

Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund Annual Evaluation Report Year 1 Implementation

Prepared for: Aspen Forum for Community Solutions
May 2016

Executive Summary

The Aspen Forum for Community Solutions' Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund (OYIF) aims to "support strong existing community collaboratives/backbone organizations focused on building and deepening education and employment pathways for opportunity youth."¹ To date, the 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.

The OYIF approach recognizes the need for communities to work together to create opportunities for youth by redesigning and developing new pathways to support youth who are out of work and school. This approach is unique in its emphasis on influencing local systems and youth less frequently attended to by other national collective impact initiatives – prioritizing youth who are, for example, involved with the criminal justice system, foster care, or are homeless. Similarly, the OYIF's two-pronged approach of changing large, complex systems while addressing immediate youth needs offers a unique context for communities' work. Collaboratives are developing approaches that move with urgency while taking the long view to build out and scale approaches that support youth for years to come.

On the following pages, we summarize findings about the nature of the 21 OYIF communities' efforts to shift systems and effect change among targeted groups of opportunity youth. These findings are viewed through the lens of the OYIF evaluation framework, which posits that collaborative infrastructure, commitment, and collective action are necessary for systemic change. Additionally, we investigate the integration of three cross-cutting priorities – data; youth engagement; and diversity, equity, and inclusion – within these three areas of work. Finally, we offer questions for consideration as Aspen and its partners continue to reflect upon the investment-level strategy and learning agenda.

Our key findings include the following:

1. Overall, communities are making the most progress in **developing collaborative infrastructure** – creating **diverse collaboratives** of partners **committed to carrying out an ambitious agenda**.
2. Collaboratives are **creating awareness of opportunity youth** within their communities, and **beginning to shape an emerging narrative** about the assets of opportunity youth.
3. Collaboratives are **laying the groundwork for long-term, substantive** changes by **addressing system-level barriers** facing opportunity youth, and through **embedded practice changes** within partner organizations.
4. **Youth have been actively engaged** as collaborative members, but are **less involved in shaping and assessing collaboratives' strategies**.
5. **Data use is relatively emergent** in most communities, yet collaboratives are **actively working to build data capacity**.
6. Collaboratives are **targeting a diverse array of priority populations**, most commonly focused on **increasing high school credentials, postsecondary/career bridging, and career/industry training**.

Together, these findings suggest that OYIF communities are poised for continued progress for the remainder of the grant, and are laying a foundation for systemic change.

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

Introduction

The Aspen Forum for Community Solutions' Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund (OYIF) aims to "support strong existing community collaboratives/backbone organizations focused on building and deepening education and employment pathways for opportunity youth."² To date, the 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.

In this report, we present findings from the first year of our evaluation, which coincides with participating communities' first year of implementation. Our findings draw heavily from the evaluation team's most recent data collection activity – a collection of cross-cutting shifts in "systems change" among the 21 communities using the annual reporting "data dashboard." Additionally, the following evaluation activities informed this report:

- Interviews with each site lead conducted during the summer of 2015
- Site visits to Hartford, CT and San Diego, CA
- A review of notes from Aspen's progress calls
- Participation in May 2015 and October 2015 OYIF Convenings

At its core, our evaluation aims to answer the following question:

How does implementing a collective impact approach contribute to systemic shifts in communities that improve educational, work, and life outcomes for opportunity youth?

Here, we highlight key findings from communities' first year of implementation, emphasizing the "systemic shifts" reported on at the close of the implementation year. Following a summary of collaboratives' overall progress in each of the three areas of the theory of change (TOC) guiding the OYIF evaluation – collaborative infrastructure, commitment building, and collective action (See *Appendix A for the full TOC*) – we more closely explore evidence of these changes, as well as progress related to youth engagement; data use; and diversity, equity, and inclusion. In the final section, we offer questions for consideration based on our observations of communities' work to date, with a particular focus on how Aspen, its funders, Jobs for the Future, and other OYIF partners might advance work on behalf of opportunity youth nationally – both within and across communities.

Aspen OYIF Communities

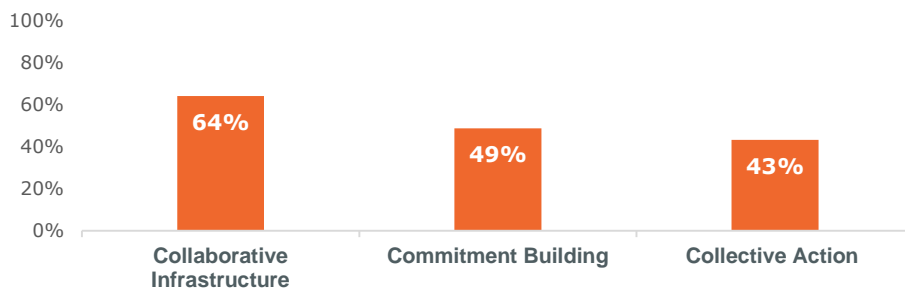
- Atlanta, GA
- Austin, TX
- Baltimore, MD
- Boston, MA
- Chicago, IL
- Del Norte County, CA
- Denver, CO
- Detroit, MI
- Greenville, MS
- Hartford, CT
- Hopi Reservation, AZ
- Los Angeles, CA
- Maine, Southern Rural
- New Orleans, LA
- New York, NY
- Oakland, CA
- Philadelphia, PA
- San Diego, CA
-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

² <http://aspencommunitysolutions.org/the-fund/goals/>

I. 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. The theory of change outlines three areas of change – collaborative infrastructure, commitment building, and collective action – that together represent systemic changes within a community. In the data dashboard, communities were presented with a series of lists outlining “evidence” of progress toward systemic shifts in each of these three areas, and were asked to identify which areas of evidence they have seen in the past year. **As a group, communities have most commonly exhibited evidence of collaborative infrastructure:** the highest percentage of collaborative infrastructure items were reported across the 21 sites, followed by commitment building and collective action (Fig. 1).

Figure 1:
Overall, communities reported the most progress in collaborative infrastructure, followed by commitment building and collective action
N=21



In general, sites are emphasizing infrastructure development and commitment building, likely as precursors to collective action. Figure 2, below, further illustrates this trend – a look at the percentage of items “checked” for each of the TOC’s systemic shifts reveals that OYIF communities, as a whole, saw more progress in collaborative infrastructure and commitment building than collective action. This finding is not surprising, and reinforces what we have seen among other communities using similar strategies to achieve systems change – which requires a strong partnership (collaborative infrastructure) that has garnered support from a variety of stakeholders (commitment) before local organizations and sectors can work together in new ways (collective action).

Figure 2:
Evidence of systemic shifts

Systemic Shift	Overall %
Collaborative Infrastructure: Commitment among partners to sustaining OY Collaborative activities and structures (and specifically the backbone role)	68%
Collaborative Infrastructure: Increased accountability among partners to implement collective, mutually reinforcing activities for the shared OY agenda.	57%
Commitment Building: Increased investments in new opportunities and pathways for OY (e.g., new/reallocated funding, in-kind resources, joint leveraging of funding streams)	56%
Commitment Building: Increased visibility of the shared OY agenda in the community.	54%
Collective Action: Increased number and type of effective OY opportunities and pathways	52%
Commitment Building: Successful reframing of issues around OY and an asset-based, public OY narrative rebranding	52%
Collective Action: Increased quality of supports for OY in community (through programmatic, policy, and funding changes)	45%
Commitment Building: Advocacy and policy wins	41%
Collective Action: More effective integration of programs and organizations in existing and new pathways serving OY (including incorporation of new partners/players)	38%

II. Collaborative Infrastructure

Collaborative infrastructure is the foundation on which the work of the collaborative is built. At the core of the collaborative is the backbone organization, which brings partners and stakeholders together around a common vision, and creates conditions for collaborative members to work together toward this goal. As collaborative infrastructure develops, partners should reflect the diversity of the community, demonstrate commitment to supporting the collaborative and backbone functions, and hold each other accountable for their work and contributions toward the common agenda.

*To date, collaboratives have **engaged a variety of partners** – particularly those who represent the nonprofit sector – and are **actively engaging youth**. Collaboratives are also receiving support from partners through **in-kind resources, funding, and practice changes**, and have **established accountability structures** that help partners share ownership of the work.*

Collaboratives have most successfully engaged community-based/nonprofit organizations addressing education, workforce development, and health and human services. They hope to further engage employers and representatives from the business sector. As Figure 3 indicates, collaboratives consist of a diverse array of partners, most of whom are “very involved.” Overall, employers and private sector/business partners were less engaged with the work of the collaboratives. These findings mirror challenges that site leads expressed during 2015 interviews. Employers and representatives from the business sector were among the least involved across communities, with only 10% of collaboratives indicating that these partners were “very involved.” Of note, however, is that 33% of communities indicate that they *plan to engage* these sectors.

Figure 3:
Sector Involvement in the OYIF Collaboratives³

Sector Partner	Very involved	Somewhat involved	Not involved, but planning to engage	Not involved
<i>CBO/non-profit: Education</i>	76%	14%	0%	10%
<i>CBO/non-profit: Workforce development</i>	71%	19%	10%	0%
<i>CBO/non-profit: Health and human services</i>	71%	24%	5%	0%
<i>Higher Education (2-year)</i>	67%	19%	10%	0%
<i>Local Philanthropy</i>	62%	29%	5%	5%
<i>K-12 education</i>	52%	38%	5%	5%
<i>Local Government</i>	52%	19%	24%	5%
<i>Youth</i>	43%	52%	5%	0%
<i>Employers</i>	10%	52%	33%	5%
<i>Private sector/Business</i>	10%	52%	33%	5%
<i>Faith community</i>	0%	48%	19%	33%
<i>Parents and families</i>	0%	5%	33%	57%

N=21 SITES

³ For full results, see Appendix B.

All collaboratives indicated that partner organizations were represented consistently at collaborative meetings. Almost all (95%) indicated that partners regularly contributed during meetings. To a slightly lesser degree, partners regularly contributed *between* meetings (81%). Over the course of the year, a large majority (90%) of collaboratives saw an expansion of the partnership through the addition of new organizations, with one site reporting, "Meetings have an exciting buzz and are full of energy. [Our collaborative] is now a hot new topic in the community and new partners are now reaching out to us and requesting to attend upcoming meetings."

Collaboratives (76%) most commonly received support from partner organizations in the form of in-kind resources. These resources included:

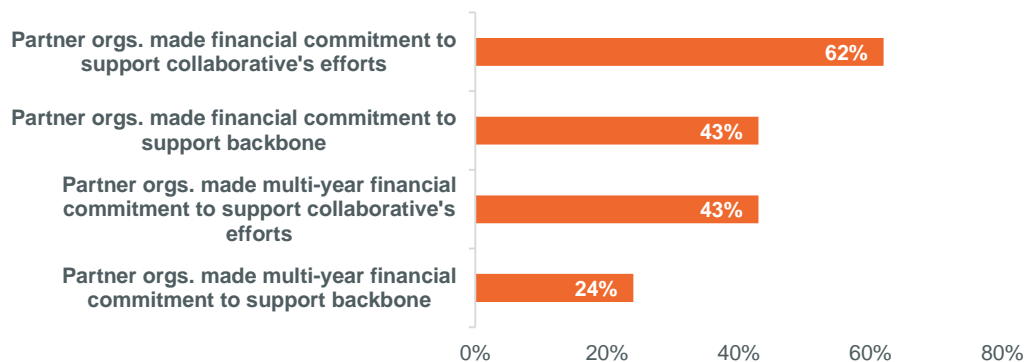
- *Social capital*, such as brokering connections and granting access to networks. Notably, 81% of sites indicated that partner organizations leveraged their own partnerships and connections to advance the work of the collaborative. In some communities, such as Austin and New York City, partners connected collaboratives to additional funding opportunities.
- *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 some backbones. In Del Norte, for example, the opportunity youth initiative is being integrated with a larger community change effort, which translates to additional resources, including support for staffing to address opportunity youth needs.
- *Knowledge-related resources*, such as technical support, training materials, research and best practices, communications support, and data sharing. The Hopi Reservation benefits from technical support from partners, as well as data-sharing commitments. Similarly, in Boston, five program vendors convene quarterly to improve practice and data collection protocols. In South King County, a local funder is supporting communications and data functions.

In addition to in-kind support, collaboratives and backbones reported relatively high financial support from partners, although multi-year commitment was less common.

Collaboratives have secured some funding for collaborative infrastructure. Most (86%) collaboratives secured a local match to the OYIF grant from local private and community foundations, and leveraged additional funding streams to support the backbone (e.g., WIOA). In addition, 62% of sites indicated that partner organizations committed financial resources to support the collaborative’s efforts, while just 43% received *multi-year* commitments to provide such financial resources. Backbone support was even less common, with just 43% of sites reporting that partner organizations committed financial resources to support the backbone, and 24% indicating that partner organizations made *multi-year* commitments to support the backbone (Figure 4). Additionally, 53% of sites reported that local funders prioritized work aligned with the collaborative’s goals when making funding decisions.

Figure 4:
Financial support for collaboratives' work was more common than support for the backbone

N=21



Many partners are making practice changes to support their local collaborative, demonstrating deep commitment to these efforts. One significant way in which partner organizations demonstrated their support for the collaborative was to change their own policies and practices to advance the partnership's goals. Sixty seven percent (67%) of communities indicated that this happened during the first year of implementation. This finding suggests that backbone organizations created conditions for partners to contribute in unique ways. As one site reported, *"Partners commit to the sustainability of the backbone by taking on more of the work of the collaborative."* This collaborative approach is also reflected in the finding that, in five communities (24%), key local organizations aligned their strategic priorities with the collaborative's goals.

Collaboratives established accountability structures that helped operationalize and reinforce partner commitment. Nearly every site indicated that partners and work groups provided updates to the collaborative on a periodic basis. In most cases (81%), work groups were established and aligned with the collaborative's plan of action, and a large majority (76%) of sites indicated that partners followed through on their commitments. Communication strategies, like regular meetings, were important for "getting everyone on the same page" and identifying opportunities for coordination. Primary approaches for increasing accountability included:

- *Developing shared products of collaboration*, including theories of change/logic models and other visual tools, action plans, and common policies established by consensus.
- *Formal partner agreements*, like MOUs and data sharing agreements.
- *Collaborating on joint efforts*, including grant and fundraising proposals, planning and/or supporting each other with OY-related events in the community, and making presentations.
- *Sharing and disseminating information*, like developing communities of practice among service providers, sharing lessons learned and best practices, and offering cross-referrals among service providers.
- *Delegating pieces of the work to different partners*, so that each party has "ownership" of the work.

"Many collaborative partners have accompanied backbone staff to present publicly on behalf of Opportunity Youth, and supported our planned events to share our mission with the community."

Collaborative Infrastructure: Integration of Cross-Cutting Priorities

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Collaboratives took great effort to ensure that diverse perspectives informed their work.

Tactics included:

Outlining the "ideal" composition of the partnership. In New Orleans, the EMPLOY collaborative sought membership that aligned with the industry and demographic diversity of the community. EMPLOY did this to ensure that its strategies were developed from *"the multiple perspectives and roles that impact a youth's career pathway and the collaborative's success."*

Developing fair decision-making processes. In Baltimore, the Coordinating Committee is composed of at least one local representative of each foundational program, and each program gets a vote. Members commit to problem solving and decision making through consensus, defined as *"all voting members being able to live with and support the decision."*

Designing opportunities to allow for multiple voices to be heard. In Maine, backbone leadership considers how to *"ensure partners feel like equals, including youth"* during meetings, and solicits anonymous responses to the systems change survey from the entire group.

Despite diverse representation and high partner engagement overall, community engagement has been relatively low. Overall engagement of community members was low compared to other partners. Specifically, the faith community and parents and families were the least involved – 48% engaged the faith community to some extent, and just one community (5%) reported that parents and families were involved (with 33% intending to engage parents and families in the future). Just a handful (19%) of collaboratives indicated that mechanisms existed for collaborative-community communication.

Youth Engagement

Youth were well integrated into the collaboratives, with 81% of sites indicating that youth were actively involved. Youth roles varied, but primarily included participation in collaborative and work group meetings (e.g., providing input, advising, and supporting decision making processes). Collaboratives cited efforts to integrate youth into their work and work groups as leadership development opportunities, as well as a tactic for increasing community representation and balancing power within the collaborative. In most cases, youth were prominent partners, ensuring that the collaborative efforts were on the right track, with most collaboratives (81%) seeking input from youth about the progress of its work. As one site reported, *"We are dedicated to engaging both our youth and partner organizations in order to identify what changes need to occur.... This is an ongoing dialogue between collaborative participants and the youth at the table."*

Data

Data use and data sharing were areas of modest progress. While 67% of sites indicated that they used data to inform pathway development and programming, most collaboratives were working through a variety of issues to strengthen data capacity. The most prominent issue was establishing conditions for sharing student-level data across programs and organizations. Just over half (52%) of sites indicated that partners participated in a shared measurement system to track progress toward the collaborative's goals. A smaller fraction (24%) of communities saw local organizations use the same data system to track opportunity youth participation across multiple programs. Movement with data sharing was frequently slowed by processes such as deciding on common definitions, exploring technology options, and securing data sharing agreements. These processes require the coordination of multiple partners with varying data systems, an area of struggle for many communities.

III. Commitment Building

Building commitment to the collaborative's agenda is a critical component of advancing and embedding the collaborative's vision within the community and improving outcomes among opportunity youth at scale. As collaboratives build commitment, they will expand visibility of the shared agenda, reframe issues around opportunity youth, increase new investments in opportunities and pathways for opportunity youth, and achieve advocacy and policy wins.

*To date, communities have **increased awareness** of opportunity youth within their communities, begun to **change the narrative** about these youth and the challenges they face, and are seeing evidence of partner and stakeholder **commitment through allocation of in-kind resources and funds** to better support opportunity youth.*

Nearly all communities have increased awareness of opportunity youth. Most communities (20) reported an increase in conversations among stakeholders about "concerns with the number of OY in the community." Strategies for increasing awareness included the following:

- *Exposure through media outlets.* In Boston, five news articles have been published in the *Boston Globe*, *Boston Herald*, the *Boston Business Journal*, and the *Baystate Banner* about the Connection Center – a one-stop resource center for opportunity youth – and the collaborative. The collaborative's new website has been used for background in developing the stories.
- *Data sharing.* In Santa Clara, a data contractor helped determine the "disconnection rate" so that the collaborative could identify the opportunity youth population in the community.
- *Leveraging influential champions.* Mayors in Boston and Chicago have publicly championed an asset-based orientation toward opportunity youth. At the launch of the 100K Opportunities initiative, for example, Mayor Emanuel remarked, "Never again will I think of these young people as dropouts or disconnected youth...I will think of them as Opportunity Youth." This proclamation was critical to changing the narrative.
- *Meetings with key stakeholders.* Both Austin and South King County have held large events and presentations for stakeholders in their regions, where their work – combined with personal stories from opportunity youth – has been featured.

The majority of communities have seen the emergence of two new narratives: 1) use of the positive frame of "opportunity youth" and 2) discussion of the systemic – rather than individual – nature of challenges these youth face. Most communities reported progress in changing the public narrative of opportunity youth in their communities. Most notably, stakeholders began adopting the language of "opportunity youth" in 86% of communities, while 81% of communities reported that challenges opportunity youth face are discussed as systemic, not as individual. Both of these perspectives reflect an important shift in views about opportunity youth and are essential to collaboratives' efforts

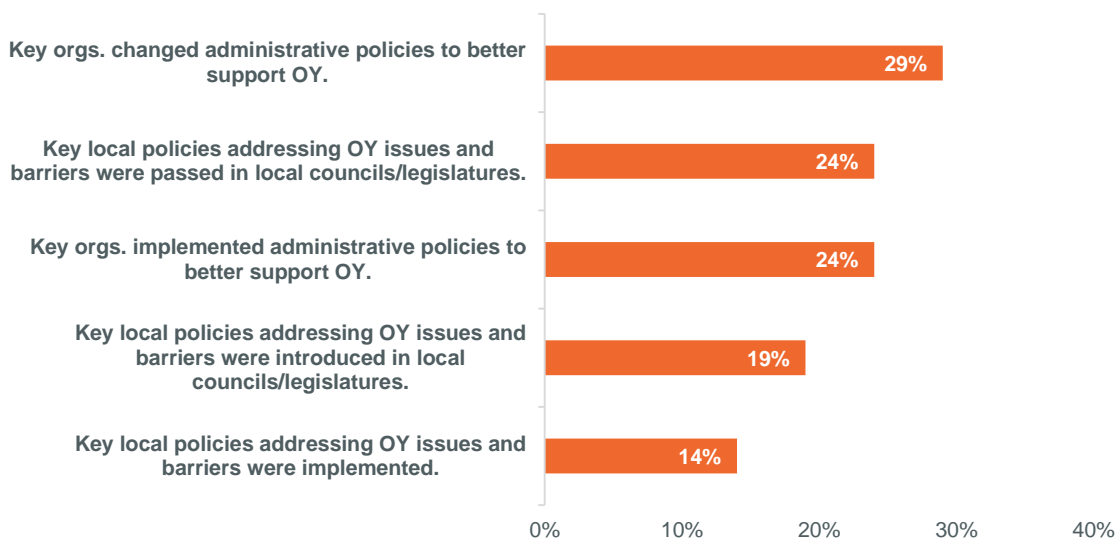
"The lack of skilled workers...is a conversation that is bringing attention to OY, by recognizing that there is an 'untapped' resource that can be a solution to a growing crisis."

Most collaboratives have laid the groundwork for policy change, although only a few have witnessed more substantive policy change. Despite only recently completing the first year of OYIF implementation, communities have begun to see strong evidence of systemic shifts within their communities. OYIF communities made the most progress toward advocacy and policy wins through new or strengthened relationships with public officials (81%) and influential decision makers and policy makers (81%). Progress here is not surprising, as relationships must be established with key champions before new ideas can be adopted and

implemented. A smaller number of collaboratives, however, have made progress toward changing organizational and local policies (Figure 5):

- Organizational policies.** Nine communities (43%) reported that their collaborative developed a plan to influence institutional policies in the past year, while six communities (29%) saw key changes in organizational policies that better support opportunity youth, and 24% *implemented* such policies. Los Angeles reported that “*city and county workforce development systems are now openly engaging and serving foster youth in a way they have not in the past. Similarly, the courts are addressing employment issues during hearings and referring transition-aged youth directly to navigators and youthsource programs to help connect them to employment while still in care.*” In Austin, “*the move to rethink remediation and the removal of barriers to college education for OY youth has grown in strength, and is now being reflected in budget choices.*”
- Local policies.** A handful of communities reported progress towards changing key local policies. Four communities (19%) *introduced* policies addressing opportunity youth issues and barriers in local councils or legislatures, while three (14%) reported that key local policies addressing opportunity youth issues and barriers were *implemented* during the past year.

Figure 5:
Collaboratives most often saw organizational policy changes in support of opportunity youth
 N=21



Communities have made progress in leveraging public and private funds. Two-thirds of communities reported that, in the past year, new private funding was dedicated to support opportunity youth pathways. The same number also reported dedication of in-kind resources, a critical source of support that can often be integrated into partners’ day-to-day activities. In addition to securing private funding and in-kind resources, half (52%) of OYIF collaboratives reported increases in *new* public funding to support OY pathways, while seven (33%) communities reported *increased* public funding. Additionally, 11 communities reported that partner organizations jointly pursued funding to support opportunity youth, with eight receiving such funding during the first year of implementation. In Detroit, for example, the collaborative leveraged its apprenticeship and training programs to serve opportunity youth through various funding streams, including WIOA, SNAP Employment and Training, and the JP Morgan Chase Foundation. Others – including Baltimore, Detroit, and Los Angeles – have secured funding to enable youth to participate in paid employment/training programs. In total, communities reported raising \$33,314,857 during the first year of implementation (Figure 6). The amount of funds raised varied greatly, with one community reporting that it secured \$22 million

(which represents approximately two-thirds of all dollars raised across OYIF communities). The median amount raised during the first year of implementation was \$600,000.

Figure 6:
Community Investments

Type of investment	# of communities	Amount
New investments	17	\$30,451,344
Reallocation of dollars	6	\$2,828,513
In-kind resources	3	\$35,000

Commitment Building: Integration of Cross-Cutting Priorities

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

In many communities, stakeholders have begun to adopt an equity lens. Fourteen (67%) communities reported that stakeholders openly talked about the specific challenges various demographic groups face to success. These findings mimic what we heard during our site visit in San Diego, during which partners attributed increased attention to youth at the city level, as well as increased attention to equity within the school district, to the collaborative's work. As communities continue their work, adopting and continuing these narratives will be critical to future success and commitment building strategies.

Youth Engagement

Most collaboratives (71%) offered youth leadership training opportunities and outlets to share their experiences with external audiences (71%). Some collaboratives implemented programs specifically focused on helping youth develop leadership competencies, such as strengthening their ability to influence others. Others embedded leadership training in collaborative and work group activities. One-third (33%) of collaboratives reported supporting opportunity youth in becoming engaged as leaders and decision makers outside of the collaborative.

Youth voice has been an important part of collaboratives' commitment building strategies. Sites reported that youth were invited to speak at meetings and events to highlight their perspectives and experiences. As one site noted, *"We have embraced the strategy of leading with youth voice in order to humanize the issue and initiate conversations around immigration policy... [And have placed court-involved youth] willing to speak openly about their criminal records at the forefront of our events in the hopes to remove the stigma often associated with both populations and challenge the systems that often deny services to opportunity youth based on documentation status or a felony record."*

Data

Few collaboratives used data as part of a broad commitment building strategy. Collaboratives appear to be more focused on internal partnership development than communicating to the public – the latter of which signals a more advanced stage of the collective impact approach. While almost all collaboratives (95%) reported an increase in conversations about opportunity youth, few released publications (24%) or research (33%) with the broader community to build the case for their agenda. Additionally, fewer than 50% of sites reported publically sharing their goals with the community, and just about a quarter reported that the collaborative publicly reported on its plan of action and progress. These data reinforce findings on collaborative infrastructure development and suggest that, during the first year of implementation, many collaboratives may not have felt ready to hold themselves accountable to the public.

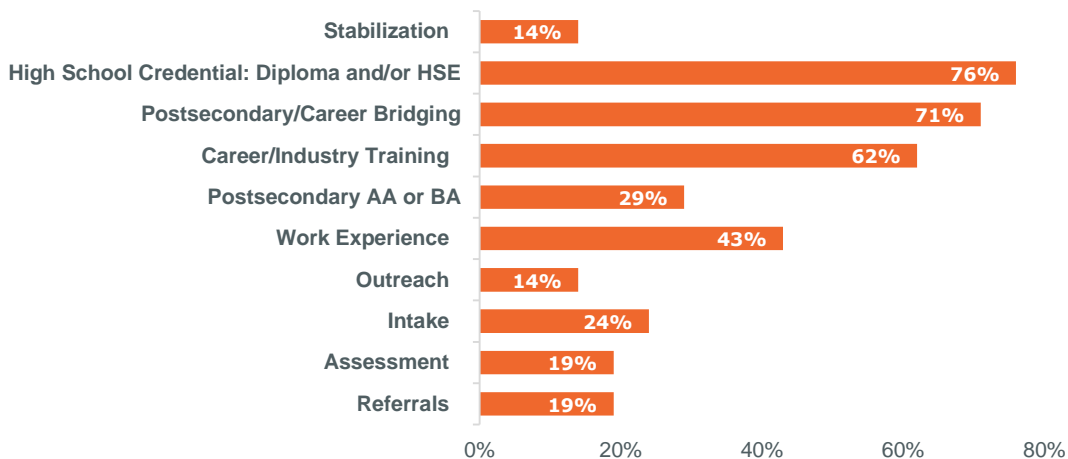
IV. Collective Action

At its core, collective action represents partners working together to provide opportunities and pathways for youth to succeed. Communities developing collective action will integrate new programs and organizations into existing pathways, while creating and scaling new pathways. Programmatic, policy, and funding changes will also be made to increase the quality of supports for opportunity youth.

To date, communities have **targeted a wide array of demographically diverse youth** through a **number of programmatic areas of focus** – most notably high school credential, postsecondary-career bridging, and career/industry training. Communities have **implemented pilot programs** to fill service gaps and, to some extent, **scaled new and existing pathways** for opportunity youth. In some communities, organizations have begun to **work together in new ways and improve programs** to better support opportunity youth.

OYIF collaboratives, as a whole, are targeting more than 11,000 opportunity youth through a variety of services and supports, with a focus on helping youth earn a high school credential, postsecondary/career bridging, and career/industry training. As seen in Figure 7, communities' areas of focus are well-distributed across the education-to-career continuum, with the majority of collaboratives focused on helping youth achieve a high school credential, postsecondary/career bridging, and career/industry training. The vast majority (86%) of communities are focused on *at least* one of these three areas, and almost half of the communities (48%) are focused on *all three* areas. Among the 21 OYIF communities, 76% are focused on helping youth earn a high school credential – the highest of any program area. In contrast, a small minority (14%) are focused on stabilization or outreach.

Figure 7:
Collaboratives are primarily focused on helping opportunity youth earn a high school credential, postsecondary/career bridging, and helping youth obtain career training
N=21



Opportunity youth showed greater gains in education-related outcomes than in work-related outcomes during the first year of implementation.⁴ A third of the youth (33%) served by

⁴ Note: The percentage of youth who earned a high school credential is based on the number of youth who did not have a high school credential upon entry to the program among the 16 communities that were focused on a high school credential. For all other outcomes, we used the total number of youth served by the communities focusing on certain program areas as the denominator since "pre" program data were not provided.

the communities focusing on Postsecondary AA/BA (N=6) enrolled in postsecondary institutions, although only 4% earned postsecondary credentials. Slightly less than one-fifth (16%) of youth served by the 16 communities focusing on high school credentials gained their high school credential (9.6% earned a HS diploma, while 6.5% earned a GED), while fewer youth participated in (12%) or completed (8%) an internship. Six percent (6%) of youth served by communities focusing on work experience obtained gainful employment, while 4% of youth within communities focused on career/industry training enrolled in career/industry training programs.

More than three-quarters of sites implemented pilot programs to meet service gaps – largely through work-based learning opportunities, college-bridge transition programs, and case management. Examples of how sites are collaborating to fill service gaps include the following:

- In Denver, data tracking has allowed opportunity coaches to identify gaps in the quality of supports and take steps to fill those gaps with programs or partnerships that can provide supports for opportunity youth.
- In Del Norte, Workforce Center continues to support Del Norte Diploma Now, allowing anyone who did not receive his/her high school diploma to work toward a diploma. College of the Redwoods, using information gathered in the community, has created more short-term certificate programs that offer training on skills important to the local economy. The college also has instituted a GED program, and has accelerated its remedial English and math programs to allow students to more quickly enter a credit-earning track.
- In Boston, the new Connection Center and pathway vendors have added life coaches or navigators to support opportunity youth at all phases: outreach, intake, referral, program navigation, and job placement.
- In San Diego, supports for youth involved in the PATHWAYS Reengagement Program were increased in quality due to cross-organizational communication that included discussions of the circumstances of each youth and his/her family. In many cases, these supports were available outside of the collaborative at other organizations.

While the majority of sites are implementing pilot programs to meet service gaps, half are scaling existing or pilot programs (Figure 8). The pace of scaling is not surprising, given the early stages of sites' work and the funding and policy opportunities they have secured. Only 43% of sites indicate either funding opportunities or supportive policies in place to support scale and, of those, only a third have secured both funding *and* policy changes. Sites may need support identifying opportunities to scale their programs – less than half of the sites have secured funding streams to support scaling. Somewhat surprisingly, 28% of sites reported scaling programs *without* securing funding or policy changes.

OYIF Opportunity Youth

11,054 youth served

Race/Ethnicity

- African American: 30%
- White: 23%
- Latino: 22%
- Native American: 18%
- Asian American: 3.4%
- Biracial: 3.1%

Gender:

- Male: 53%
- Female: 47%

Boys and Men of Color: 32%

Age

- 16-19 years old: 46%
- 20-24 years old: 44%
- Other: 10%

Education

- HS credential: 39%
 - GED: 23%
 - Diploma: 16%

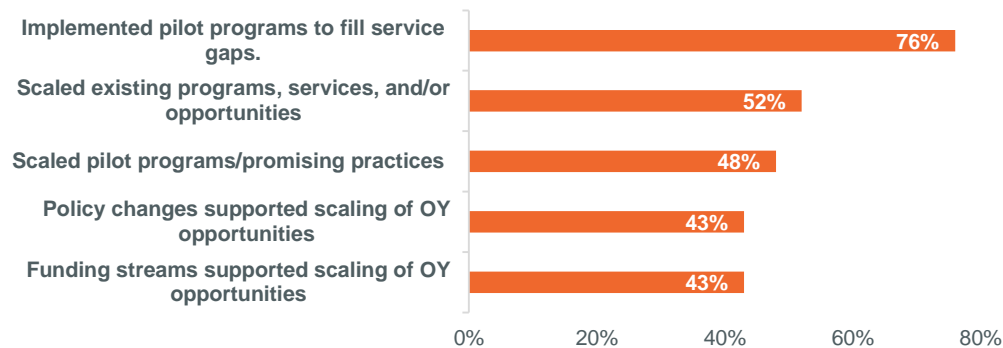
Priority populations

- Court involved: 14%
Served by 11 communities
- Foster care: 9%
Served by 15 communities
- Pregnant/parenting: 6%
Served by 12 communities
- Homeless: 2%
Served by 11 communities

Percentages for race/ethnicity, gender, and age are based on 10,087; 10,591; and 10,094 youth, respectively.

Youth demographics do not include data from New Orleans

Figure 8:
Communities were more likely to implement pilot programs to fill service gaps than scale existing programs
N=21

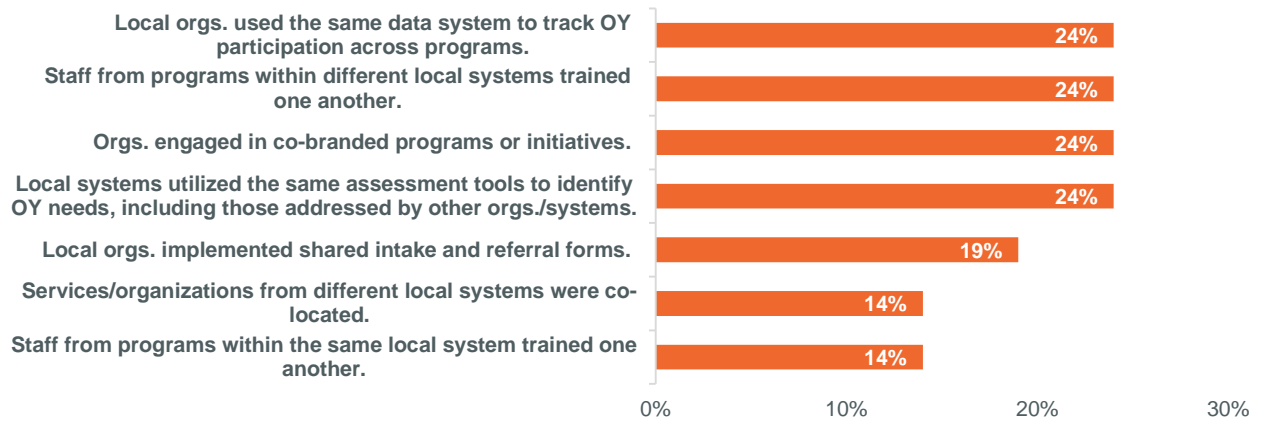


Sixty-two percent of sites developed new programs to better serve opportunity youth, while 52% redesigned existing programs; one-third of communities did both. Among sites that did either, almost half focused on postsecondary education or workforce development, with more than a quarter of sites focusing on both of these local systems. Healthcare, mental health, physical health, and public benefits were not identified as areas of focus for this work. Priority areas of focus reflect a similar trend seen in the number and type of opportunities and pathways implemented across the 21 sites; opportunities and pathways are largely centered on work-based learning and college bridge transition programs (81% of sites are focused on each), and much less so on programs that deal with physical health services, housing, child care support, and mental health services.

In several communities, partners are developing new ways of working with one another, fundamentally changing the ingrained practices of providers and agencies and setting the stage for systemic changes. While strategies are still emergent, communities are showing promise in their ability to shift practices to better support opportunity youth. Sites are progressing in their coordination with partner organizations by increasing communication among frontline staff (71%) and enhancing capacity to provide complementary services (66%). In South King County, for example, Seattle Education Access' postsecondary bridging and navigation services were embedded in reengagement programs. As seen in Figure 9, sites are beginning to make progress in areas that require deliberate planning and coordination, such as rolling out integrated program elements, reducing redundancies across organizations, sharing intake and referral forms, and co-branding programs. Chicago, Boston, and Austin, for example, are addressing higher education needs through bridge programs, streamlined enrollment processes, and priority enrollment, respectively. Others are also tackling systemic issues, as in Maine – which is developing a comprehensive post-secondary educational plan with Maine's child welfare system – and Philadelphia – where collaboration between the Department of Human Services, School District of Philadelphia, and Family Court helped to improve opportunity youth service coordination, including expanded employment services for youth involved in the juvenile justice system.

"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."

Figure 9:
A handful of collaboratives saw partners make significant changes to how they work in order to better serve opportunity youth
N=21



Collective Action: Integration of Cross-Cutting Priorities

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Collaboratives' priority populations represent a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Although embedded in the OYIF strategy, the focus on priority populations that include youth often excluded from "community wide" initiatives is a testament to sites' application of a diversity, equity, and inclusion lens. These youth, often described as the "hardest to reach" because of their disconnection from traditional education and career pathways, require deliberate strategies that many communities are ill-equipped to implement. Collaboratives' work *with* and *on behalf of* these youth represent a commitment to equity for *all* youth in their community and fills a gap among similar initiatives.

Youth Engagement

Youth involvement in activities related to collective action was relatively low compared to those associated with building collaborative infrastructure and commitment. For example, in 71% of communities, youth informed decisions made within the collaborative, yet they had less influence in specific areas of decision making: programming (57%), funding (24%), and policy changes (e.g., institutional, state, local, or federal) (19%). The lower rates are connected to the generally slower pace of collective action during this first year of implementation overall, and may also reflect the prevailing status quo in how organizations and local systems operate. Within this context, the modest results may still be considered progress.

Youth were tapped to inform program pathway design in approximately half of the communities, while their involvement in the shaping and assessment of these strategies was less common. In 57% of the communities, opportunity youth recommendations were solicited to inform program and pathway design, yet in just 29% of communities, their recommendations were integrated with program and pathway design. Forty three percent of communities reported ongoing and embedded inclusion of youth voice and perspectives in developing, monitoring, and refining pathway systems, supports, and policies. Just 33% of sites indicated that mechanisms were developed to assess opportunity youth satisfaction with pathways.

Data

Less than half of OYIF communities reported regular data use for continuous improvement, although many are actively working to develop the infrastructure necessary for such activities. Data use for continuous improvement was particularly nascent, with just 43% of sites reporting that the collaborative collectively reviewed data on progress toward goals to inform strategic decision making. Just about half (48%) of collaboratives had the necessary processes in place to share, analyze, and reflect on data to refine their work. Thirty-three percent (33%) of sites reported that partners used data to inform continuous quality improvement within their programs, while less than one-third of the communities saw partners within the same local system, or from different local systems, share data with one another to assess and improve services. Collaboratives expect to use data to assess programs and partnership work in the future, with one site reporting, "*We have actively worked one-on-one with partners to develop...MOUs detailing the collection of common indicators which will allow for the monitoring of progress towards goals and preliminary evaluation of impact. [We are] building the infrastructure that will allow for the sharing, analyzing and reflecting on OY data to refine our work.*"

V. Considerations for Aspen's Investment Strategy and Learning Agenda

At the investment level, the OYIF aims to inspire changes that improve outcomes for opportunity youth and reduce the number of opportunity youth on a community and national scale. The OYIF aims to accomplish these significant changes by providing and encouraging financial support for sites' efforts, providing assistance to strengthen local capacity, convening stakeholders to connect learning and build momentum, and by showcasing lessons and successes working with opportunity youth. Drawing from the findings described above and our evaluation activities to date, we offer the following considerations for the investment-level strategy and learning agenda.

- **How can communities be supported in developing data capacity?** While some communities reported progress in data collection and use, reports from communities suggest that building out data infrastructure is taking longer than anticipated. As communities embark on the second year of their work, data use for case-making and accountability will become increasingly important. Many sites appear to be laying the foundation for robust data collection and sharing among key partners, yet are not currently in a position to use data as effectively as they would like.

Additional Questions to Consider: How can collaboratives accelerate their development of data-sharing systems – both for continuous improvement and case-making – to advance their work? What resources might help communities meet short-term needs for data while maintaining momentum towards longer-term gains?

- **How can communities be supported in taking successes with pilot initiatives to scale?** Sites have focused their efforts on implementing pilot programs to meet service gaps, and are leveraging lessons from these pilot programs to enhance pathways. As part of this, partners are developing ways to work with each other differently in order to reach more opportunity youth while improving quality. While most collaboratives have laid the groundwork for policy change, only a handful of communities have achieved more substantive policy change and support for scaling their work. As pilots continue and – hopefully – demonstrate success, the need to scale efforts will continue to increase.

Additional Question to Consider: How can technical assistance help collaboratives focused on pilot programs scale their efforts for systems change?

- **How can collaboratives leverage national attention on opportunity youth and collective impact in their own communities?** There is a great deal of national focus on opportunity youth. At the same time, sites have increased awareness of opportunity youth within their own communities, and are working to change the narrative about these youth and the challenges they face. Sites have seen evidence of partners and stakeholder commitment through receipt of in-kind resources and funds to better support opportunity youth, but there is room for greater local commitment that may come with collaboratives' increased visibility in their communities.

Additional Questions to Consider: How can efforts at the national level support movement-building at the local level, especially in those communities where collaboratives are less visible or where fewer champions exist?

- **Would collaboratives benefit from assistance aimed at building communications capacity?** Fewer than half of sites reported publicly sharing their goals with the community, and just about a quarter reported that the collaborative publicly reported on its plan of action and progress. At the same time, the majority of sites have been negotiating how to use a positive frame to discuss opportunity youth, while highlighting the systemic challenges these youth face. Strengthening the capacity of sites to develop their own communications strategies could assist in conveying the OYIF work and messages to the broader public.

Additional Questions to Consider: How important is a comprehensive communications strategy to the work of the collaboratives? How can Aspen/JFF support collaboratives in determining

when and how one should be developed and implemented? What other types of supports might help collaboratives share the work in their communities effectively?

- **How might changes to federal funding policies improve work on the ground?** Sites have made progress in leveraging federal funding streams (e.g., WIOA) to support the backbone and advance their work. While such funding often offers opportunities to scale best practices, sites have faced barriers due to grant restrictions associated with federal dollars. This issue was prevalent in San Diego, for instance, with partners expressing frustration for the challenges of needing to comply with strict rules they felt hampered service.

Additional Questions to Consider: How can sites better negotiate with restrictions certain funding streams bring? How can the OYIF, as a whole, leverage its influence to create more flexible federal funding opportunities?

Appendix A: Aspen OYIF Theory of Change (Community-level)

The table below highlights the connection between strategies focused on collaborative infrastructure, collective action, and commitment building and the types of systemic shifts to which they lead. The table also links these systemic shifts to expected outcomes for OY. Although the 21 OYIF sites will approach this work differently given context, capacity, and areas of expertise, these strategies and outcomes represent the range of approaches across OYIF communities as a whole. Lastly, this figure highlights three cross-cutting priorities embedded in sites' work: 1) the collection and use of data; 2) elevation of diversity, equity, and inclusion; and 3) youth and employer engagement. The evaluation will seek to understand the integration of these priorities in site-level efforts.

Key strategies (If communities...)	Evidence of systemic shifts (then communities will demonstrate...)	Opportunity Youth outcomes (and OY will ...)
Collaborative Infrastructure: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen backbone capacity (<i>backbone support</i>) Develop new partnerships (e.g., with employers, education, child welfare, juvenile justice) Strengthen partnership capacity (<i>continuous communication, mutually reinforcing activities, shared measurement</i>) Support vision (<i>common agenda</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased representativeness of the partnership vis-à-vis the community Commitment among partners to sustaining partnership activities and structures (and specifically the backbone role) Increased accountability among partners to implement collective, mutually reinforcing activities, and hold one another accountable for the shared OY agenda 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experience Work-Based Learning: Complete internship or related work experiences Reconnect to K-12: Earn a secondary credential (i.e., high school diploma or high school equivalency)
Commitment Building: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cultivate champions Reach targeted constituents Leverage existing resources (e.g., human and financial, local and national) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased visibility of the shared OY agenda in the community Increased investments in new opportunities and pathways for OY (e.g., new/reallocated funding, in-kind resources, joint leveraging of funding streams) Successful reframing of issues around OY and an asset-based, public OY narrative rebranding Advocacy and policy wins 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connect to Postsecondary: Enroll in a postsecondary institution Achieve Postsecondary Success: Enroll, persist and earn postsecondary credentials (e.g., industry-recognized credentials, two- and four-year degrees)
Collective Action (<i>specific, effective, scalable, and sustainable programmatic changes supported by policy and funding shifts</i>): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adapt existing pathway opportunities and address emerging barriers Include partners at multiple pathway points (e.g. new and existing, educational, business, and workforce) Adopt evidence-based pathways strategies (from within community and external to community) Take targeted action to address programmatic, policy, and funding gaps in local OY systems and supports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> System level policy and/or infrastructure shifts Increased number and type of effective OY opportunities and pathways Increased quality of supports for OY in community (through programmatic, policy, and funding changes) More effective integration of programs and organizations in existing and new pathways serving OY (including incorporation of new partners/players) Demonstrated focus on multiple OY populations (including those of highest need) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Achieve Career Success: Gain family-sustaining employment in a career field (e.g. wages)

Cross-Cutting Priorities for Catalyzing Change

Collection and Use of Data: Development of processes for sharing and analyzing cross-organizational data; use of data to set public goals, build community awareness, target messages in communities, identify actions, and set accountability frameworks youth; use of data for continuous partnership improvement and identification and adoption of collective actions

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI): Use of DEI to disaggregate and review data for target populations, develop pathways that address and break down structural barriers to opportunity and access, engage and include diverse partners and perspectives (including demand and supply side engagement, community/neighborhood leaders, and youth), and ensure broad and diverse OY populations are served

Youth Engagement: Inclusion of youth as part of leadership teams within partnerships, as co-designers of actions, as implementation partners, and as data collectors and analyzers; Reframe and rebrand the public narrative for OY to an asset-based frame

Appendix B: Partner engagement (by sector)

Sector Partner	Very involved	Somewhat involved	Not involved, but planning to engage	Not involved	Formal partner (yes) (frequency)
<i>Community-based/non-profit organization: Education</i>	76%	14%	0%	10%	16
<i>Community-based/non-profit organization: Workforce development</i>	71%	19%	10%	0%	19
<i>Community-based/non-profit organization: Health and human services</i>	71%	24%	5%	0%	17
<i>Higher Education (2-year)</i>	67%	19%	10%	0%	16
<i>Local Philanthropy</i>	62%	29%	5%	5%	16
<i>K-12 education</i>	52%	38%	5%	5%	15
<i>Local Government</i>	52%	19%	24%	5%	13
<i>Youth</i>	43%	52%	5%	0%	14
<i>Advocacy/Grassroots organization(s)</i>	43%	38%	10%	10%	14
<i>Community-based/non-profit organization: Child welfare</i>	33%	33%	5%	29%	11
<i>Juvenile Justice</i>	29%	38%	33%	0%	12
<i>Other community-based/non-profit organization: (supplied by site lead)</i>	29%	10%	N/A	19%	7
<i>Child Welfare</i>	24%	38%	19%	19%	11
<i>National Philanthropy</i>	19%	43%	14%	19%	11
<i>Community-based/non-profit organization: Community health</i>	19%	38%	19%	24%	9
<i>Higher Education (4-year)</i>	14%	29%	19%	38%	8
<i>Employers</i>	10%	52%	33%	5%	9
<i>Private sector/Business</i>	10%	52%	33%	5%	8
<i>State Government</i>	10%	19%	38%	33%	6
<i>Foster Care</i>	5%	48%	33%	14%	13
<i>Faith community</i>	0%	48%	19%	33%	6
<i>Parents and families</i>	0%	5%	33%	57%	2

N=21 sites