

2016 Annual Progress Report

Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund



Aspen Forum for Community Solutions
March 2017

About the Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions

The Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solution's mission is to support community collaboration — including collective impact — that enables communities to effectively address their most pressing challenges. The Forum works to accomplish this mission by pursuing four complementary strategies including: 1) building awareness by documenting and lifting up impactful strategies and stories of success; 2) mobilizing stakeholders through knowledge and network development; 3) removing barriers by advocating for effective policy; and 4) catalyzing investment by encouraging funder partnerships.

<http://www.aspencommunitysolutions.org>

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Foreword

By Jamiel L. Alexander and Shawnice Jackson

Youth and young adults are experiencing an ongoing crisis of disconnection from education and employment, with 4.9 million opportunity youth – young people ages 16 to 24 who are not in school or working – nationwide. According to the latest data from Measure of America included in the 2017 report “Promising Gains, Persistent Gaps”, young people of color, especially Native American (25.4%), African American (18.9 %) and Latino (14.3 %) youth are much more likely to become disconnected than their white peers (10.1%) and rural youth (20.3%) are more likely to experience disconnection than youth in cities (14.2%). Although there has been a significant decline in the number of opportunity youth over the past five years, with almost 900,000 fewer opportunity youth, we must ensure that they are not left out of the economic growth of our communities and nation.

As former opportunity youth and members of the National Council of Young Leaders – Opportunity Youth United, a nationwide movement of diverse young leaders who advocate on issues affecting low-income youth and their communities, we have been involved with the Aspen Forum for Community Solutions since its inception and the launch of the Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund (OYIF) in 2013. We know that successful reconnection of opportunity youth requires community collaboration with youth not only at the table, but afforded meaningful opportunities for decision-making and leadership advancement.

Over the past four years, we watched the Aspen Forum for Community Solutions bring together a powerful learning and movement-building network of 23 communities that is deeply committed to infusing an economic, racial, and social equity and justice lens across its work. Locally, we’ve seen OYIF communities develop robust collaboratives that engage leaders from critical systems that affect the lives of opportunity youth and lift up important learning about what works in designing comprehensive second chance pathways that improve the education and employment outcomes of our peers.

OYIF collaboratives are promoting new asset-based narratives about opportunity youth; deepening and expanding supportive services along the pathway to education and career success; working to align systems and bust programmatic silos; helping their partner organizations identify and implement practice changes; identifying policy priorities to create local and state advocacy agendas with/on behalf of opportunity youth; creating new models of meaningful and authentic youth engagement; and focusing on the most vulnerable youth, including youth of color and youth engaged in child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

More work remains to be done to reconnect youth and young adults who are not afforded a full range of educational and employment opportunities. It is our hope that despite the current national political climate that puts at risk critical federal programs that support reconnection, the efforts of OYIF and other community collaboratives nationwide can continue to lift up and promote place-based strategies that result in better education, career, and life outcomes for opportunity youth and future generations.

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About The Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund

The Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund (OYIF) is the first funding collaborative launched by the Aspen Forum for Community Solutions in 2012, with a goal of interrupting the multi-generational cycle of poverty that undermines the vibrancy and economic health of communities by reconnecting 4.9 million opportunity youth – young people between the ages of 16 and 24 who are neither in school nor participating in the labor market. OYIF is a long-term systems change initiative that invests in a network of [23 community grantees](#) that design and implement comprehensive second chance pathways for opportunity youth. The work of OYIF has been generating significant learning about what works in designing pathways to education and employment, as well as momentum in communities and nationally to turn the tide on youth disconnection. OYIF provides an overarching framework for three interrelated initiatives: OYIF, Opportunity Works, and 100,000 Opportunities Initiative™ Demonstration Cities:



Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund

OYIF supports 23 community grantee partners that are designing and implementing innovative collaborative strategies that remove barriers to reconnection of opportunity youth to education and careers and connect and align the many systems that touch the lives of opportunity youth, including K-12, postsecondary, workforce development, child welfare, juvenile justice, and youth services agencies.

OYIF goals are: 1) to build strong evidence of success for utilizing the collective impact community collaboration strategy to build and deepen pathways that achieve better outcomes in education and employment for opportunity youth, and 2) to make the case for increased adoption of collective impact and community collaboration as an effective model for community change.

OYIF community collaboratives across the country – including urban, rural, and tribal communities – have placed youth at the center of their efforts, calling upon youth as leaders in this work because the voices of youth are critical to tackling the challenges they face.



100,000 Opportunities Initiative™ Demonstration Cities

Launched in July of 2015, the 100,000 Opportunities Initiative™ has rapidly become the largest employer-led coalition focused on opportunity youth in the country. The partnership of more than 50 companies seeks to create more pathways to economic prosperity for vulnerable youth and connect employers to this underutilized talent pipeline. The Demonstration Cities effort represents a comprehensive systems alignment and systems change strategy to develop new career pathways for opportunity youth, in partnership with the employer coalition, in five cities – Chicago, IL; Los Angeles, CA; New Orleans, LA; Phoenix, AZ; and Seattle, WA.

The Demonstration Cities focus on four key strategies: deepening connections to employers; systems alignment and coordination across sectors; innovation and acceleration of employer-led pathways; and codifying and sharing lessons learned for large scale adoption and impact. The work and lessons learned in the Demonstration Cities seek to contribute to a better youth workforce system over time.



Opportunity Works

Opportunity Works, an initiative of Jobs for the Future, in partnership with the Aspen Forum for Community Solutions Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund, is building the evidence base of what works to improve the credential attainment and employment prospects of low-income opportunity youth.

Supported by the Corporation for National and Community Service's Social Innovation Fund, matched by new investments from national and regional funders, Opportunity Works supports seven communities (Boston, Hartford, CT; New Orleans, LA; Philadelphia, PA; San Francisco, CA; Santa Clara, CA; and South King County, WA) to reconnect opportunity youth with education and employment on-ramps and pathways that dramatically improve their life trajectories.

Opportunity Works places a special emphasis on strategies for engaging boys and men of color, and will document impact on this population in response to the call to action from the national My Brother's Keeper initiative.

Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund Grantee Partners

COMMUNITY	COLLABORATIVE	BACKBONE ORGANIZATION
Atlanta, GA	Atlanta Opportunity Youth Collaborative	United Way of Greater Atlanta
Austin, TX	Austin Opportunity Youth Collaborative	Workforce Solutions Capital Area
Baltimore, MD	TheCONNECT	Ingoma Foundation & Johns Hopkins Centers for Adolescent Health and the Prevention of Youth Violence
Boston, MA <i>OYIF & Opportunity Works community</i>	Boston Opportunity Youth Collaborative	Boston Private Industry Council & Boston Opportunity Agenda
Chicago, IL <i>OYIF & 100,000 Opportunities Initiative™ Demonstration Cities community</i>	Thrive Chicago	Thrive Chicago
Del Norte County, CA	Del Norte County and the Adjacent Tribal Lands Opportunity Youth Initiative (DNATL)	Wild Rivers Community Foundation
Denver, CO	Denver Opportunity Youth Investment Initiative	Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce
Detroit, MI	Detroit Pathways to Opportunity Initiative	Detroit Employment Solutions Corporation
Greenville, MS	GO YOUTH	Rural LISC
Hartford, CT <i>OYIF & Opportunity Works community</i>	Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative	Capital Workforce Partners
Hopi Reservation, AZ	Hopi Opportunity Youth Initiative	The Hopi Foundation
Los Angeles, CA <i>OYIF & 100,000 Opportunities Initiative™ Demonstration Cities community</i>	Los Angeles Opportunity Youth Collaborative	Alliance for Children's Rights
Maine, Southern Rural	Southern Maine Youth Transition Network	Muskie School of Public Service, University of Southern Maine
New Orleans, LA <i>OYIF, Opportunity Works & 100,000 Opportunities Initiative™ Demonstration Cities community</i>	Employment and Mobility Pathways Linked for Opportunity Youth (EMPLOY)	Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives, Tulane University
New York, NY	Bronx Opportunity Network	JobsFirstNYC
Oakland, CA	Urban Strategies Council	Oakland-Alameda County Opportunity Youth Initiative
Philadelphia, PA <i>OYIF & Opportunity Works community</i>	Project U-Turn	Philadelphia Youth Network
Phoenix, AZ <i>100,000 Opportunities Initiative™ Demonstration Cities community</i>	Opportunities for Youth	Maricopa County Education Service Agency
San Diego, CA	Youth Opportunity Pathways Initiative (PATHWAYS)	San Diego Youth Development Office
San Francisco, CA <i>Opportunity Works Community</i>	Roadmap to Peace	Bay Area Community Resources (BACR)
San Jose / Santa Clara County, CA <i>OYIF & Opportunity Works community</i>	Santa Clara County Opportunity Youth Partnership	Kids in Common, Planned Parenthood
South King County, WA <i>OYIF, Opportunity Works, & 100,000 Opportunities Initiative™ Demonstration Cities community</i>	The Road Map Project	Mar Monte Community Center for Education Results
Tucson, AZ	Youth on the Rise	United Way of Tucson and Southern Arizona

OYIF Grantee Convenings

In collaboration with key implementation partner Jobs for the Future, OYIF designed and launched a national learning community of OYIF grantee partners. This learning community engages OYIF site leads, youth leaders, funders, thought partners, and national leaders across several sectors in two convening per year: a spring convening, typically hosted by an OYIF community in order to promote learning in local context and lift up promising local practices in reconnecting opportunity youth, and a fall convening, which takes place on the Aspen Institute campus in Aspen, Colorado and focuses on national innovations and movement-building efforts. The core themes of OYIF convenings are: Collaboration, Equity, Youth Leadership, and Local & National Innovation.

1 Collaboration

OYIF convenings focus on cross-system, cross-sector collaboration. While our emphasis is specifically on the early promise of the collective impact approach when applied to creating pathways to education and employment for opportunity youth, OYIF recognizes the multitude of collaborative approaches which communities can adopt in order to effect change.



OYIF convenings plenary and breakout sessions regularly feature systems leaders from OYIF communities and nationwide, representing workforce, K-12, higher education, community-based organizations, local and national philanthropy, and local and federal government. Highlights include:

Systems Leadership

→ At the OYIF Spring 2015 Convening in New Orleans, Louisiana, a panel of national and local leaders that included Dr. Scott Cowen, President Emeritus, Tulane University, Walter Isaacson, President & CEO, The Aspen Institute, the Honorable Mitchell Landrieu, Mayor of New Orleans, and Michael Smith, former Special Assistant to President Obama and Director of My Brother's Keeper, discussed lessons on innovation in local and national system leadership and situated these innovations in the context of New Orleans and the work of local leaders to improve youth education and employment outcomes and reduce youth violence through the NOLA for Life effort.

Employer Engagement

→ At the OYIF Fall 2014 Convening in Aspen, Colorado, and the May convening in New Orleans, leaders from OYIF communities and local and national business and corporate philanthropy leaders discussed innovative local and national strategies and approaches to partnering with employers to design employer-driven pathways to careers for opportunity youth.

Engaging Philanthropy

→ In New Orleans, a plenary panel of private, corporate, and community philanthropic leaders talked about leveraging and coordinating their strategies for investing in local programming to ensure the well-being of all children and youth in New Orleans.



“ Today, with thousands of young people on a better path, it is clear that when given the right opportunities and supports, opportunity youth are eager to reconnect to education and the workforce. There is also strong evidence building for the collective impact approach. Communities are pulling together toward a shared vision for their cities and towns, and demonstrating that cross-sector collaboration works.”

Melody Barnes
Chair, Aspen Forum
for Community
Solutions

2 Equity

Aspen Forum and our partners are committed to bringing an equity lens to the practice of collective impact. In order to solve complex social issues, it is critical to address structural inequality along race, class, and cultural axis. Collective impact with its focus on large-scale systems change must include an explicit analysis of equity and power, particularly around race, class, gender and sexual orientation, and other characteristics that shape the complex problems – including educational and economic disparities and youth disconnection – that our collective impact efforts aspire to change.



“An explicit focus on equity and inclusion is required to address systemic and structural barriers that threaten sustained transformation when addressing systemic challenges. We delude ourselves and sabotage our impact when we ignore equity and forego the intentional inclusion of the disenfranchised and underrepresented. The commitment to inclusion and equity augments our efforts and strengthens the quality and credibility of our outcomes.”

Chekemba Fulmore-Townsend
President and CEO, Philadelphia Youth Network

OYIF learning agenda reflects our broad commitment to equity by exploring how issues of race, gender, and class shape systems that touch opportunity youth and limit equitable access to opportunity. OYIF convenings also include breakout sessions on equity-based approaches to the practice of collective impact. Highlights include:

- At the May convening in New Orleans, Angela Glover Blackwell, Founder of PolicyLink, delivered a keynote address that highlighted the challenges and opportunities with infusing equity into collective impact. Arnold Chandler, co-founder of Forward Change Consulting, presented his *Life Course Framework for Improving the Lives of Boys and Young Men of Color* that provides a holistic framework for exploration of how race, gender and place intersect in ways that drive disparate life outcomes for young men of color, as well as emergent and promising gender-specific interventions to improve outcomes for this population.
- At the OYIF Fall 2015 Convening in Aspen, Colorado, Dr. Manuel Pastor, Professor of Sociology and American Studies & Ethnicity and the Director for the Program of Environmental and Regional Equity at the Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration at the University of Southern California, delivered a keynote address that highlighted major national demographic shifts over the next decade and made the case for equity and opportunity as key drivers for community and national economic sustainability and growth.
- The Fall 2015 gathering in Aspen featured national leaders who discussed bold new ideas that are critical to the success of the opportunity youth movement. Lata Reddy, President of the Prudential Foundation, Dr. Gail Christopher, Vice President and Senior Advisor at the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and Trabian Shorters, Founder and CEO of BMe, talked about the imperatives of racial and economic equity. At the same convening, Arnold Chandler and Tia Martinez of Forward Change Consulting and Dr. Pamela Cantor, President and CEO of Turnaround for Children explored the health and educational challenges that chronic stress and adversity create for youth and outlined connections between trauma, school behavior and school discipline policies that disproportionately impact youth of color, and the tracking of youth into the school-to-prison pipeline.

3 Youth Leadership

The Aspen Forum and OYIF grantee partners are deeply committed to empowering youth voice, engagement, and leadership on the national and local level. The Aspen Forum is deeply aware that in order to move forward necessary policy and practice changes that can improve outcomes for opportunity youth, the field needs to deepen our collective investment in youth engagement and leadership; support the development of a new, diverse pipeline of young leaders; promote and align with the work of youth-led networks; and engage youth as equitable and authentic partners with adults in systems reform efforts.



“Disenfranchised youth are far more than their stories, they are trailblazers in breaking out of detrimental cycles caused by social adversity and possess the knowledge of what works in the community and how we can better support their dreams.”

Maria Valdez

Youth Leader, Austin Opportunity Youth Collaborative

Highlights of OYIF efforts to support youth voice and leadership on the national stage include:

- Former opportunity youth served as critical partners in the launch of OYIF and participated in the design of the OYIF RFP and review of community proposals. They currently serve on the OYIF Leadership Council, a group of funders and thought partners that provides strategic direction to the work of OYIF.
- OYIF is facilitating a peer-to-peer network of youth leaders from across OYIF communities. OYIF convenings include a youth leadership track – co-designed by OYIF youth leaders and staff – that provides learning, professional development, and public speaking opportunities to youth, while highlighting youth engagement and leadership strategies developed by OYIF grantee partners and national best-in-class models such as YouthBuild.

Locally, OYIF grantee partners are implementing innovative strategies to engage youth in problem identification and design of comprehensive second chance pathways that improve employment, education, and life outcomes of opportunity youth:

- In Boston, the Youth Voice Project employs Peer Leaders to design and implement peer outreach and research strategies to engage opportunity youth and serve in an advisory role to the collaborative. Recommendations from the Youth Voice Project resulted in the launch of the Connections Center, a one-stop resource center, as the cornerstone of the collaborative pathway model for reengaging opportunity youth onto pathways to postsecondary education and careers.
- In Maine, Muskie School of Public Service at the University of Southern Maine is coordinating several youth and youth-adult partnership groups that focus on issues affecting systems-involved youth and engage youth and adult partners in identifying and advocating for policy and practice changes. Youth were instrumental in the passage of LD 1683, “An Act to Improve Degree and Career Attainment for Former Foster Children” (2014), which voluntarily expands foster care for youth who are enrolled in postsecondary education until age 26, allowing them to continue to receive supportive services, the first such law in the nation.
- In Austin, the collaborative is launching the 100 Youth Voices Initiative, a community-wide public campaign that will place 100 opportunity youth at public and private sector tables of influence in order to develop the next generation of leaders, build youth-adult partnership networks, and influence systems change.

4 Local & National Innovation

OYIF place-based and national convenings lift up local context – including exemplary models of local reconnection pathways that engage systems that touch opportunity youth – while recognizing the leadership and expertise of national organizations in designing innovative approaches to reconnection.



Site Visits

OYIF spring convenings feature site visits to local community-based organizations and youth services providers that explore exemplary models in workforce development, education and school reengagement, culturally-relevant programming, stabilization services, youth development, and more, with an emphasis on developing partnerships and evidence-based program designs. At the 2015 convening in New Orleans, participants visited programs that implement recuperative and reengagement strategies, workforce readiness and development, and youth engagement, including Café Reconcile, The Net Charter School, Kids Rethink New Orleans Schools, Youth Empowerment Project, New Orleans Works, and Tulane University Earn and Learn Career Pathways Program. At the 2016 convening in Chicago, participants visited programs that provide culturally relevant, gender-specific school-based interventions, alternative education models rooted in social justice, trauma-informed continuum of care services, and workforce development, including Youth Guidance – Becoming a Man, Instituto del Progreso Latino, Manufacturing Careers Internship Program, Student Outreach and Re-Engagement centers, and UCAN.

National Experts

OYIF convenings feature breakout and plenary sessions led by national experts representing best-in-class models in designing and implementing second-chance pathways for opportunity youth and advocating for policy and systems change on behalf of this population. Past OYIF convenings highlighted the work of many partners, including YouthBuild USA, Forum for Youth Investment, Forward Change Consulting, The Corps Network, National League of Cities Reengagement Network, Gateway to College National Network, National Fund for Workforce Solutions, Year Up, LRNG, Remit Training, Turnaround for Children, and more.

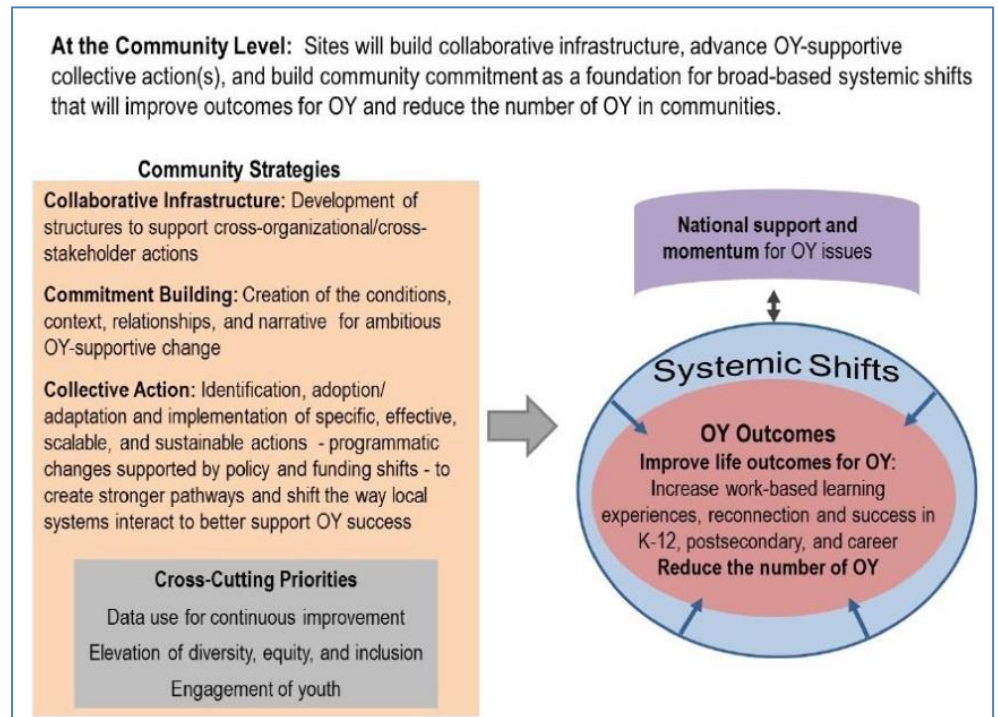
Local Systems Innovation

OYIF convenings feature breakout sessions that lift up local collaborative expertise in designing comprehensive second-chance pathways for opportunity youth, including providing stabilization supports, designing High School equivalency pathways, driving local policy and systems change, creating targeted interventions for vulnerable populations such as system-involved youth, implementing community college reforms, designing workforce interventions, and more.

Evaluation Findings

In 2014, The Aspen Forum partnered with Equal Measure to conduct a rigorous multi-year evaluation of the OYIF that will produce a final evaluation report in March 2018. The goals of the evaluation include: 1) to assess and provide ongoing feedback on the performance of the Aspen Forum and JFF team as a national intermediary to support continuous improvement of the overall initiative; 2) to assess the impact of the OYIF learning community; and 3) to evaluate the collective impact model as an effective strategy for building pathways to education and career-track employment for opportunity youth. To date, Equal Measure worked with OYIF communities and Aspen Forum staff and partners to develop the theory of change, conducted interviews with OYIF site leads, partners and youth leaders, conducted site visits to OYIF communities, and collected data on cross-cutting priorities – use of data; youth engagement;

and diversity, equity and inclusion – across OYIF communities. In 2016, Equal Measure produced an evaluation report on the first year of implementation in OYIF communities. The evaluation explores progress in OYIF communities within the framework of the community-level theory of change which posits that collaborative infrastructure, commitment building, and collective action can create necessary conditions for systems change. The evaluation specifically looks at how collective impact strategies that are implemented by OYIF grantees lead to systemic shifts – changes in systems that touch the lives of opportunity youth – in ways that result in long-term improved outcomes for opportunity youth in these communities.



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The evaluation report is based on qualitative, self-reported data that the 21 original OYIF communities that participate in the evaluation submit to an online data collection system, as well as interviews with communities. Communities were asked to respond to a series of questions that assessed evidence of progress in three areas of change: collaborative infrastructure, commitment building, and collective action. The OYIF theory of change assumes that these three areas together serve as indicators of systemic change happening in communities, an essential condition for improving outcomes for opportunity youth. Additionally, Equal Measure focuses on how three cross-cutting priorities are incorporated across all areas of collaboratives' work.

Data indicate that in the second year of implementation, communities are focusing on collaborative infrastructure development, with most progress observed in the area of collaborative infrastructure (64% of communities), with fewer reporting evidence of commitment building (49%) and collective action (43%). Developing a robust collaborative infrastructure – with a focus on strengthening partnerships – is essential for implementing shared agendas (commitment building) and collective action towards the goal of reducing youth disconnection in communities.

Key Findings: Implementation Progress

1 Collaborative Infrastructure

- Grantees are making progress in convening cross-sector collaboratives of diverse partners
- Grantees report that collaborative partners are committed to implementing shared agendas

2 Narrative Change

- Collaboratives are raising awareness of opportunity youth in their communities
- Collaboratives are shaping new, asset-based narratives about opportunity youth

3 Sustainable Impact through Systems, Policy & Practice Change

- Collaboratives are targeting over 11,000 demographically diverse opportunity youth through pilot programs and pathways
- Collaboratives are addressing systemic barriers to reconnection of opportunity youth in their communities through strengthening existing pathways and designing new pathways that respond to barriers to accessing services and service gaps
- Collaboratives are providing a range of services along the pathway to college and career success, with highest areas of focus including high school credentials, postsecondary/career bridging, and industry training
- Collaboratives report that partner organizations are implementing practice changes
- Collaboratives identified emerging policy priorities to shape local and regional advocacy agendas, while some collaboratives have seen early policy wins

4 Youth Engagement

- Youth have been engaged as collaborative members
- More work remains to be done to fully integrate youth as strategy- and decision-making partners at collaborative tables

5 Data Use

- Collaboratives are working to build data capacity and foundations for data sharing infrastructure

6 Priority Populations

- Collaboratives focus on several priority populations, including boys and men of color, court-involved youth, pregnant and parenting youth, and homeless youth, representing a commitment to broadening access to opportunity for the most vulnerable youth

1

Collaborative Infrastructure

At the core of the collective impact model as implemented across OYIF is the backbone organization. An organization fulfilling the backbone function acts as a neutral convener of collaborative partners, guides the development of the common vision for opportunity youth, and builds momentum for collective action. As such, the backbone organization is responsible for developing collaborative infrastructure. Features of robust infrastructure include strong cross-sector partnerships; partners that support the collaborative by implementing practice changes, providing in-kind resources, and committing funding; and established accountability mechanisms that support shared ownership of the work among partners.

Collaboratives Established Robust Cross-Sector Partnerships

OYIF collaboratives have successfully engaged a variety of critical partners in their work. Across the OYIF, community-based organizations tended to be the most involved, with majority of the collaboratives reporting that education-focused CBOs (76%), workforce development-focused CBOs (71%), and health and human services-focused CBOs (71%) were very involved in their work. Fewer collaboratives report high levels of engagement from systems that touch the lives of opportunity youth, including; higher education (62%), local philanthropy (52%), K-12 education (52%), and local government (52%) – although most collaboratives reported that these systems had at least some level of engagement in their work. Most collaboratives engaged youth as partners at the collaborative table, with 52% indicating that youth were actively involved, and 43% that they were somewhat involved in the work of the collaboratives. Employer and business engagement presented a key challenge to most OYIF collaboratives, with only 10% indicating that these two key sectors were actively involved in the work of the collaborative (however, 52% indicated that these groups were somewhat involved). Majority of the collaboratives indicated that not only did partners contribute actively during collaborative meetings (95%), but also outside of meetings (81%).

Partners Provide Support to the Collaboratives

Collaboratives report that partner organizations are actively supporting the development of collaborative infrastructure, with 76% reporting that partners provide in-kind resources (access to networks, additional partnerships, and funding opportunities; administrative resources; staff allocated to support the backbone; and technical assistance, communications and technology support, and best practices information). Most collaboratives (86%) reported that they secured the required 1:1 local match to the OYIF funds, with 62% indicating that partners have made financial commitments to support the collaborative (although securing multi-year support remains a challenge for most). Finally, 65% of OYIF collaboratives reported that partners made changes to their policies and practices to ensure that organizationally they supported the goals of the collaborative.

Collaboratives Established Accountability Structures

Majority of the collaboratives (81%) reported that they formed work groups that support implementation of collaborative goals and provide a layer of accountability. Additional accountability mechanisms include tools that support shared vision (theories of change, action plans), formal agreements such as MOUs, joint fundraising efforts, and sharing information.

2 Narrative Change

Narrative change – the process of not only increasing community awareness of opportunity youth, but reframing the narrative about opportunity youth to tell an asset-based story that focuses on the structural, rather than individual, causes of disconnection – is a core strategy through which OYIF grantee partners build commitment to their agenda and vision for opportunity youth among local stakeholders.

“ Collaborative efforts and unity make stronger voices. So we are not whispers but a cohesive and loud yell that we care about these issues, that we see these issues, we support the change that needs to happen. Not only do we need to align with other National movements, but align ourselves as well in order to have a stronger and more powerful voice.”

Jermaine Brubaker

Program Manager, Opportunity Youth Initiative, Del Norte and Adjacent Tribal Lands (DNATL)

Jacob Patterson

Youth Leader, DNATL

Collaboratives Engage in Strategies to Increase Awareness of Opportunity Youth

Almost all (20) OYIF grantees reported that their efforts to increase awareness of the number of opportunity youth in their communities resulted in increased knowledge of the scope of the issue locally. Collaboratives strategies included:

- **Media and Communications:** this strategy has been especially successful in Boston, where major local newspapers published articles about the work of the collaborative.
- **Data Scans:** all OYIF communities completed internal data scans on the local opportunity youth population during the planning year of the grant. In Baltimore and San Diego, heat maps were created using U.S. Census data to determine the neighborhoods with particularly high numbers of opportunity youth. In New Orleans, the Cowen Institute at Tulane University, the backbone organization of the EMPLOY collaborative, released [Reconnecting Opportunity Youth: Data Reference Guide](#) that examines who the opportunity youth are in New Orleans and how these data compare to regional and national data.
- **Champions:** Several communities leveraged systems leaders, mayors, and other influential stakeholders to increase awareness of opportunity youth and champion collaborative vision. In Hartford, two successive mayors have served as collaborative chairs. In Boston and Chicago, mayors attended collaborative events and publically addressed the issue of opportunity youth.
- **Community Events:** in Austin, South King County, Hopi Reservation, and other communities, collaboratives held community-wide events to share their work with community stakeholders.

Collaboratives Promote New Narratives about Opportunity Youth

In 86% of OYIF communities, stakeholders began adopting the “opportunity youth” language (rather than “disconnected youth”), seen by OYIF as a critical first step in shifting from deficit-based narratives to an asset-based frame that focuses on the economic and civic potential of opportunity youth. In 81% of OYIF communities, collaboratives observed a reframing of the challenges faced of opportunity youth to a discussion of systemic, rather than individual barriers.

Sustainable Commitment Building

These narrative shifts are critical to the collaboratives’ ability to promote a sense of collective ownership of the issue of youth disconnection that should ultimately drive sustainable local commitments to community-wide reconnection efforts. Most collaboratives (81%) report that they are seeing strengthened relationships with public officials and policy makers, while a smaller number report seeing evidence of changes in administrative (29%) and legislative (24%) policies to improve supports for opportunity youth. Additionally, communities report increases in new (52%) and existing (33%) public funding to support high-quality pathways for this population.

3 Sustainable Impact through Systems, Policy & Practice Change

OYIF collaboratives are beginning to make sustainable impact in their communities through collective action around strengthening existing pathways, addressing gaps and barriers by creating new pathways, driving practice changes at partner organizations, and identifying policy and system alignment priorities. Through pilot pathways that are being developed by each collaborative, OYIF has engaged over 11,000 opportunity youth on pathways to and through secondary completion, postsecondary bridging, industry training and postsecondary credentials, and careers.

“ Our theory of action is that if we can help more low-income youth enter and complete community college, with some life and career coaching, we will dramatically increase the employment rates and income levels of populations who have been marginalized, especially the African-American and Latino communities, and immigrant communities.”

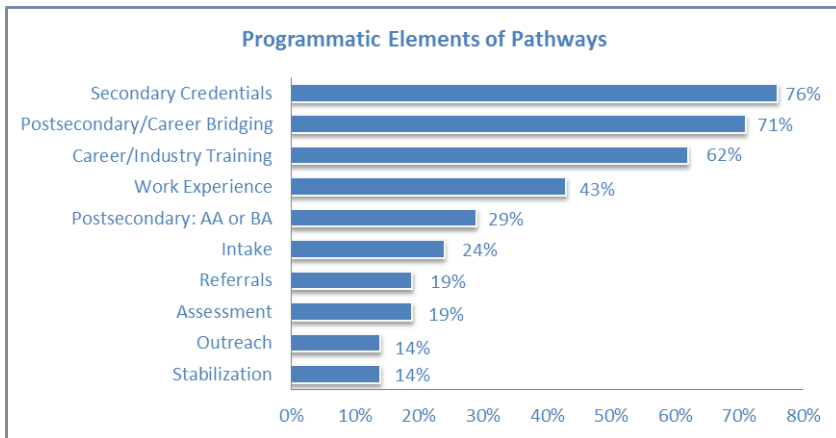
Kathy Hamilton
Youth Transitions Director, Boston Private Industries Council

Kristin McSwain
Executive Director, Boston Opportunity Agenda

Collaboratives Deepen and Strengthen Existing and New Pathways

OYIF grantees are deepening existing pathways or designing new pathways to provide a range of programmatic interventions, with top three areas of focus including secondary credentials (76% of

The majority of OYIF communities are implementing pilot programs that meet service gaps (76%), but over half are also scaling existing programs and services. While 62% reported that they developed new programs, 52% also reported redesigning existing programs. Most of the communities focus on secondary and postsecondary education and workforce pathways.



communities), postsecondary credentials and career bridging (71%), and career and industry training (62%). Almost half of the communities focus on all three of these areas of focus, representing a commitment to creating comprehensive second-chance pathways for opportunity youth. Across the 21 OYIF communities, over 11,000 youth are participating in pathways programming.

In New Orleans, the Earn and Learn Career Pathways Program is designed with a market-driven approach that seeks to meet the needs of regional businesses and opportunity youth. An initiative of the Reconnecting Opportunity Youth division within the Cowen Institute, Earn and Learn employs opportunity youth in a yearlong apprenticeship program that combines hands-on training in jobs at Tulane University with career-focused technical and academic skills training through the Accelerated Career Education program at Delgado Community College. Apprentices are paid livable wages and keep a 40-hour week with 20 hours on the job, and 20 hours in the classroom. Numerous regional employers contributed to the Earn and Learn curriculum to ensure that apprentices are trained in the skills employers are seeking.

Collaboratives Are Seeing Practice Changes in Partner Organizations

Collaboratives report early success in advancing practice changes in partner organizations to ensure better support for opportunity youth, a critical condition to laying the groundwork for more long-term system changes. Majority of communities (71%) report increasing communication among frontline staff across foundational programs that they are bringing together to design new pathways, while 66% report increased ability to align services.

Thus, in Austin, the collaborative is piloting a College Readiness Transitions class at Austin Community College, in partnership with Adult Education Division and additional partners who provide outreach, referral, and case management services. The college provided participants with a dedicated Transitions class and a dedicated College Academic Advisor, while other services and supports introduced by partners include life skills curriculum, stabilization supports (childcare, transportation, meals, and stipends), financial supports including costs of textbooks, testing fees, school supplies, and tuition, and first-year wrap-around supports.

Additionally, a smaller number of collaboratives are beginning to report significant practice changes in partner organizations, including using shared data systems to track youth across programs (24%), peer cross-training of staff from different local systems (24%), designing co-branded initiatives (24%), using shared assessment tools to track the needs of opportunity youth (24%) and shared intake or referral forms (19%), and co-locating services from different systems (14%).

Collaboratives are Identifying Policy and Systems Alignment Priorities

Most collaboratives identified and are refining emerging policy, advocacy and system alignment priorities. Evidence of progress includes stronger relationships with public officials (reported by 81% of communities) and decision- and policymakers and leaders (81%).

While long-term systems and policy change takes time, several communities have seen significant early policy and system/administrative wins:

- Southern Maine Youth Transition Network was instrumental in passing of LD 1683, "[An Act to Improve Degree and Career Attainment for Former Foster Children](#)" (2014), which voluntarily expands foster care for youth who are enrolled in postsecondary education until age 26, allowing them to continue to receive supportive services.
- In Seattle/South King County, WA, The Road Map Project was instrumental in supporting the design of a tax levy, [Best Starts for Kids](#) that was approved by voters in November 2016. The levy will generate \$60 million a year for six years to support programming for youth ages 0-25, with \$5 million/year dedicated to implementing reconnection strategies for older youth.
- Several communities leveraged the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (2015), which shifted \$140 million (75%) of resources from serving in-school youth to serving out-of-school youth. Capital Workforce Partners, which leads the OYIF collaborative in Hartford, CT, included adoption of the [Career Pathway System](#) developed by the collaborative as a requirement in its WIOA procurement RFPs, resulting in more than \$2 million public resources going to support programming for opportunity youth. In San Diego, CA, the PATHWAYS collaborative was able to align over \$1 million in public funds, including WIOA, to support the first San Diego dropout reengagement center.
- Several communities worked with local systems to implement administrative changes to support opportunity youth. For example, in Philadelphia, the Department of Human Services, School District of Philadelphia, and Family Court collaborated to coordinate services for opportunity youth, resulting in expansion of employment services for court-involved youth.

4 Youth Engagement

A core and evolving strategy of OYIF is supporting the capacity of collaboratives to engage youth in their work as experts and partners, in order to ensure that youth voice, expertise, and decision-making are at the center of reform and improvement of youth-serving systems in their communities.



Youth Are Active Participants at Collaborative Tables

Collaboratives have been working on innovative strategies to engage youth voice in their work, with 81% of sites indicating that youth were actively involved in a variety of roles, and 81% stating that they were seeking input from youth about the work of the collaborative. A strong majority of collaboratives (71%) reported providing youth with leadership training opportunities, such as speaking at collaborative meetings or community events, while some implemented formal youth leadership training programs to prepare youth to serve as leaders at the collaborative table and in the community. In conversations with site leads, most identify youth as central to their efforts of driving systems change in their communities.

Youth-Adult Partnerships and Youth as Decision-Makers

Collaboratives reported that youth tended to be involved in activities aimed at building collaborative infrastructure (with 71% of communities reporting that youth informed collaborative decisions), while fewer communities reported that youth had influence on decision-making in programming (57%), funding (24%) and policy (19%). OYIF

collaboratives are continuing to re-assess their youth engagement strategies in order to identify innovative approaches to developing authentic and equitable youth-adult partnerships that support youth voice, engagement, and leadership. At the same time, the Aspen Forum is working to design a strategy for expanding and strengthening existing capacity in OYIF communities (and growing capacity where necessary) to intentionally engage youth in all areas of collaborative efforts, including systems reform, policy advocacy, and program and pathway strategy design.

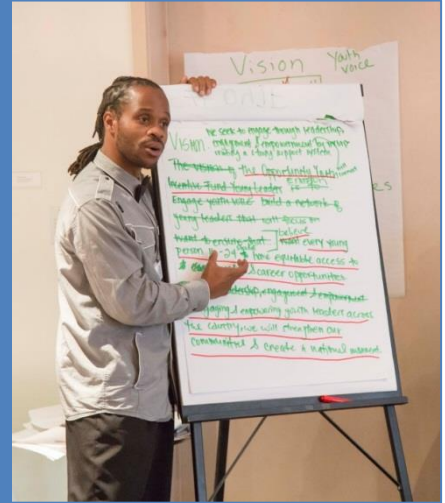
A New Model of Youth Engagement

Equal Measure developed a model of youth engagement within the OYIF that represents the stages of collaborative youth engagement strategies and the ongoing efforts' design strategies that progressively strengthen youth leadership, moving from advisory roles within the collaboratives to increased civic engagement within communities.



5 Data Use

OYIF collaboratives are developing processes to track and share data across partners, particularly across pathway providers. Within the OYIF framework, data is used to track youth outcomes, communicate to community stakeholders about the scope of the issue of youth disconnection, guide quality improvement and accountability in collaborative processes, and promote system and practice change by aligning services and adopting evidence-based practices. While some communities report significant progress being made in data sharing, others are developing strong foundations and partnerships for building out local data capacity and infrastructure.



Data Use & Sharing: Challenges and Successes

Although most OYIF collaboratives have been able to identify critical data sharing and infrastructure needs and begin to develop partnerships for building out local data capacity, data sharing remains a challenge for several collaboratives. While 67% of collaboratives indicated that they used data to inform pathway design and programming, only 52% reported that their partners participated in a shared measurement system to track student outcomes and progress towards collaborative goals. One of the most critical – and anticipated – challenges experienced by collaboratives is establishing data-sharing agreements with partners. Establishing data sharing agreements and MOUs is especially challenging with public systems, most typically due to participant privacy concerns. Additional challenges include the high cost of data infrastructure (software and staff), as well as reaching agreement on shared definitions of metrics of success (e.g. “career-readiness”) and as to which indicators and outcomes are to be tracked across all programs. As a result, only 24% of communities reported that local agencies used a shared data system to track youth outcomes across programs.

Strategic Use of Data

A smaller number of collaboratives advanced further in their use of data, reflective of the advanced stage of their collective impact initiatives. Collaboratives are beginning to use data to advance their narrative

- In Denver, opportunity coaches in the GED+ Pilot have been using data to identify gaps in

strategies about opportunity youth in their communities, for example publishing collaborative plans and progress reports (50%), research (33%) and other publications (24%). Additionally, 43% of collaboratives use data to reflect on progress and to inform strategic planning and 33% report that their partners use data to inform continuous quality improvement. Ultimately, OYIF collaboratives aim to use data to guide continuous improvement in collaborative processes. Examples of promising uses of data include:

- In Santa Clara County, 14 youth-serving CBO partners are using common metrics to track life success of opportunity youth, collecting data on 1,000 participants and identifying 100 youth who will receive expanded services and whose progress will be tracked for two years.
- In New Orleans, the collaborative launched the Opportunity Youth Data Sharing Council, a group of city agencies and CBO providers that are using a shared data platform using Efforts to Outcomes software and joint indicators for youth outcomes. This effort is building capacity among local providers, ensuring partner accountability, and producing data that is being used to improve quality of pathways for New Orleans youth.

services and improve quality of supports by filling gaps with new programs or identifying additional partners.

- In Austin, through the implementation of the Fortifying the College Success Pipeline grant, the collaborative established FERPA waivers with youth enrolled in Austin Community College to track matriculation and retention outcomes of opportunity youth.
- In New Orleans and Philadelphia, backbone agencies released reports on opportunity youth. The Cowen Institute released [No Longer](#)

[Invisible: Opportunity Youth in New Orleans](#); this scan of opportunity youth in Orleans Parish is being used to inform local strategy to target youth disconnection. Project U-Turn in Philadelphia released several reports, including [A Promise Worth Keeping: Advancing the High School Graduation Rate in Philadelphia](#), an update on its 2006 [Unfulfilled Promise](#) report that kick-started dropout reengagement efforts in Philadelphia by identifying the scope of the crisis and the factors that contributed to high dropout rates.

6 Priority Populations

OYIF collaboratives have committed to strive for equity in access to opportunity, with most identifying priority populations – youth that tend to be the most vulnerable and more likely to be underrepresented in programs and disconnected from traditional pathways – for special focus in programs and policy activities.

“
As youth and communities struggling for survival, no one knows more about our experience than us. What we as youth need is the emotional outlet to breathe beyond our pain, and the support, built on an understanding of who we are, that meets us in real and tangible ways to help us create our own pathways to sustainable futures.”

Nehemiah Hall

Youth Leader, theCONNECT Baltimore

Collaboratives Target a Demographically Diverse Population

Of the over 11,000 of youth supported in pilot pathways, majority are young people of color (30% African American, 22% Latino, 18% Native American, 3.4% Asian American, and 3.1% biracial), with 23% identifying as white. Young men make up 53%, with boys and men of color (BMOC) 32% of the total number of youth.

Priority Populations

OYIF communities identified several priority populations of youth who are especially vulnerable due to systems

involvement and other barriers, including BMOC, court-involved youth (14% of the total number of youth, served by 11 communities), foster care (9%, served by 15 communities), pregnant and parenting (6%, served by 12 communities), and homeless (2%, served by 11 communities).

The focus on the most vulnerable youth, who tend to experience the most profound disconnection from education and career services and pathways, and are often considered difficult to reach, engage, and serve by youth service providers, represents a deepening commitment to equity in access to opportunity in OYIF communities.

The Future of OYIF

OYIF communities are demonstrating strong progress in creating local civic infrastructure to promote community collaboration on the issue of youth disconnection; driving narrative change by raising awareness of issues and telling an asset-based story about opportunity youth; and increasing the number of quality pathways for opportunity youth in their communities.

At the same time, communities are implementing innovative approaches to youth-adult partnerships that center youth voice and support youth organizing and decision-making and identifying and implementing emerging policy and practice change agendas while experiencing early administrative and policy wins.

Moving forward, OYIF is in the process of designing a broader future vision that will focus on continuing support for OYIF community grantees; providing technical assistance in partnership with national experts; and expanding the OYIF learning network and partnership with national organizations. OYIF will also focus on developing a robust policy and systems change agenda on local, state and federal level; expanding its metric impact; and increasing emphasis on youth voice, engagement, leadership and supporting youth informed expertise and ownership of efforts on behalf of opportunity youth.

“
We are now in a space where it is unacceptable to tokenize these young adults, to take their real lives and only choose the pieces of it that are convenient to moving an agenda, and that it is absolutely necessary to put the focus on youth voice. Youth voice and youth leadership looks like a youth organized movement, it looks like folks that feel cared for and supported in their future, and it looks like a session dominated by youth giving their recommendations for youth engagement.”

Amanda Shabowich

Boston Youth Voice Project, Boston Opportunity Youth Collaborative
