and the organization of seemingly fragmented work areas into a coherent whole with shared goals will provide the foundation for EMPLOY’s productivity and long-term success.

For the Hartford OYC, the Collective Impact approach has been an important lever for engendering a shared sense of purpose across numerous local community-based organizations. As cross-system and cross-sector stakeholders joined under the backbone leadership of Capital Workforce Partners—the local WIB—the Collective Impact model offered a mechanism for community leaders to understand how their respective organizations’ expertise fit into a larger campaign to improve outcomes for opportunity youth. As the collaborative worked toward a common agenda, sharing a mutual framework also spurred a shift across the collaborative from a programmatic approach to a systems framework for driving holistic solutions that cut across policies and programs. This shift to a collaborative, systemic approach among key stakeholders is evident in the following example.

While there are various programs and services for youth in Hartford, asset mapping completed by the collaborative identified a limited number of career pathway programs leading to middle-skill jobs with sustaining wages suitable for out-of-school youth. Many existing programs focused on one area, such as youth development, education, or workforce development, and failed to provide an integrated pathway approach. Even though some of the youth programs offer job-readiness training directly or via referral, this training often lacks specific occupational training or a connection to college/postsecondary education. Additionally, growing

evidence suggested that referrals and hand-offs from one program or system to another were ineffective or inefficient.

Using the Collective Impact model, Capital Workforce Partners designed and garnered support for the OYC's education-career pathway framework. This evidence-based framework incorporates proven intervention strategies and best practices that connect systems, programs, and services. In addition, it better meets the needs of out-of-school youth and employers. With the approval of its Board, Capital Workforce Partners now requires the career pathway framework for all youth programming funded by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Using the collaborative's framework, Capital Workforce Partners recently awarded \$2 million in contracts to community-based organizations, including some active OYC members.

While each collaborative member saw itself as a valuable contributor to the collective effort, they also realized that systems-level changes were needed to make a meaningful and long-lasting impact on the lives of opportunity youth. The collective impact approach created a shared sense of ownership for the education/career pathway framework. Working together, OYC partners identified ground rules that helped to clarify roles and expectations and ultimately resulted in a mutually shared systems approach to reconnecting youth across the Hartford community. The backbone organization has skillfully facilitated this work with a dual approach: framing workforce and education issues at a 30,000-foot level while also getting into the weeds of individual pathway components for local partners, stakeholders and opportunity youth.

LESSON 3

Inclusion of youth voice has provided unique insights on both the structure and content of the pathways.

To receive OYIF funding, communities needed an ongoing process to ensure active youth participation in the decision-making process. Some communities invited one or two young people to participate in steering committees, while others created full-

fledged youth councils that mobilized large numbers of youth and trained them to be active members of the collaborative. The Boston OYC launched a Youth Voice Project to infuse youth leadership into all aspects of the collaborative's work, particularly pathway design. Under the Youth Voice Project, six young people were hired to serve as part-time peer leaders. Two of them serve on the OYC leadership group, the main decision-making body of the collaborative. To inform Boston's pathway design work, peer leaders were tasked with conducting peer research on opportunity youth in Boston through focus groups and online surveys.

These paid youth leaders conducted door-to-door surveys in the community to ask opportunity youth about their education and employment status, what help they needed to reconnect, and what kinds of career and educational activities would help them realize their hopes and aspirations. With the help of OYC collaborative members, youth leaders analyzed and presented the survey results along with recommendations for action to the boards of directors of the two backbone organizations, members of the Boston OYC, the Youth Transitions Task Force, and the Boston Youth Services Committee. The recommendations were incorporated directly into the foundational elements of the pathway design, including:

- Connections Center, a services hub that will connect youth who have a secondary credential and want to enter postsecondary education but are not sure where and how to start with programs that provide services and supports
- Transition/Life Coaches to support youth in pursuing their pathways
- Career exploration and advising
- Postsecondary preparation and transition pathways at community college that will provide college transition coaching for students with a high school equivalency diploma

By engaging youth peer leaders through a set of well-defined activities, Boston OYC has identified a model for continuous youth input into pathway design, implementation, codification, and scaling across the city.

LESSON 4

OYIF cross-site convenings and the community of practice among OYIF sites have enabled exchanges of knowledge and expertise that have accelerated local pathway design efforts.

Twice a year leaders from AFCS and JFF convene OYIF grantees. The cross-site convenings are attended by leaders from backbone organizations and their collaborative partners representing school systems, postsecondary institutions, community-based organizations, foundations, private-sector representatives, government and city officials, policy makers, juvenile justice system and foster care system representatives, and youth leaders. These knowledge exchanges are designed to support learning across the five parts of the OYIF framework: collaborating for impact, programs and pathways, using data to guide decisions and assess impact, policy, and financing to support and sustain innovation.

In the fall, OYIF grantees convene at AFCS's campus in Aspen, Colorado, to focus on how their local collaborative efforts aggregate to the national level. The overall theme of the fall convenings is building the opportunity youth movement. In the spring, grantees convene in an OYIF community where they have a chance to learn firsthand about the local work. To date, Los Angeles and New Orleans have hosted OYIF convenings, and many grantees report that they continue to use what they learn at the convenings to drive their local collaborative efforts. Participants have consistently credited the peer learning as a valuable asset to their local work.

Junious Williams of Urban Strategies Council, the backbone organization leading the opportunity youth effort in Oakland, California, acknowledges that moving a Collective Impact agenda is difficult work. The OYIF cross-site convenings offer him and his collaborative partners the opportunity to problem-solve with like-minded practitioners who are considering similar challenges across different contexts. Participating in a community of practice has also encouraged Mr. Williams and his colleagues to take risks and test innovations from other communities that they may not have previously considered.

For example, Laney College—a partner of Urban Strategies Council—made a key decision following the October 2014 convening to redesign several of its departments, including the Department of Academic Affairs and the Department of Student Services, across the college to better engage and support opportunity youth. Recently, Urban Strategies Council received the Career Pathway II Grant in partnership with Laney Community College. This grant will support five key service providers in leading GED/credentialing programs aimed at helping students matriculate into credit-bearing classes. It will also provide for a full time staff member to work with the community college system to build out the on-ramps to the postsecondary pathway for more opportunity youth. The program at Laney was recently reorganized to include the newly redesigned Academic Affairs and Student Services departments and Extended Opportunity Program and Services (EOPS), and future efforts will focus on a more integrated approach to academics.

Opportunities to push the envelope and test new approaches are key takeaways for several OYIF communities. In Hartford, according to Kim Oliver, a plenary panel on youth engagement that took place in the fall of 2013 inspired Hartford to redesign its youth engagement strategy to ensure young people played a more active role in the collaborative's work. According to leaders from the Boston Private Industry Council and Opportunity Agenda, OYIF cross-site convenings have provided them with the perfect venue to reflect on their strengths as a collaborative and identify key new partners that can supplement expertise where needed.

Boston OYC also reported that cross-site convenings have informed local learning agendas, as participants share key lessons with other collaborative members at home. In this way, content from the cross-site convenings that members have translated and shared serves as part of a technical assistance strategy to strengthen and deepen the efforts of local collaborative partners, outside of and apart from the OYIF convenings.

LESSON 5

By shining the light on opportunity youth, national partners—including AFCS and JFF—have helped build momentum around this work and have catalyzed resources to advance local efforts.

According to members of the Hartford and Boston collaboratives, AFCS and JFF—along with many other organizations—have played a role in keeping the national spotlight on opportunity youth. Bringing together core partners, networks, and national platforms, AFCS and JFF continue to foster shared ownership for opportunity youth at the national level, while also leveraging critical resources to support the regional and local work.

Recently, these efforts resulted in a Social Innovation Fund grant award to JFF and from the Corporation for National and Community Service for Opportunity Works. This new initiative will build the evidence base for successful ways to connect opportunity youth, especially boys and men of color, to education and employment pathways. The award—which provides \$6 million in grant funds to selected local communities to support pathway development and scale-up efforts—will help keep the national focus on opportunity youth.

Additionally, the reauthorized Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act prioritizes opportunity youth, allowing communities to spend up to 75 percent of workforce dollars on this population—up from 30 percent in previous years. Finally, the Performance Partnership Pilots (P3) allow agencies across jurisdictions to pool resources in an effort to design a shared approach to reconnect opportunity youth to education and employment. Collectively, these federal opportunities represent momentum at the national level while also driving resources to local communities to engender long-term and sustainable change.

More recently, with startup support from Schultz Family Foundation and Starbucks Foundation, AFCS launched the 100,000 Opportunities Initiative in partnership with FSG and more than 30 national corporate and philanthropic partners including JC Penney, JPMorgan Chase, Macy's, Target, Walgreens, WalMart, and others. The initiative aims to close the

gap between labor market demand and the supply of career-ready former opportunity youth. The 100,000 Opportunities Initiative will build out and/or deepen existing—and in some instances new—pathways to jobs that result in meaningful, family-supporting employment opportunities for young people. The goal is to reconnect 100,000 young adults to apprenticeships, internships, training programs, and both part-time and full-time jobs by 2018. While most of AFCS and JFF's work focuses on supporting a subset of 100,000 Opportunities Demonstration Cities, the initiative endeavors to be the nation's largest employer-led coalition committed to engaging opportunity youth.

LESSON 6

Communities are increasingly focused on seeking employer input at each step in the pathway design process so that opportunity youth are ready to fill high-demand and well-paying jobs in their local labor market.

At the start of OYIF, employers were involved in some, but not all, collaboratives. As the initiative has matured, OYIF collaboratives have become more aware of the importance of employer engagement in pathway design work and more sophisticated in identifying engagement strategies.

OYIF backbone organizations in Hartford, Boston, Austin, and Detroit also serve as local workforce investment boards whose members represent such entities as private businesses, community based organizations, community colleges, and unions. In this capacity, they have used this unique position to engage employers as active participants in the pathway design work. JobsFirstNYC, the backbone organization of the New York City OYIF collaborative, exemplifies the skill and credibility required to engage employers and integrate demand-focused workforce development strategies in pathway design. JobsFirstNYC has a long history of strategic employer engagement and deep expertise in designing employer-driven, sector-based training programs for young adults. It serves as a neutral intermediary, fundraiser, and facilitator for building partnerships between community-based organizations and employers. In fact, one of its key

strategies is to build and support dual-customer focused workforce partnerships, aligning supply and demand and thus benefiting employers and young jobseekers.

Additionally the 100,000 Opportunities Initiative will provide national support to the communities as they do such vital work. As a core technical assistance partner to the Aspen Forum for Community Solutions, JFF will lead the design of a national learning agenda to support the initiative.

Over the next three years Aspen will make grants to several Demonstration communities within the Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund to catalyze their employer engagement strategies and capitalize on the commitment from employers in the national coalition to hire opportunity youth. This effort will also provide new resources through an innovation fund to a subset of communities that will build employer-led pathways and document innovative approaches to building out career pathways for opportunity youth.

CONCLUSION

The collective impact approach and Back on Track model represent two powerful and useful frameworks to engage stakeholders in an inclusive, participatory, and results-oriented pathway design process that leads to economic success for opportunity youth. Our main goal in writing this brief was to share emerging lessons in how communities have used these frameworks in their pathway design efforts. In light of the national sense of urgency to reengage opportunity youth, we hope that insights will inform ongoing and future reengagement efforts directed at opportunity youth.

At the same time, we know there is no silver bullet for successful pathway design. It is hard work. It takes considerable time and requires leadership, a data infrastructure, sustained collective effort, and targeted resources—both public and private. Yet it is work we must do to change the life circumstances of millions of young people and their families and transform entire communities that suffer from the deleterious effects of mass unemployment and pervasive poverty.

ENDNOTES

¹ Belfield, Clive R., Henry M. Levin, & Rachel Rosen 2012. *The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth*. Washington, DC: Civic Enterprises.

² Corcoran, Mimi, Fay Hanleybrown, Adria Steinberg, & Kate Tallant. 2012. *Collective Impact for Opportunity Youth*. Boston, MA: FSG.

³ See: <http://aspencommunitysolutions.org/the-fund>; <http://cyc.brandeis.edu/pdfs/reports/PSSReport.pdf>; and <http://www.jff.org/initiatives/back-track-designs>

⁴ San Francisco and Phoenix recently joined OYIF; which brings the total number of OYIF sites to 23.

⁵ A third party evaluation by Brandeis University for the Gates-funded Postsecondary Success Initiative, which tested the Back on Track framework as a strategy for building pathways to postsecondary credentials for formerly disconnected youth, indicate that high numbers of participating youth (57 percent) are entering some form of postsecondary education through these Back on Track interventions.



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TEL 617.728.4446 FAX 617.728.4857 info@jff.org

88 Broad Street, 8th Floor, Boston, MA 02110 (HQ)
122 C Street, NW, Suite 650, Washington, DC 20001
505 14th Street, Suite 900, Oakland, CA 94612

WWW.JFF.ORG

