

Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund Annual Evaluation Report 2017 Implementation

Prepared for: Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions
July 2018

Executive Summary

In this report, we highlight evaluation findings from the third and final year of implementation of the Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund (OYIF). This investment enabled 21 communities (since expanded to 24) to advance an opportunity youth agenda among partners, stakeholders, and community members by investing in “collaboratives/backbone organizations focused on building and deepening education and employment pathways for opportunity youth.”¹ OYIF communities have made consistent gains within each area of the OYIF Theory of Change, with data suggesting that both infrastructure and commitment are important in enhancing collective action.

The underlying theory of the OYIF evaluation is that systems must change in order to improve outcomes for opportunity youth (OY) at scale, and posits that communities need to:

- Build and strengthen **collaborative infrastructure**;
- Build diverse stakeholder **commitment**; and
- Instigate and sustain **collective action** among stakeholders.

Each aspect of the OYIF Theory of Change – collaborative infrastructure, commitment, and collective action – has increased annually, with the greatest growth in collective action.

During this period, communities saw tremendous growth in systemic shifts, including organizational and public policy change and practice improvements leading to more, higher quality, and sustainable pathways for opportunity youth. Collaboratives have made year-over-year progress in strengthening partnerships and community commitment to serving opportunity youth, while implementing key organizational and public policy changes – especially in this third year – to ensure that systems are structured for youth success. Figure 1, below, outlines changes among each of the nine systemic shifts within each area of the theory of change.

Figure 1
Evidence of Systemic Shifts

	Systemic Shift	2015	2017	% Change
Collaborative Infrastructure	<i>Increased accountability among partners to implement collective, mutually reinforcing activities for the shared OY agenda</i>	57%	66%	+9%
	<i>Commitment among partners to sustaining OY Collaborative activities and structures (and specifically the backbone role)</i>	68%	65%	-3%
Commitment Building	<i>Successful reframing of issues around OY and an asset-based, public OY narrative rebranding</i>	52%	62%	+10%
	<i>Increased visibility of the shared OY agenda in the community</i>	54%	60%	+6%
	<i>Advocacy and policy wins</i>	41%	46%	+5%
	<i>Increased investments in new opportunities and pathways for OY (e.g., new/reallocated funding, in-kind resources, joint leveraging of funding streams)</i>	56%	57%	+1%
Collective Action	<i>Increased number and type of effective OY opportunities and pathways</i>	52%	68%	+16%
	<i>Increased quality of supports for OY in community (through programmatic, policy, and funding changes)</i>	45%	54%	+9%

¹ <http://aspencommunitysolutions.org/the-fund/goals/>

More effective integration of programs and organizations in existing and new pathways serving OY (including incorporation of new partners/players)	38%	47%	+9%
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In addition to making critical systems changes, collaboratives have directly affected youth outcomes in their communities. By piloting new programs and scaling others, collaboratives and their partners have directly served approximately 38,000 youth since the OYIF began, and worked among systems that, conservatively, touch approximately 92,000 youth. Between 2015 and 2017, the following youth outcomes were achieved:

Figure 2
Youth outcomes during the OYIF

	Youth Outcomes*	2015	2016	2017	Total
Secondary Outcomes	Earned a HS Diploma	631	2,036	2,345	5,012
	Earned a GED	429	374	757	1,560
Post-secondary Outcomes	Enrolled in postsecondary institution	1,882	730	1,495	4,107
	Earned a postsecondary credential	214	192	146	552
Employment Outcomes	Enrolled in Career/Industry Training Programs	372	1,180	1,312	2,864
	Participated in Internship	781	2,931	3,188	6,900
	Completed an Internship	533	1,329	1,595	3,457
	Obtained gainful employment	419	1,398	1,652	3,469
	Total	5,261	10,170	12,490	27,921

*Some youth may have achieved more than one outcome

KEY FINDINGS

A deeper dive into the progress of the 21 OYIF communities reveals several key findings about the nature of collaboratives' work.²

- 1) Collaboratives have developed **strong partnerships**, characterized by **high partner engagement and shared accountability** toward a common agenda.

- 90%** of collaboratives had participation of senior-level partners with the power to change organizational policies and practices, or to align financial or in-kind resources in support of the collaborative's work
- 86%** of collaboratives reported that partners followed through on commitments to help advance the collaboratives' vision

² Percentages reflect the proportion of collaboratives that reported this activity in 2017, unless otherwise noted.

2) The majority of **collaboratives have made progress changing two narratives in their communities:** 1) creating an asset-based frame of “opportunity youth” and 2) elevating recognition of the systemic – rather than individual – nature of challenges these youth face.

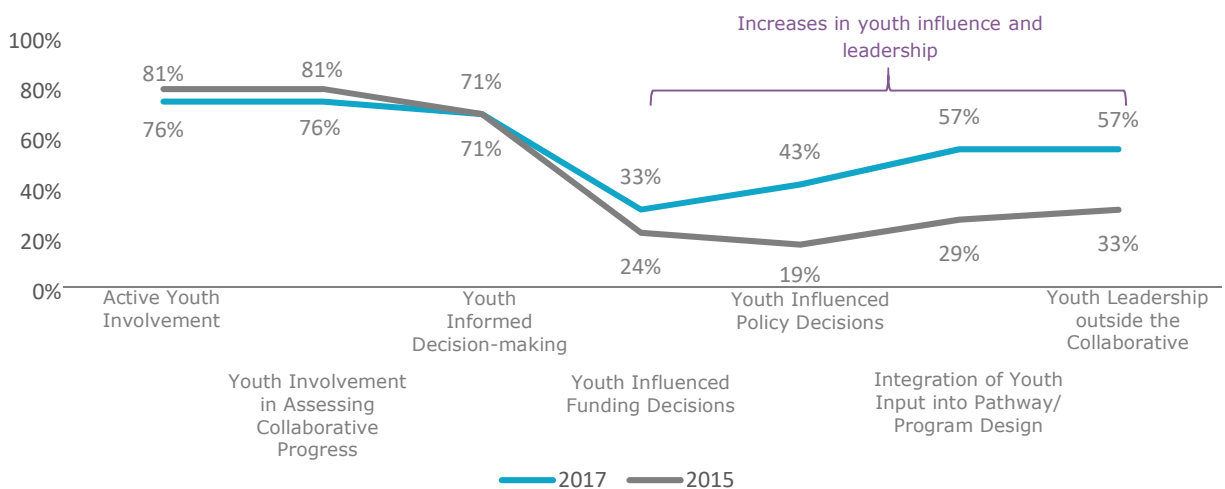
- 86% of collaboratives reported that partners more openly talk about the challenges various demographic groups (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, age) face as *systemic* – rather than *individual*.
- 86% of collaboratives reported that stakeholders (e.g., employers, media, public officials) talked about *improving the quality of current systems serving opportunity youth* – an important shift in the narrative.
- 62% of collaboratives indicated that the narrative among partner organizations focused on youth assets, contributions, aspirations, and skills.

3) Collaborative partners have made a **range of organizational policy and practice changes that demonstrate significant promise and progress in changing pathways to support opportunity youth.** While less progress has been made in changing public policy, collaboratives are **laying the groundwork** for these changes through **new relationships** and **focused advocacy agendas.**

- 90% of collaboratives implemented customized supports to target the unique needs of opportunity youth during the OYIF.
- 86% of collaboratives developed or strengthened relationships with public officials (e.g., mayor, city council, and/or state legislators) during the three-year timeframe.
- 48% of communities saw key local policies addressing opportunity youth issues and barriers passed during the OYIF.

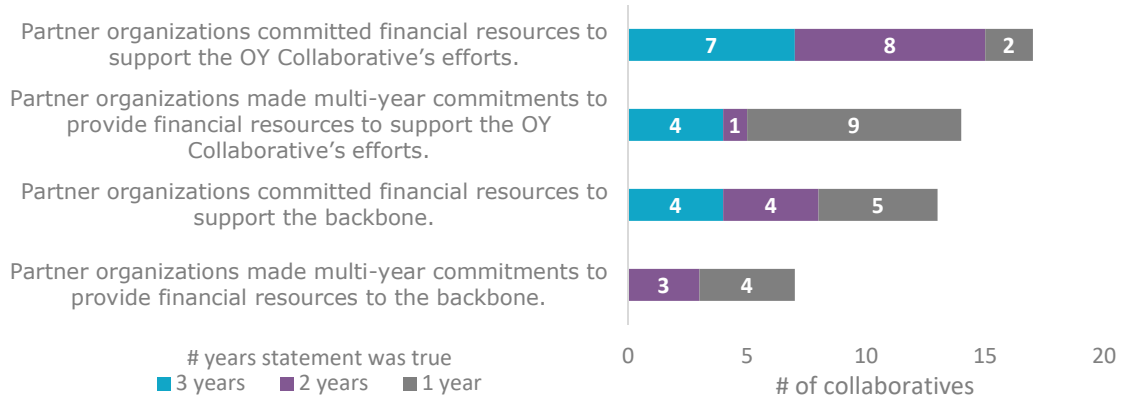
4) Collaboratives are **authentically engaging youth** as partners in their work. Many collaboratives have deepened their youth engagement during the OYIF and have seen **youth play prominent roles**, including **informing strategy, assessing the work of the collaboratives, and influencing policy and funding decisions** in their communities (Figure 3).

Figure 3
While some aspects of youth engagement remained steady, youth influence and input into funding, policy, and program decisions increased
N=21



- 5) Fundraising – particularly **multi-year funding and support for the backbone** – remains a **challenge** (Figure 4), although collaboratives have made some headway in **leveraging public resources** to expand opportunities and pathways for youth.

Figure 4
Partners are more likely to provide financial support for broader efforts than to the backbone directly
 N=21



Introduction

The Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions (FCS) Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund (OYIF) was established to “support strong existing community collaboratives/backbone organizations focused on building and deepening education and employment pathways for opportunity youth.”³ For the past three years, a diverse portfolio of 21 communities participating in the OYIF have been developing their collaboratives to coordinate and implement programmatic and system-level interventions intended to improve education and life outcomes for opportunity youth (since the evaluation’s launch, the OYIF has expanded to include three new communities – Phoenix, San Francisco, and Flint, MI – a testament to its movement building efforts through 100K Opportunities Demonstration Cities, the Social Innovation Fund, and its learning community).

In this report, we present findings from the third year of our evaluation, which coincides with participating communities’ third and final year of implementation⁴. While these findings draw primarily from the 21 communities’ annual reporting on evidence of “systemic shifts” using the online “data dashboard” between 2015 and 2017, the following evaluation activities also informed this report:

- Interviews with each site lead conducted during the summers of 2015 and 2016;
- Interviews with select site leads during the winter of 2018;
- Site visits to San Diego; Hartford, CT; and Southern Maine;
- Ongoing review of notes from Aspen’s progress calls and communication with OYIF collaboratives; and
- Participation in semi-annual OYIF convenings.

On the following pages, we share key cumulative findings from communities’ three years of implementation, first summarizing progress across systemic shifts, then highlighting aspects of collaboratives’ work within the following areas.

- Collaborative Infrastructure
- Building a Movement
- Policy and Practice Changes
- Youth Engagement
- Funding

We summarize progress in each of these sections using the following icons:



Most collaboratives have had success here.



About half of the collaboratives have had success here.



About a quarter of the collaboratives have had success here.

OYIF Communities

- Atlanta, GA
- Austin, TX
- Baltimore, MD
- Boston, MA
- Chicago, IL
- Del Norte County, CA
- Denver, CO
- Detroit, MI
- Flint, MI*
- Greenville, MS
- Hartford, CT
- Hopi Reservation, AZ
- Los Angeles, CA
- Maine, Southern Rural
- New Orleans, LA
- New York, NY
- Oakland, CA
- Philadelphia, PA
- Phoenix, AZ*
- San Diego, CA
- San Francisco, CA*
- San Jose/Santa Clara County, CA
- South King County, WA
- Tucson, AZ

**Not included in the OYIF evaluation*

³ <http://aspencommunitysolutions.org/the-fund/goals/>

⁴ Percentages reflect the proportion of collaboratives that reported this activity in 2017, unless otherwise noted.

In the final section, we offer considerations for how Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions, its funders, Jobs for the Future, and other OYIF partners might advance work on behalf of opportunity youth nationally – both within and across communities.

Systemic Shifts across OYIF Communities

The underlying theory of the OYIF evaluation is that systems must change in order to improve outcomes for opportunity youth (OY) at scale, and posits that communities need to:

- Build and strengthen collaborative infrastructure;
- Build diverse stakeholder commitment; and
- Instigate and sustain collective action among stakeholders.

Taken together, these shifts will fundamentally change the ways in which opportunity youth are supported in communities.

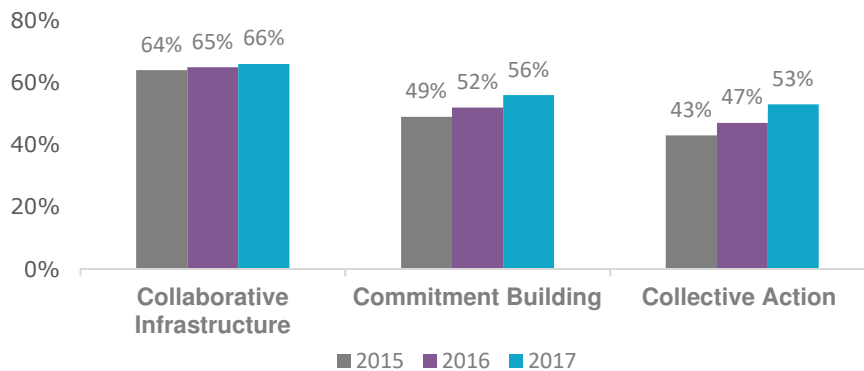
The portfolio-level evaluation is designed to track progress on the extent to which the 21 communities have seen “evidence” of these systemic shifts in each of these three areas and highlight examples of these shifts for other communities.

CONSISTENT GROWTH IN INFRASTRUCTURE, COMMITMENT, AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

Each aspect of the OYIF Theory of Change – collaborative infrastructure, commitment, and collective action – has increased annually, with the greatest growth in collective action between 2015 and 2017 (Figure 1). Additionally, the relative strength of each area has remained consistent, with collaboratives showing the greatest evidence of infrastructure, followed by commitment and collective action. This pattern mimics what we have seen in similar initiatives – collaboratives lay the foundation for change by solidifying partnerships and clarifying roles and responsibilities, then extending their reach outward to generate commitment among key stakeholders as a path to instigating changes in how partners support opportunity youth. Notably, collaboratives saw the greatest growth in collective action during the investment period.

Figure 1

Collectively, collaboratives were strongest in infrastructure, and saw year-over-year increases in each aspect of systems change – with collective action increasing the most (10%) between 2015 and 2017
N=21



THE CRITICAL ROLE OF INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMITMENT IN INCREASING COLLECTIVE ACTION

Statistical analysis of the relationship between the three types of systemic shifts reveals that collaborative infrastructure and commitment building are *strongly associated* with collective action. While data from prior years indicate that collaboratives are likely building infrastructure and commitment as a pathway to collective action, a closer look at data from each of the OYIF’s three years supports this hypothesis: *collective action outcomes are strongly associated with commitment building and collaborative infrastructure.* While there are other (unknown) factors affecting collective action, commitment building and collaborative infrastructure, working together, play a strong role in driving collective action.

In statistical terms:

- When the collaborative infrastructure rating increases by 1%, collective action can be expected to increase by 0.39%.
- Similarly, if the commitment building rating increases by 1%, the collective action rating can be expected to increase by 0.58%.⁵

These statistically significant findings ($p < .01$) confirm that collaboratives must focus on *both* collaborative infrastructure and commitment building in order to achieve collective action, and reveal that, of the two, increasing commitment is slightly more likely to lead to increases in collective action.

A CLOSER LOOK AT SYSTEMIC SHIFTS

In Figure 2, we describe the extent that communities saw evidence of “systemic shifts” between 2015 and 2017. A look at the percentage of items “checked” for each of the nine systemic shifts reveals that OYIF communities – as a whole – saw the greatest evidence of *collaborative infrastructure* and *commitment building*, while seeing the greatest growth in *collective action*. These findings reinforce what we have seen among other communities using similar strategies to achieve systems change; as collaboratives become accustomed to working together and build commitment toward a shared agenda, they continue to emphasize and increase collective action.

Figure 2
Evidence of Systemic Shifts


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Collaborative Infrastructure	<i>Increased accountability among partners to implement collective, mutually reinforcing activities for the shared OY agenda</i>	57%	66%	+9%
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	<i>Increased quality of supports for OY in community (through programmatic, policy, and funding changes)</i>	45%	54%	+9%
	<i>More effective integration of programs and organizations in existing and new pathways serving OY (including incorporation of new partners/players)</i>	38%	47%	+9%


On the following pages, we highlight key areas of progress and challenge across these systemic shifts, exploring where communities have seen success and where opportunities for improvement remain.


⁵ R-squared = .6388

Collaborative Infrastructure

Collaborative infrastructure reflects the extent to which the collaborative – the backbone and its partners – are equipped to carry out the opportunity youth agenda. This aspect of work has been a consistent strength across OYIF communities. Over the last three years, collaboratives have succeeded in: 1) Maintaining the active engagement of key partners; 2) Increasing accountability toward achieving goals; and 3) Strengthening partners' commitment to supporting the OY agenda and collaboratives' efforts.


 **Partner commitment** to working together to achieve the collaborative's goals


 **Partner contributions** – financial and in-kind – to the collaborative's agenda


 **Shared accountability** toward the collaborative's goals

HIGH PARTNER ENGAGEMENT


All collaboratives have benefitted from consistently high partner participation. Strong partner engagement is a lynchpin of successful collaborative work, and lays the groundwork for building deeper commitment across the community and, ultimately, changing policies and practices to better support opportunity youth. A critical area of success for collaboratives has been their ability to keep partners focused on the collaborative's agenda and develop a sense of ownership among partners.

 of collaboratives reported high partner participation and contribution in meetings (*consistent with 95% in 2015*)

 of collaboratives had participation of senior-level partners with the power to change organizational policies and practices, or to align financial or in-kind resources in support of the collaborative's work (*increased from 71% in 2015*)

 of collaboratives reported that partners followed through on commitments to help advance the collaboratives' vision (*up from 76% in 2015*)

Partners have demonstrated commitment to the opportunity youth agenda by providing in-kind and financial resources. Partners across collaboratives are demonstrating commitment to the opportunity youth agenda by making investments in the work through contribution of a variety of resources.

 **Relationships and networks.** In 2017, every collaborative (100%) saw partner organizations leverage their own partnerships and connections to advance the work of the collaborative (*up from 81%*). In Southern Maine, for example, partners such as John T. Gorman Foundation, Portland ConnectED, and the Greater Portland Workforce Initiative have come together to assess the overlap between various collaborative initiatives and opportunities for connecting and enhancing each other's work.

In-kind Support Can Take Many Forms

- *Social capital*, such as brokering connections and granting access to networks.
- *Administrative resources*, such as a partner serving as the fiscal intermediary, providing supervision, or absorbing the backbone into an existing organization or structure.
- *Dedicated staff* allocated to backbones or collaborative efforts.
- *Knowledge-related resources*, such as technical support, training materials, research and best practices, communications support, and data.






In-kind resources. The majority (86%) of collaboratives saw partners commit in-kind support – e.g., office space, materials, staff, and other resource – to the collaborative’s efforts (*up from 76%*), and 67% of collaboratives reported that partners provided in-kind support to the backbone (*up from 57% in 2015*). Urban Labs in Chicago, for example, has generated research about effective programs and services that can connect opportunity youth to educational and labor market opportunities. In some cases, in-kind support has taken the form of partners offering personnel to advance the collaborative’s work. A local high school has enlisted VISTA volunteers to support the Hopi Opportunity Youth Collaborative’s college and career-readiness efforts, and Denver Public Schools is funding a career coach position that previously was supported by the Denver Opportunity Youth Initiative. The Mississippi Center for Justice is providing Greenville’s “GO Youth Initiative” with resources to support a navigator position at the community-based umbrella organization, Sunflower County United for Children.



Financial resources. The majority of collaboratives (67%) reported that partners contributed financial resources to their efforts in 2017. These contributions came in the form of direct funds, as well as financial support for related efforts, such as scholarships, purchase of supplies and materials, or funding for personnel. In addition to directly supporting collaboratives’ work, these resources also represent important statements of commitment to partners’ efforts (see “Funding” on page 20 for additional detail regarding partners’ financial support). In Boston, the Mayor’s Office of Workforce Development (OWD) contributed to community college scholarships for youth with GEDs. In addition, OWD contributed \$15,000 toward the development of a series of OYC trainings on hidden disabilities for Boston area youth programs that led to the development of a common assessment/intake tool for identifying hidden disabilities in a culturally competent way. In Denver, the public school system funds part of the salary of a career coach that was previously funded by the Denver Opportunity Youth Initiative.

SHARED ACCOUNTABILITY FOR THE COLLABORATIVE’S GOALS



The majority of collaboratives have embraced the use of data to monitor progress toward the OY agenda and hold partners accountable for achieving shared goals. Many collaboratives ensured that they have structures in place to set clear goals, as well as a system of continuous quality improvement that helps monitor progress. As a group, collaboratives have made progress toward using data to assess and refine their work.

-  of collaboratives reported that partners participated in a shared measurement system to track progress toward the collaborative’s goals (*up from 52% in 2015*)
-  of collaboratives collectively reviewed data on progress toward goals, and used data to inform strategic decision making (*up from 43% in 2015*)
-  of collaboratives had processes in place to share, analyze, and reflect on opportunity youth data to refine their work (*up from 48% in 2015*)

These results indicate that, in many communities, partners have truly come together around a common vision for their work, and are actively working to jointly share ownership and responsibility for progress toward their collaborative’s goals. This is the case in Philadelphia, where partners come together regularly to look at data and discuss their implications for the supports they are offering.

Spotlight on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: Ensuring Community Engagement

The majority of collaboratives engaged in two-way communication with community members, an important feature of an inclusive partnership.

-  of collaboratives had mechanisms in place for the collaborative to communicate its agenda with community members.
-  of collaboratives reported that they included voices and experiences from the community in their assessment of the collaborative’s work.

Using Data to Ensure Program Quality and Improve Accountability in Hartford, CT

The Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative (HOYC) has seen significant growth in partners' willingness to become accountable for streamlining services for opportunity youth. Under the leadership of HOYC chair Mayor Luke Bronin, partners agreed to report on common data elements to ensure that all opportunity youth are being served, and that the youth receive adequate services, such as the evidence-based career pathway programming in health care and manufacturing that HOYC operates in partnership with community based organizations and community colleges. In addition to reducing duplication and identifying gaps in services, this initiative has led to increased participation in HOYC's Career Pathway Subcommittee, where similar organizations identify ways to work together to serve – rather than compete for – Hartford youth.

Building a Movement

For more than three years, collaboratives have sought to build a movement that draws attention to the needs – and assets – of opportunity youth. To build this movement, collaboratives have changed the narrative about opportunity youth and the systemic barriers they face, expanded commitment to improving pathways and opportunities through strategic alliances, and shared their message with stakeholders and community members.



Changing the narrative about opportunity youth and barriers to success



Developing new relationships to broaden and deepen commitment to the OY agenda



Communications capacity

CHANGING THE NARRATIVE ABOUT OPPORTUNITY YOUTH AND BARRIERS TO SUCCESS

The majority of collaboratives have made progress changing *two narratives* in their communities: 1) creating an asset-based frame of “opportunity youth” and 2) elevating recognition of the systemic – rather than individual – nature of challenges these youth face. “Changing the narrative” about opportunity youth has been a critical component of the movement to improve system conditions and outcomes since the OYIF’s inception. Collaboratives have made substantial progress helping community members and key stakeholders view opportunity youth – and the systems that surround them – differently.

The majority of communities have adopted an asset-based view of opportunity youth. Changing the narrative about opportunity youth from deficit-based to asset based has been a critical focus of the OYIF investment. Most (62%) collaboratives indicated that the narrative among partner organizations focused on assets, contributions, aspirations, and skills (*up from 52% in 2015*). For instance, 81% of communities reported that stakeholders adopted language of “opportunity youth” in lieu of negative phrases like “drop out” and “disconnected.” In some communities, community and civic leaders have championed this narrative. The CEO of the Chamber of Commerce in Denver has been instrumental in framing opportunity youth in a positive light to Denver’s leaders. Similarly, providers in Southern Maine reported changes in perceptions about opportunity youth as a result of the backbone’s youth-led and youth-designed trainings. Interactions with the youth facilitators through these trainings helped providers connect with the youth and better understand their needs and priorities.

Nearly all collaboratives have drawn attention to the structural and systemic challenges opportunity youth face. A critical component of changing the narrative, collaboratives have aimed to help partners and stakeholders see the *systemic* – rather than individual – nature of challenges youth face. Eighty-six percent of collaboratives reported that partners more openly talk about the challenges various demographic groups (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, age) face as *systemic* – rather than *individual* (*up from 67% in 2015*). Similarly, most (86%) collaboratives reported that stakeholders (e.g., employers, media, public officials) talked about *improving the quality of current systems serving opportunity youth* – an important shift in the narrative.

LEVERAGING NETWORKS TO CREATE CHANGE

Relationship building has played a critical role in collaboratives’ strategies for advancing the opportunity youth agenda. Systems change work is highly relational. During the OYIF, collaboratives developed relationships with a number of new partners and stakeholders. These relationships helped change perspectives about opportunity youth and build the movement toward new policies or practice changes by expanding the base of support.

The majority of collaboratives established relationships with key decision-makers and policymakers.

During the OYIF, collaboratives became increasingly engaged with key policy and decision makers – the proportion of collaboratives that reached out to decision makers and policy makers to build relationships in support of a policy agenda rose from 48% in 2015 to 67% in 2017. Such efforts resulted in *civic leaders* championing the work in 57% of communities (*up from 48% in 2015*), with *political leaders* publicly doing so in 38% of communities in 2017 (*remaining constant since 2015*). These relationship, in many cases, have led to important discussions about development of new policies or funding mechanisms to better support opportunity youth.

- In Detroit, a youth subcommittee within the Mayor’s Workforce Development Board provided a forum to bring attention to opportunity youth among the City’s C-suite stakeholders.
- Partners in Oakland presented a report about suburban poverty to the city council, and highlighted the need for resources and policy to address disconnected youth in the suburbs. They also expanded their engagement with elected officials outside of Alameda County, where youth had recently been displaced and needed services.
- Due to strong alignment of the opportunity youth agenda with the mayor’s office, the New York collaborative saw movement at the system level with a coordinated effort to improve cross-agency collaboration to enhance services to opportunity youth. City council also conducted public hearings on the state of opportunity youth, and the Mayor’s office coordinated a focus group on youth employment that included many collaborative partners.

Nearly all collaboratives (90%) have extended their reach through strategic alliances, finding common ground with organizations and initiatives in their communities.

As collaboratives aimed to deepen community commitment to their agendas, they aligned their initiatives with complementary efforts to further their reach and infuse OY-supportive practices across their communities.

- As a result of its involvement with the OYIF investment, the San Diego Unified School District funded CBOs to implement re-engagement efforts, including case management training, and established the Reconnection Department to help youth reengage with education.

Elements of an Effective Movement Building Strategy


Movement building involves a variety of elements working together to make impact through policy and practice change. These elements, briefly described below, are evident in the work of the OYIF collaboratives.

- ✓ **An ambitious vision and mission**, as well as shared values and beliefs among activists, is where movements begin.
- ✓ **Leaders**, who often demonstrate a radical spirit, galvanize people to act. Movements often embed leadership development opportunities to build power across multiple places.
- ✓ **Relationships, partnerships, and alliances** are formed to build capacity through bringing together the assets and strengths of many. Leaders create meaningful entry points to getting involved.
- ✓ **External communications** focused on influencing public will toward the cause. Activists share evidence to educate the public about an unmet need and instill a sense of urgency toward change.
- ✓ **Political involvement**, including lobbying, is necessary to influence legislative policy in favor of the cause.
- ✓ **Mobilization of resources** activates dollars from fundraising and spurs action among individuals, organizations, and the government.

- Given its focus on employment for boys and men of color, the Oakland collaborative forged an alliance with the Bay Area Young Men of Color Employment Project, LeadersUp, PolicyLink, and the Bay Area Council. The collaborative intends to lead policy change with the local workforce investment board and other workforce development agencies to serve boys and men of color. The emerging coalition is also hoping to shift funding from incarceration to prevention programming.

EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

Collaboratives have bolstered external communications efforts during the OYIF, although only about half are engaging in targeted strategies. Communication with the broader community and stakeholders is critical to building a movement and advancing a change agenda. Collaboratives increased efforts to communicate with a variety of community members, stakeholders, and leaders to bring greater attention to opportunity youth needs. Notably, 71% of collaboratives developed mechanisms to communicate their agenda with community members in 2017, a staggering increase from 19% in 2015. These strategies often took the form of reports and data, large-scale events, and to a lesser extent, branded communications efforts.

 **Reports and data.** Data can help stakeholders “view” challenges in new ways, and can draw attention to needs within the community. Forty eight percent (48%) of collaboratives had partners release publications and other products that leveraged recent data on their opportunity youth population (*up from 24% in 2015*). Similarly, sharing data or research with key decision makers and policy makers to make a case for policy changes is an important strategy – 52% of OYIF communities reported doing so in 2017 (*up from 33% in 2015*). In Hartford, the collaborative’s leadership met with policy makers to share data and recommendations related to the needs of opportunity youth in response to state budget cut threats. These data and conversations led to the Best Chance program’s (for former offenders) inclusion in the governor’s budget for the next two years. Similarly, the Denver Opportunity Youth Initiative released a [report](#) examining Colorado’s recent progress and opportunities to change public policy in education and workforce, which could benefit opportunity youth.

Spotlight on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: Disaggregating data to target strategies and close opportunity gaps

Many collaboratives disaggregated data to ensure that strategies addressed the unique needs of priority populations and youth of various demographics.

62%

of collaboratives reported that they or their partners disaggregated data to uncover disproportionate outcomes for OY priority populations to inform their efforts during the three-year period.



Large-scale events. Many collaboratives used large-scale events to draw attention to opportunity youth in their communities. These events provided a platform for collaboratives to share research and data, generate conversations about youth and systemic challenges to success, and share youth stories with local stakeholders.

- The Opportunity Rise Summit in Baltimore engaged nearly 150 individuals from all sectors, “inverting the blaming paradigm and asking stakeholders to identify ways in which their sector contributes to the problem, and how youth are both impacted by but are also resiliently overcoming challenges.”
- JobsFirstNYC conducted a full-day convening of employers, philanthropies, nonprofits, government representatives, and more than 200 young adults. South Bronx Rising Together, a collective impact initiative that involves a wide array of stakeholders, included opportunity youth as a primary focus for its convenings to raise awareness in the community about available options for better serving youth.



Branded communications efforts. Just over half (57%) of collaboratives had an externally facing brand (e.g., Philadelphia’s Project U-Turn), including a logo, website, and communications platforms, while 48% shared a public goal for improving outcomes among opportunity youth. In some instances, communication about the opportunity youth agenda was embedded in a broader postsecondary, workforce, or other cradle-to-career effort so that stakeholders could see the complementarity of the opportunity youth agenda with broader goals. As one collaborative stated, “because our collaborative work is embedded within [the broader regional initiative], we haven’t pursued things like an externally facing brand. We’ve really wanted the work to be seen as a critical part of reaching the broader goal around college/career.”

Policy and Practice Changes

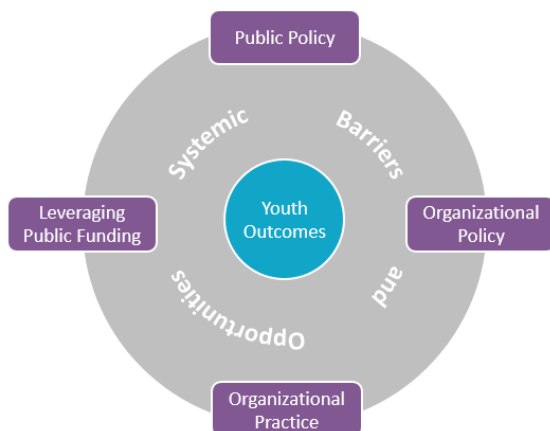
Policy and practice changes reflect the ultimate effort of collaborative infrastructure and commitment. Over the course of the OYIF, collaboratives have implemented a variety of new policies and practices, with many seeing key organizational changes emerge and laying a strong foundation for public policy change, including leveraging public funds to advance their agenda. Each collaborative implemented new programs, policies, or practices to better serve opportunity youth, addressing systemic barriers and creating the conditions necessary for educators, workforce partners, and providers of stabilization supports to better support youth.

-  **Changing organizational policies and practices** to support opportunity youth
-  Implementing **pilot programs**
-  **Scaling** new or existing programs and services
-  Developing a **public policy agenda**
-  **Public policy changes**
-  **Using data to track youth** progress across providers and systems

Collaboratives have implemented a range of policy and practice changes to address systemic barriers facing opportunity youth.

These change strategies address a variety of systemic barriers that require a multi-pronged strategy of shifts in organizational policies and practices, as well as public policy changes and resource shifts across a range of “systems” that opportunity youth interact with (e.g., k-12, postsecondary, workforce, child welfare, housing, and justice). Collectively, these approaches represent collaboratives’ significant progress in increasing the likelihood of positive educational, career, and life outcomes for opportunity youth (Figure 3).

Figure 3
Approaches to breaking down systemic barriers



Data sharing and integration remains a challenge

Data sharing and integration among partners remains an opportunity for greater focus across the OYIF, as collaboratives have struggled with the complexity of data systems unique to each service system, including determining the “right” indicators to track for each priority population and building the necessary infrastructure for data-sharing across partners and systems.

33% reported that local organizations used the same data system to track youth participation across programs.

33% reported that partners within *the same* local system shared data with one another to assess and improve services.

19% reported that partners from *different* local systems shared data with one another to assess and improve services.

Partners across OYIF communities have made significant strides in changing how they work to improve outcomes for opportunity youth. These strategies cut across six common systemic barriers, providing a framework for understanding how partners can work differently to better support youth.⁶



Organizational silos. One of the “root causes” of many systemic challenges facing opportunity youth, organizational silos prevent service providers and educational institutions from working with one another. Collaboratives have discovered that many educational institutions, for example, fail to address challenges affecting academic performance outside the classroom, including health issues, childcare, housing, and food security, among others. Similarly, many social service providers overlook needs not directly met by their agency. Through the OYIF, communities have taken steps to integrate education, employment, and service offerings through new policies, procedures, and communication that breaks down organizational silos. Partners have revisited referral processes and shared intake and assessment tools to ensure continuity of care no matter who’s providing services. Many collaboratives, such as Southern Maine, have also worked to shift educator and provider mindsets – helping those working directly with youth to think *holistically* about who, within their networks, is best positioned to provide support for the youth they work with.

“Many of the systemic challenges faced by OY are really a matter of administrative practice and not formal policy. This is why we have focused on piloting two targeted pathway programs that integrate with existing infrastructure in our educational systems.”

-OYIF Collaborative



Financial constraints. Financial constraints pose challenges for a substantial number of opportunity youth. In many instances, these constraints include relatively small expenses, typically under \$500. Stipends, funds for textbooks, and fee waivers can make a significant difference for youth, providing just enough momentum and hope to open doors to new opportunities. In Austin, for example, the Collaborative (AOYC) realized that a policy was preventing students with financial holds from registering for classes at Austin Community College (ACC) – regardless of the amount. AOYC and ACC staff reviewed data together and found a large cohort of local young people whose education trajectory could be changed if their holds were removed. As a result, the ACC Community Foundation created a fund to pay any financial hold for an AOYC-connected student that is \$150 or lower to allow them to re-enroll in class, as well as a separate fund for holds of higher amounts. Santa Clara County, as well, has addressed financial barriers by piloting the elimination of fines for 16 to 18-year-olds brought into the probation system.



Eligibility criteria. Collaboratives have discovered that, when trying to access employment and educational programs, especially those that are publicly funded, youth are either “in” or “out.” Programs or policies that exclude youth because of age, documentation status, or criminal history can create challenges, and are often counterproductive. Collaboratives in Southern Maine and Los Angeles have tackled eligibility criteria to extend benefits for foster youth Southern Maine and Los Angeles, while Austin has focused on giving youth with a criminal record a second chance in obtaining employment. Policy makers – at the organizational, local, state, and federal levels – must consider who’s being denied opportunity because of their “status,” and to examine whether these rules truly are helping youth who most need it, or are just perpetuating inequity.



Disconnected educational offerings. In the OYIF, as well as in many cradle-to-career initiatives geared toward improving educational pathways, youth commonly “stop out” at transition points – like upon graduation from high school or completion of a job training program. Without a clear handoff or help transitioning to “next steps,” youth can get lost in the system or lose momentum toward their goal. Educational institutions – such as GED

⁶ Adapted from the OYIF Year 2 Implementation Report: http://aspencommunitysolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Aspen-OYIF-Year-2-Annual-Report_Final_11May17.pdf

programs and community colleges – can work together to encourage a seamless transition from completion of one program to enrollment in the other. Communication and coordination among educational institutions can keep youth on a pathway toward success. Collaboratives tackling this barrier include Austin, Boston, and Chicago, among others. In Austin, the partnership identified that its youth completing high school were ineligible to take a “College Ready” course offered by the community college. The course, offered as an adult basic education class, started one week before students finished high school. In order to accommodate youth finishing high school, the community college began offering the course at the end of the school year, making it accessible to youth.



Timing and inefficiencies. When opportunity youth enroll in workforce or education programs, timing is critical. Long, drawn out program offerings, or seemingly endless courses or training programs without tangible effects, keep youth in a perpetual state of “waiting” while they continue to balance many competing demands, costing both time and money. By shortening college courses, offering college credit through paid internships, and offering stackable credentials, OYIF communities have helped youth move efficiently through the education-to-career pipeline, condensing the time it takes for youth to earn a credential or enter the workforce. Boston, Greenville, and Atlanta, among other communities, have addressed this issue. In Greenville, the collaborative supported policy changes within the community college system to address the pitfalls of Adult Basic Education (ABE) and to better contextualize ABE into credited programming to help students achieve at a quicker rate.



Location and transportation. Creating the conditions for youth to enter and succeed in education and the workforce means not only addressing systemic barriers, but physical barriers as well. Access to places of education and employment is critical. Denver has tackled costly bus fares that can make it hard for youth to access programs, services, and jobs. Other communities – including South King County, Boston, and New York – have co-located services. Collaborating with partners that are nearby and accessible, and addressing other commuting-related barriers, is essential.

Spotlight on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: Customizing strategies to address the unique needs of opportunity youth

Partners have applied a lens of diversity, equity, and inclusion in their approaches to enhancing pathways for opportunity youth, ensuring that new programs and policies are addressing youth needs and systemic barriers.



of collaboratives reported greater customization of supports targeted to the unique needs of opportunity youth.



of collaboratives reported that programs were developed to address the unique strengths and challenges of opportunity youth.



of collaboratives reported that partners discussed whether one another’s practices are culturally appropriate.

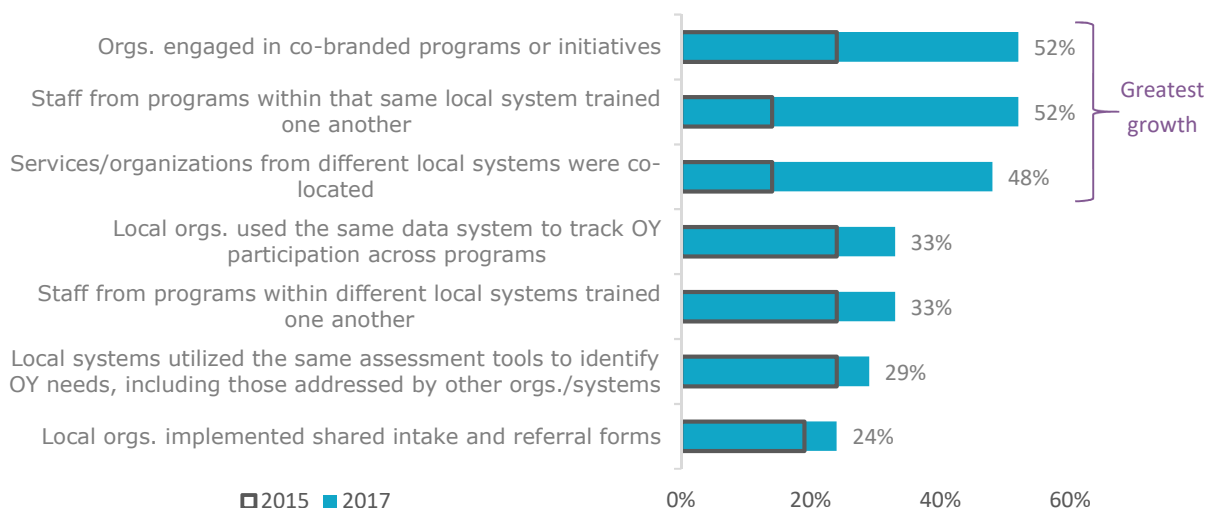
CHANGING ORGANIZATIONAL POLICIES AND PRACTICES TO SUPPORT OPPORTUNITY YOUTH

Collaboratives have had continued success implementing new organizational practices that break down silos and more seamlessly meet youth needs. Collaboratives have continued to make progress in changing how partners work and work together to support opportunity youth through new practices and integrating existing practices into their work. These changes reflect partners’ deep commitment (described earlier) to improving the quality and effectiveness of services. Figure 4, on the following page, illustrates progress in several key areas of policy and practice change. Many of these changes – described as “aspirational” and even “unattainable” by site leads at the start of the OYIF – have come to fruition, and indicate the type of substantive practice changes transforming how youth experience “the system.” In fact, most (81%) collaboratives reported that partners increased their capacity to align with other organizations and provide complementary

services. Notably, more than half of collaboratives (52% in 2017 vs. 29% in 2015) reported reducing repetitive processes. Key organizational changes include:

- Co-branding and co-locating programs or initiatives
- Staff cross-training (across organizations and systems)
- Tracking youth across the same data system
- Using consistent intake, referral, and assessment forms across programs

Figure 4
Partners continue to work together differently to support opportunity youth
N=21



PUBLIC POLICY CHANGE

Approximately half of collaboratives developed strategies for influencing public policy – those who did most often looking to build on opportunities with existing momentum. Nearly two-thirds (62%) of collaboratives developed an advocacy and/or policy change agenda by the end of 2017, while slightly fewer (52%) developed a plan to influence public (local, state, or federal) policy (Figure 5). Among those with plans to change policy, several prioritized policies based on existing momentum, rather than introducing new policies. Atlanta began exploring statewide legislative initiatives and core policy goals that aligned with its strategic plan, including raising the age of juvenile justice jurisdiction, ending school discipline through positive behavioral intervention and supports, and encouraging data and science-driven approaches to juvenile justice. Austin tracked over 100 local bills that the workforce sector was prioritizing, focusing on bills related to education, employment, and equity that were going to committees.

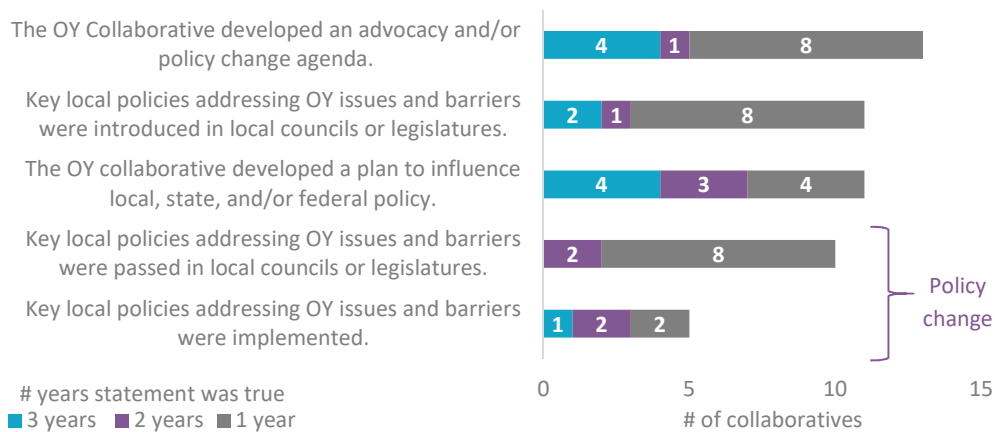
While many collaboratives are in the early stages of influencing public policies, a handful have seen substantive public policy changes. Among collaboratives that have influenced public policy, such changes position communities to support opportunity youth at greater scale while creating opportunities for long-term sustainability. In total, 10 communities reported that key local policies addressing opportunity youth issues and barriers were passed between 2015 and 2017, while five reported that such policies were implemented. Examples of “policy wins” include the following:

- In South King County, The RoadMap Project supported the passage of Best Starts for Kids (BSK) – a major tax levy that voters approved last November. BSK is generating roughly \$60 million a year for six years, and focuses primarily on prevention activities for the 0-5 population. Approximately \$5 million a year is allocated to strategies to reconnect opportunity youth to education and employment, and to stop the school-to-prison pipeline. The RoadMap

Project works closely with South King County to inform the investment strategy for these funds in alignment with the collaborative’s opportunity youth action plan.

- The Los Angeles collaborative advocated to obtain a waiver of a requirement that prevented foster youth from accessing WIOA programs. As a result, foster youth now have access to high school re-engagement services, workforce training programs, and employment support through public agencies.
- In Maine, legislation leading to the Alumni Youth Transition Grant Program extended state education and other support for youth in foster care through age 27. Conversations among partners at the first fall OYIF convening led to this public policy change.

Figure 5
While many collaboratives took steps to advance policy agendas, fewer saw new policies supporting opportunity youth implemented during the OYIF
 N=21



In addition to directly influencing public policy, many collaboratives have leveraged public funding to support opportunity youth. While many collaboratives have addressed public policy changes directly, others have taken advantage of public funding to better support opportunity youth. Each year, the number of collaboratives that developed plans to use public resources to advance their agenda increased (*from 14% in 2015 to 48% in 2017*).

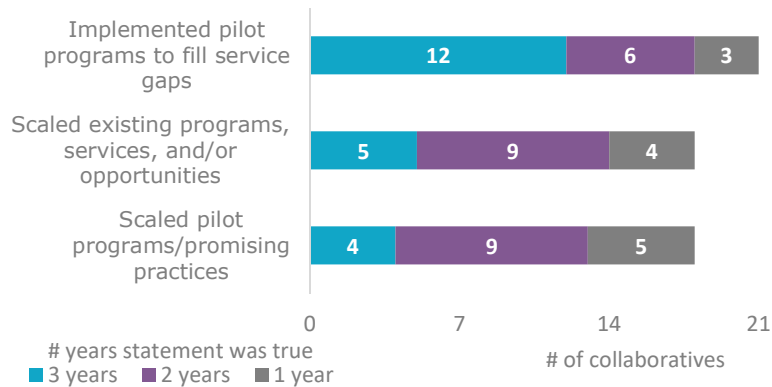
- Detroit received a \$1.1 million Department of Labor grant that is bringing four organizations together to create new pathways for opportunity youth.
- The Los Angeles Opportunity Youth Collaborative leveraged public funds to support OYC goals and priorities through public workforce development and education support programs, and through public/private collaborative efforts. As an example, public agencies will manage and expand the OYC’s Digital Resource Guide for Opportunity or “Transition-aged” Youth.

PATHS TO REACHING OPPORTUNITY YOUTH AT SCALE

Collaboratives have demonstrated promise in expanding opportunities for youth, with most piloting and scaling programs during the OYIF. Piloting new programs served as a critical mechanism for collaboratives to “test the waters” of new programs or services. Every collaborative (100%) has piloted at least one program during the OYIF. A key to achieving “metric impact,” scaling program pilots or existing programs has been almost as common, with 86% of collaboratives doing each – including a majority that reported scaling programs multiple years (Figure 6). Notably, piloting and scaling (existing or new) programs increased between 2015 and 2017, as collaboratives clarified their areas of focus and solidified pathways to scale. This expansion of programs can be seen in the total number of opportunity youth served in 2017, which increased to more than 18,000 – almost as

much as 2015 and 2016 combined. Simultaneous to their scaling efforts, collaboratives saw increases in funding streams that support scaling in 2017 – nearly doubling to 81% from 43% in 2015.

Figure 6
The majority of collaboratives piloted *and* scaled programs, although pilot programs were much more common
 N=21




Scaling an Alternative Placement Pilot in Boston


In Boston, Bunker Hill Community College (BHCC) has more than doubled the number of students participating in an acceleration track to college-level courses through the Grade Point Average (GPA) Placement Pilot. One of the biggest challenges for community college students is testing into developmental courses, which review high school level material and do not provide credits toward an Associate’s degree. For a good number of students, it is less of a matter of content knowledge than of lack of preparation for the Accuplacer college placement test. In recognition of the challenges students face through lack of preparation for the Accuplacer placement tests, the Commonwealth’s community colleges piloted a program that allowed students with a high school GPA of 2.7 or higher to opt out of developmental math, and enroll directly into credit-bearing courses. The pilot went so well during the first year that BHCC expanded the program to include developmental English during school year 2017. In 2017, the college hired a specialized program coordinator, allowing the program to expand from 100 students at the start of 2017 to 400 students to date.

Youth Engagement

Youth engagement has become a powerful strategy for building commitment to advance the opportunity youth agenda across the 21 communities. From the OYIF launch, Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions made a deep investment in developing the leadership capacity of opportunity youth, providing space for and encouraging collaboratives to ensure youth inform – and lead – efforts toward systemic change. Youth engagement has helped collaboratives improve services based on youth experiences and needs, as youth have informed the design of new programs, assessed the success of existing programs, and led efforts to change organizational and public policies.

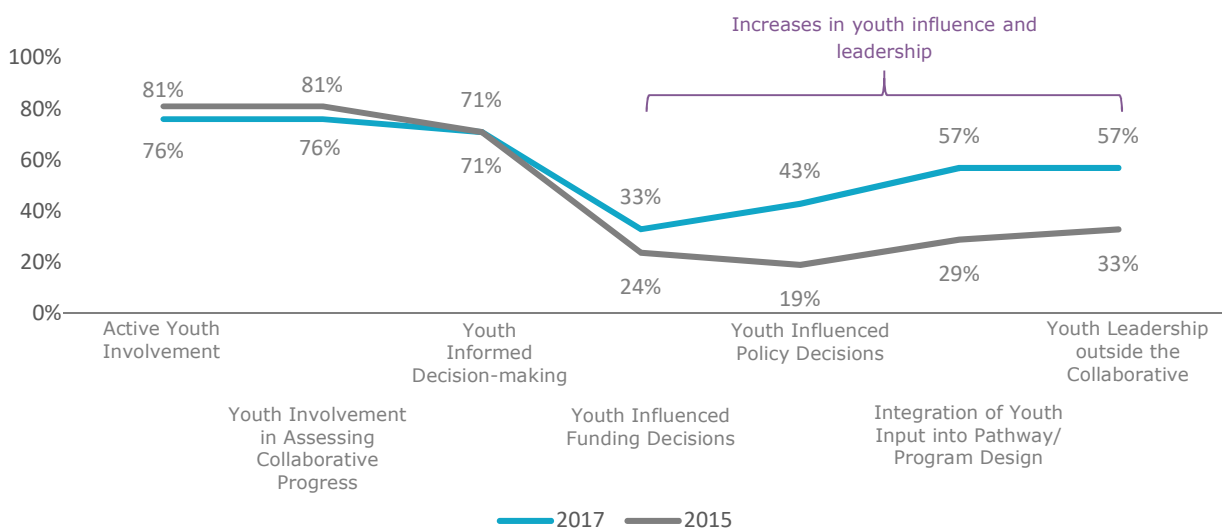
 **Youth participation** in collaborative meetings and decision-making

 **Youth influence** in program design, funding, and policy changes

 **Youth leadership** outside the collaborative

Collaboratives have maintained a high level of youth engagement throughout the OYIF, with several increasing the prominence of youth voice and leadership in their efforts. With youth engagement as a hallmark of the OYIF investment strategy, collaboratives have intentionally elevated youth voice, perspective, and influence in their work. As collaboratives solidified their strategies, many deepened the role youth played in informing and carrying out the work, creating space for youth to serve as equals with other partners, and, in some cases like in New Orleans (which provided “Undoing Adultism” trainings), educating partners about what it means to engage youth. While youth engagement in collaboratives’ work remained relatively stable – and high – from 2015 through 2017, youth leadership and influence increased across the OYIF. Figure 7, below, illustrates OYIF youth engagement in various roles – from general “involvement” to “leadership.” Although involvement decreased slightly, the number of collaboratives where youth have played stronger, more influential roles has increased. This trend is not surprising given a) the OYIF’s continued emphasis on youth leadership, and b) that 67% of collaboratives reported they “established structures for youth leadership development that focused, in part, on self-advocacy” (up from 43% in 2015).

Figure 7
While some aspects of youth engagement remained steady, youth influence and input into funding, policy, and program decisions increased
N=21






- 76%** **Active youth involvement.** 76% of collaboratives reported that youth were actively involved in the work of the collaborative (*down from 81% in 2015*). The majority of collaboratives have youth “at the table” – in Tucson, the collaborative changed its meeting time so members of its United Youth Leadership Council could attend meetings.
- 76%** **Assessment.** Most (76%) collaboratives sought input from youth about the progress of their work (*down slightly from 81% in 2015*). In New Orleans, partners have increased efforts to create systems to solicit feedback from participants, demonstrating greater value on the experiences and opinions of opportunity youth.
- 71%** **Informing collaborative decision-making.** 71% of collaboratives reported youth informed decisions consistent, with the percentage reporting this in 2015. In Southern Maine, the collaborative has sought to achieve a balance of power between youth and adults during collaborative meetings, including creating opportunities for youth to lead activities and facilitate discussions “so that adults are not the only ones guiding and directing conversations.”
- 33%** **Informing funding decisions.** 33% of collaboratives reported that youth influenced funding decisions in 2017 (*compared to 24% in 2015*). In Del Norte County, youth lead philanthropy efforts through their own fund for grant-making in the community, and also fundraise to increase the fund.
- 43%** **Informing policy decisions.** Across the OYIF, collaboratives reported a slight increase in the role of youth in informing policy decisions (43% in 2017, *up from 19% in 2015*). After creating a youth council, the Detroit collaborative was able to lobby the state to allow a youth to sit on the State Education Advisory Group, which brings businesses and education together to coordinate training and build career pathways.
- 57%** **Integrating youth recommendations into program and pathway designs.** Collaboratives moved beyond soliciting youth recommendations solely to inform program and pathway design to integrating the recommendations into program and pathway designs. Fifty-seven percent of collaboratives reported the integration of youth recommendations into program and pathway designs (*up from 29% in 2015*). The Hopi Reservation is relying on youth voice to tell the full story of its opportunity youth; these stories, along with input from the Youth Advisory Council, will be used to inform and provide a youth perspective on its programmatic work.
- 57%** **Leadership.** The percentage of sites reporting that OY became visible, engaged as leaders, and as decision makers outside of the collaborative rose sharply, from 33% in 2015 to 57% in 2017. In Baltimore, for example, youth engaged in participatory research about youth experiences, collecting data and elevating the voices of other youth in the community.

“The youth have truly become community advocates, voicing their stories to the community and asking themselves what more they can do to improve the lives of OY.”

-OYIF Collaborative

Funding

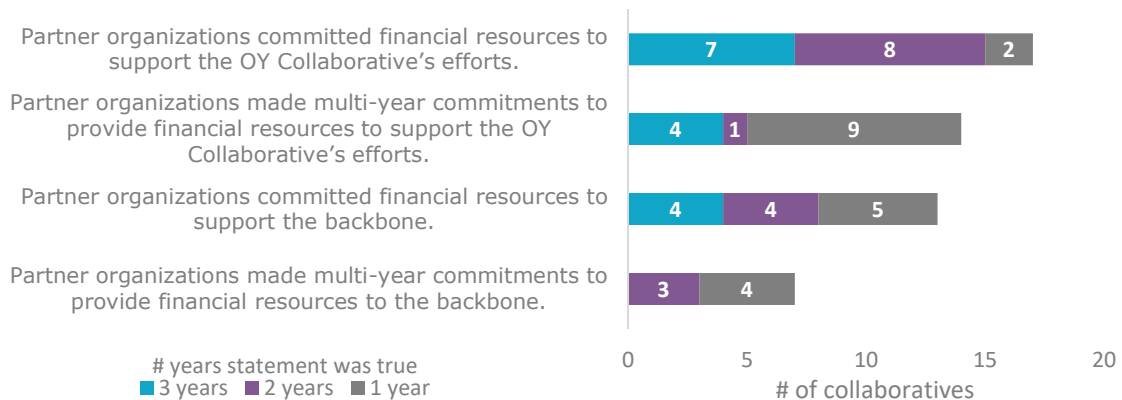
Funding to support collaborative efforts and backbone functions is critical to advancing and sustaining the opportunity youth agenda. While most collaboratives have increased both public and private funding directed toward opportunity youth, success has been inconsistent. Funding from partners has also been mixed – with collaboratives most commonly receiving single, one-time investments to support broader efforts, and few receiving multi-year investments or funds to support the backbone role.

-  Increased **public and private funding**
-  Financial commitments to **support the collaborative's work**
-  Financial commitments to **support the backbone**

FUNDING SUPPORT FROM PARTNERS

Collaboratives reported relatively high financial support from partners, although partners were more likely to support broader collaborative efforts than the backbone role. Discussed previously in this report, partner commitment has been high throughout the OYIF. While in-kind support for collaboratives has been high, financial support – particularly for the backbone organization – has been less common. The majority of collaboratives (67%) indicated that partner organizations committed financial resources to support the collaborative's efforts in 2017, while just 33% received *multi-year* commitments to provide financial resources. Backbone support was even less common, with just 38% of sites reporting that partner organizations committed financial resources to support the backbone in 2017, and 14% indicating that partner organizations made *multi-year* commitments to support the backbone. This trend held true throughout the OYIF – partners are more likely to provide support for broader efforts than directly to the collaborative, and are more likely to provide one-time, rather than multi-year funding. Figure 8, below, illustrates the frequency of these financial supports between 2015 and 2017.

Figure 8
Partners are more likely to provide financial support for broader efforts than to the backbone directly
N=21



While raising funds for the collaborative and backbone has been a challenge, increased attention to opportunity youth has prompted some funders to prioritize efforts that benefit opportunity youth. As collaboratives elevated their work, local funders began to prioritize work aligned to those goals, with 95% of collaboratives reporting this shift at some point during the three-

year OYIF. In Boston, for example, the local United Way and the Clipper Ship Foundation re-organized their portfolios to create opportunity youth program tracks in their funding opportunities. Similarly, in New York, the local government has structured more targeted service contracts for opportunity youth that create better opportunities for training and educational services that can lead directly to market demand jobs. Such changes demonstrate these funders' commitment to the opportunity youth agenda and show promise for continued support.

PUBLIC FUNDING

Most collaboratives reported an increase in new and existing public funding during the OYIF. For many collaboratives, affecting how public funding flows is synonymous with "systems change," and remains the most viable option for affecting community-wide change. In 2017, 48% of collaboratives saw increased public funding dedicated to support or sustain opportunity youth pathways, *up from 33% in 2015*. Over the course of the OYIF, 71% experienced increased public funding, while 81% reported *new* public funding during the period, including 52% in 2017 alone.

PRIVATE FUNDING

While most collaboratives were able to increase public funding to support their work, private funding was not at the scale of public funding and varied considerable across collaboratives. Nearly two-thirds (62%) of collaboratives saw increased private funding for OY pathways in 2017, *up from about a third in 2015*. Over the course of the OYIF, 76% of communities in total saw *increased* private funding, while 95% reported *new* private funding for opportunity youth. The San Diego Workforce Partnership (a WIB) placed "significant public and private funding resources" to address the disconnection of opportunity youth from training and employment. This resulted in internships at City and County agencies and a relationship with the retail industry (e.g., Starbucks). Despite progress, collaboratives were concerned about sustainability due to challenges with securing and maintaining sufficient funding. They reported receiving smaller grants from private sources, rather than large investments, noting that "funds [from foundations] come in smaller chunks," and seem to be limited to short-term or discrete projects rather than for unrestricted, backbone, or longer-term funding.

Youth Outcomes

The OYIF is focused on two levels of change – systems change (described previously) and youth outcomes. This investment approach allows collaboratives to develop strategies for improving youth outcomes at scale without losing sight of the youth these improvements are intended to benefit.

Nationally, approximately 1.2 million opportunity youth reside within OYIF communities⁷, with approximately 575,000 youth residing within collaboratives' geographies of focus. In 2017, more than 18,000 of these youth were directly affected by collaboratives' interventions and pathways strategies, with the systems collaboratives are working with touching approximately 92,000 youth.⁸

Snapshot: OYIF Opportunity Youth

18,513 youth served during 2017

Race/Ethnicity

- African American: 36%
- White: 25%
- Latino: 22%
- Native American: 10%
- Asian American: 3%
- Biracial: 4%

Gender:

- Male: 50%
- Female: 50%

Age

- 16-19 years old: 47%
- 20-24 years old: 49%
- Other: 4%

Education

- HS credential: 43%
 - GED: 10%
 - Diploma: 33%

Priority populations

- Foster care: 17%
- Court involved: 11%
- Pregnant/parenting: 8%
- Homeless: 7%

Boys and Men of Color: 33%

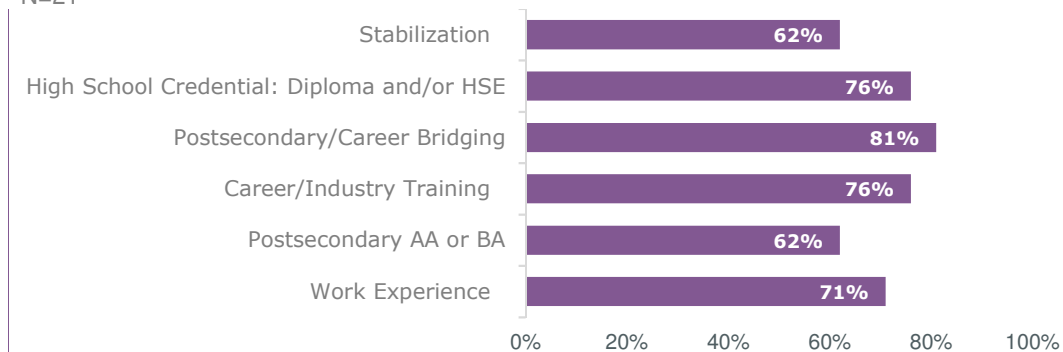
Percentages for race/ethnicity, gender, and age are based on 18,103; 18,315; and 17,491 youth, respectively.

In 2017, more than 18,000 opportunity youth were directly served and supported through OYIF collaboratives' pilot programs and promising practice innovations; efforts most commonly focused on postsecondary/career bridging, helping youth earn a high school credential, and providing youth with career/industry training. As seen in Figure 9, collaboratives were focused fairly consistently on a range of educational and career outcomes, including helping youth earn a high school credential and transition into postsecondary and career pathways. In 2017, collaboratives focused on providing workforce training (76%) and work experiences (71%) for youth in their communities.

Figure 9

Collaboratives remained focused on helping opportunity youth earn a high school credential, postsecondary/career bridging, and helping youth obtain career training in 2017

N=21



⁷ Based on data available from Measure of America, a program of the Social Science Research Council: <http://www.measureofamerica.org>

⁸ Based on estimates provided by collaboratives in fall 2017.

During the OYIF, collaboratives helped thousands of youth achieve a variety of education and employment-related outcomes. Between 2015 and 2017, collaborative partners directly served approximately 38,000 youth. During this timeframe, youth across the OYIF achieved a number of secondary, postsecondary, and employment-related outcomes. Overall, youth most commonly achieved employment-related outcomes, including the nearly 3,500 youth who obtained gainful employment. A range of outcomes across the education and employment continuum have been achieved, however – more than 5,000 youth earned a high school diploma and more than 4,000 enrolled in a postsecondary institution. Overall, the number of youth who achieved one of the eight outcomes tracked by collaboratives increased each year. Figure 10, below, illustrates the number of youth who achieved each outcome between 2015 and 2017.

Figure 10
Youth outcomes during the OYIF

	Youth Outcomes*	2015	2016	2017	Total
Secondary Outcomes	Earned a HS Diploma	631	2,036	2,345	5,012
	Earned a GED	429	374	757	1,560
Post-secondary Outcomes	Enrolled in postsecondary institution	1,882	730	1,495	4,107
	Earned a postsecondary credential	214	192	146	552
Employment Outcomes	Enrolled in Career/Industry Training Programs	372	1,180	1,312	2,864
	Participated in Internship	781	2,931	3,188	6,900
	Completed an Internship	533	1,329	1,595	3,457
	Obtained gainful employment	419	1,398	1,652	3,469
	Total	5,261	10,170	12,490	27,921

*Some youth may have achieved more than one outcome

Considerations for Aspen's Investment Strategy and Learning Agenda

During the OYIF, collaboratives made substantive progress across systemic shifts. When this work first started, many collaboratives expressed hesitation about the expectation of "systems" change following three years of work. Data reveal, however, that significant change has been made; *several communities have instigated key policy or practice changes that fundamentally change the way partners operate.* These changes – which address systemic barriers facing youth – show promise for lasting effects on how youth re-engage and move through pathways that set them on a trajectory for positive education, career, and life outcomes.

Despite progress, some questions remain for collaboratives, AFCS, and its partners as new, complementary initiatives are launched and the learning community is expanded. Below, we offer considerations based on what we have learned during the OYIF investment.



Fundraising for backbone sustainability. Collaboratives have had some success raising funds to support their efforts, but less success raising funds that cover multiple years or specifically support the backbone. While public funds provide an opportunity to advance efforts at scale, private funds tend to consist of relatively smaller, shorter-term investments, or are often directed toward "the work" in lieu of the backbone.

As collaboratives transition out of the initial OYIF investment, consider how AFCS can: 1) elevate the role the backbone plays in facilitating systems change; 2) help these entities express their "value add" in building organizational and system capacity; and 3) leverage relationships with a network of local and national funders who have already supported backbones' efforts through the OYIF.

"While our partners do the heavy lifting of serving youth, our unique role is to draw connections between the work our partners are doing and the systems changes necessary for their success."

-OYIF Backbone Organization



Developing infrastructure and capacity to share and continue to use data across partners. While communities made progress in using data to design, implement, and assess strategies for opportunity youth, few communities use data to track youth across partner organizations, limiting their ability to assess impacts and, ultimately, better serve youth.

Consider deep technical assistance and peer learning that allow communities to troubleshoot these issues while simultaneously building their capacity. Additionally, consider how key partners and systems (workforce, child welfare, education) might be incentivized to participate in data-sharing, and where strong data capacity can be leveraged, rather than built from the ground up.



Building communications capacity. The evaluation reveals that collaborative infrastructure and commitment play a critical role in advancing collective action, and that commitment building may bring a greater "return" on changing key policies and practices. While collaboratives have made notable progress in changing the conversation about opportunity youth and implementing mechanisms to share their agenda with the broader community, opportunities exist to build greater commitment with stakeholder groups and maintain momentum with influential decisionmakers. To date, about half of OYIF collaboratives shared their goals with the broader community or developed a brand and supporting strategy to communicate their efforts more broadly.

As FCS continues to "build a movement" at two levels – within individual communities and across the nation – consider how bolstering communications capacity might simultaneously facilitate local and national efforts. Similarly, given the intersection of OYIF's core values with current national conversations – such as equity, youth leadership, collective impact, and workforce development – consider how FCS's perspectives and lessons learned from collaboratives' efforts can contribute to these conversations while bringing greater attention to opportunity youth.