A Snapshot of the 2021 Opportunity Youth Forum: Boosting Capacity to Drive Equitable Systems Change

ABOUT THE OYF NETWORK

The OYF network is home to 5.9 million 16 to 24-year-old youth. 657,000 (11%) were opportunity youth, who are not in school and not working, in 2019. The rate has likely increased since then.

Based on 2019 ACS data (to be updated with 2021 ACS data)

COLLABORATIVE CHARACTERISTICS
Collaboratives vary in focus area, size, and experience, adapting to meet the unique needs of their communities.

AREAS OF FOCUS
Collaboratives prioritized youth involved in or experiencing:

- Justice System: 63%
- Foster System: 59%
- Homelessness: 56%

SIZE
Network median: 14 partners
Range: 6-120 partners

TIME FOCUSING ON OPPORTUNITY YOUTH

Less than 5 years: 24%
5-10 years: 64%
More than 10 years: 12%

91% of collaboratives included partners from at least three of the following sectors:
- Higher education
- Community-based organizations
- Government
- K-12 education

BACKBONE CHARACTERISTICS
Backbone organizations are a critical component of the OYF network, providing a structure and team to coordinate the work of each collaborative.

TYPES OF ORGANIZATIONS
Community-based organization: 30%
Intermediary: 15%
Education institution: 12%
Other organizations include:
- Workforce investment board
- Community foundation or funder
- Cross-organizational partnership

BUDGET
BACKBONE
Network median: $3.2M
Range: $0 to $67M

STAFFING
Network median: 12 FTEs
Range: 1 to 35 FTEs

TIME FOCUSING ON OPPORTUNITY YOUTH

More than 10 years: 24%
5-10 years: 46%
Less than 5 years: 30%

CORE VALUES
Equity, youth-led change, and community power building are foundational to OYF.

Collaboratives advanced in equity from 2019 to 2021:
- Naming racial equity and/or community-specific disparities in planning processes
- Reflecting the demographic diversity of their communities
- Disaggregating data to address inequities
- Focusing equity and assets in narratives and local media work

While pandemic restrictions limited direct engagement in 2020 and early 2021 – making youth-led change and community power building more challenging – collaboratives re-engaged with youth throughout 2021.

In 2021 the OYF network began to identify practices related to belonging, meaning, wellbeing, and purpose that can help counter the impacts of structurally racist systems for youth.
The 2021 evaluation examined two dimensions of communities in the OYF network:

1) **Collaborative capacity**: the infrastructure and processes necessary for the collaborative to carry out its opportunity youth agenda

2) **Systems changes**: "shifts to the conditions that hold a problem in place"—in this case, disconnected pathways and inequitable conditions that prevent young people from achieving education and employment outcomes


**COLLABORATIVE CAPACITY**

Data and learning became the highest scoring capacity in 2021, reflecting the time and energy put into building data capacity across the network.

**SYSTEMS CHANGES**

Programmatic changes on behalf of opportunity youth remained most evident, with increased focus on policy and funding changes, when comparing 2020 and 2021.

**Methods.** Findings come from the 2021 OYF Self-Assessment. Thirty-three collaboratives answered questions about their collaborative capacity and systems changes. The Assessment included indicators grouped into four types of capacities and seven types of systems changes, assessed on a four-point scale.

For more information about the OYF network: https://www.aspencommunitysolutions.org/opportunity-youth-forum/