

Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund

Radical Possibilities: Youth Entrepreneurship Fund

Request for Proposals

The Youth Entrepreneurship Fund (YEF), a new effort under the Aspen Forum for Community Solutions – Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund (OYIF) *Radical Possibilities* portfolio of emerging grants seeks to document what works in creating pipelines into microbusiness ownership and/or careers for opportunity youth by infusing entrepreneurial education into existing pathway models that are being implemented in OYIF communities.

1. **Background & Purpose**

There are currently 4.9 million opportunity youth – defined as young people between the ages of 16 and 24 who are neither enrolled in school nor participating in the labor market – who represent enormous potential for our nation’s economy, as well as a powerful case and need for the advancement of future generations of low income children and families. The successful reconnection of these young people requires community collaborations that effectively remove barriers, connect the many systems that touch their lives, and build and deepen education and employment pathways.

A recent report by the Association for Enterprise Opportunity (AEO), *Linking Young Adults to Microbusiness – Providing New Pathways to Economic Opportunity,[[1]](#footnote-1)* found that 45 percent of youth ages 18-24 who were not currently in school or working were highly interested in starting their own business but lacked the resources and support to do so. At the same time, entrepreneurial training can be highly valuable, not only for launching microbusinesses but also for development of soft skills that increase workforce readiness of young adults. Youth and young adults under 25, particularly youth of color, experience higher unemployment rates than adults. The costs of disconnection from education and the labor market are high, resulting in loss of individual lifetime earnings and costs to taxpayers. There are additional social burdens associated with disconnection, including increased likelihood of negative outcomes (such as incarceration) and reliance on government supports.

Young adults – particularly youth of color, system-involved, low-income youth, and other vulnerable groups – who have experienced prolonged exclusion from the workforce and find themselves on the margins of participation in the economy require different and more intensive supports and training to develop soft and more technical skills required to succeed in the workforce. For many youth, entrepreneurial training can support development of skills attractive to 21st century large and small employers, in addition to providing preparation for launching their own microbusinesses and start-ups.

However, young adults differ from older entrepreneurs because they have not yet developed technical expertise, networks and social capital that one needs to launch a successful small business. Youth need support developing what the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE) calls the “entrepreneurial mindset” – “a set of attitudes, skills, and behaviors that students need to succeed academically, personally and professionally [that] include initiative and self-direction, risk-taking, flexibility and adaptability, creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem solving.”[[2]](#footnote-2) Additionally, all budding entrepreneurs need to develop a variety of technical skills such as business planning, marketing, and financial literacy and access to critical services such as credit building and micro-financing that can be provided by small business incubators and accelerators.

***Rationale:***The growing national focus on youth entrepreneurship as a strategy for reconnecting opportunity youth to workforce and careers – as well as an emerging strategy for economic development in low-income communities – aligns strongly with the emerging interest across the OYIF network to integrate entrepreneurship education into existing pathways and to form and deepen partnerships with training providers, employers, small business associations, and other entities that support youth entrepreneurship. Several OYIF grantees are already exploring entrepreneurship pathways in response to explicit requests by opportunity youth in their communities who see small business ownership as a vital component of pathways to economic success and stability for themselves and their families.

To this end, YEF seeks to support innovative approaches to collaborative solutions to develop and/or deepen pathways into entrepreneurship for opportunity youth. **This effort aligns with the OYIF vision of building out an eco-system of multiple reconnection pathways with diverse on-ramps leading to economic success and stability for opportunity youth. YEF seeks to support the OYIF goal of promoting racial, gender, and economic equity and justice by ensuring that youth who are experiencing barriers to participation in the economy – including youth of color, low-income, immigrant, system-involved, and LGBTQ youth – are provided with the full range of opportunities to develop the entrepreneurial mindset and skillset, as well as a set of tools and supports they need to thrive in today’s economy.**

***Approach:***YEF is soliciting proposals from current OYIF backbone grantees to infuse entrepreneurial education into existing pathways or to strengthen emerging pipelines into entrepreneurship and careers in small businesses. Proposals should be designed with a long-term vision in mind and demonstrate a strategic approach that brings together a set of partners capable of providing a continuum of opportunities along the pathway, including (but not limited to): education that promotes the development of the entrepreneurial mindset; hands-on and work-based learning (internships, apprenticeships, professional mentoring, job shadowing); financial education/empowerment; connection to business competitions, incubators, and accelerators; and access to tools needed to launch and manage microbusiness (microfinancing, accounting, financial management tools, business planning and marketing, crowdfunding, etc.).

Up to three OYIF backbones will receive one-year awards of $50,000 each to pilot and test pathways – in collaboration with local partners – to entrepreneurship for opportunity youth. Although only one year of funding is guaranteed, there is potential, pending additional resources, for a longer-term investment. To this end, successful applicants will be able to demonstrate a long-term vision and a plan for leveraging Aspen Forum resources to secure additional public, private, and in-kind resources (if not already in place) to support this effort. Grantees are expected to build on strong existing pathway momentum and to show substantive impact in this initial year, thus collaboratives should not apply for funding to launch a brand new pathway where current entrepreneurship foundations and programs do not exist. Successful applications will build on, deepen and/or scale existing entrepreneurship efforts, programs and partnerships.

1. **Eligibility and Key Proposal Elements**

***Eligibility Criteria*:**

* This RFP is open to all current OYIF backbone grantees.
* Please note that YEF projects must 1) include a pilot intervention that will provide direct services to youth participants and 2) support integration of entrepreneurship education and pipelines to entrepreneurship and microbusiness careers into your overall collaborative strategy and vision for opportunity youth in your community.
* Projects must include foundational pathway partners, such as education providers, employers, financial literacy providers, etc.
* Projects must be designed to demonstrate intermediate progress towards long-term outcomes within 12 months of start date. These intermediate results may include, but are not limited to:
  + ***Youth-level Outputs:*** number of youth participating in entrepreneurial education; number of youth connected to incubators, accelerators, and business competitions; number of youth receiving professional mentoring; number of youth receiving youth leadership development training; number of youth in internships and other paid and unpaid hands-on learning opportunities; number of youth connected to financial empowerment education and financial tools, etc.
  + ***Collaborative and System-level Outputs:*** number of additional partners supporting this effort; increase in number of seats in quality entrepreneurial training programs; number of providers implementing practice changes to better support OY in these programs; increase in public and private resources leveraged to support these pathways, etc.
* Projects funded through YEF will be documented by the Aspen Forum and its evaluation partner, Equal Measure. Applicants must be willing to collect and share summary data, including outputs such as those outlined above, with Aspen and its evaluation partner. Grantees should use their data to inform project strategy and implementation.
* Applicants must be willing to participate in the OYIF learning network, including two OYIF convenings a year, in addition to activities (to be determined, but including no more than 6 calls and/or webinars) specific to the Youth Entrepreneurship Community of Practice (COP) that will be convened by the Aspen Forum.

***Key Proposal Elements:***

Successful proposals must address all of the following core elements:

1. ***Vision:***A long-term (at least three-year) vision for entrepreneurship pathways for opportunity youth in your community and a plan for leveraging the initial Aspen YEF investment to accelerate progress towards this vision. Proposals must include 1) a three-year plan that articulates how this effort fits into your overall opportunity youth vision and ecology, and 2) activities and outcomes for the first 12 months of implementation.
2. ***Partnerships:*** A plan for leveraging current and new partners necessary to implement the proposed project. Examples of partners include: CBOs that provide entrepreneurship training and curriculum; financial education/tools providers; employers; business accelerators, incubators, or competitions; and systems that serve opportunity youth (e.g., child welfare, justice, education) that can refer participants to the pathway pilot. Aspen Forum anticipates that the vast majority of YEF grant funds received will be re-granted or contracted out to local pathways providers by the backbone.
3. ***Youth Voice:*** A strategy for infusing youth voice and leadership into pathway design and implementation
4. ***Equity:*** A strategy for designing pathways that reduce racial and other inequities in access to entrepreneurship tools and opportunities and prioritizing vulnerable populations (justice-involved youth, immigrants, youth of color, etc.).

Although not required, preference will be given to proposals that:

* Focus on connecting youth to entrepreneurship education and opportunities within specific sectors (for example IT, healthcare or other sectors);
* Engage partners that deliver locally or nationally recognized entrepreneurship curriculum;
* Are able to demonstrate a local philanthropic match or a plan for leveraging in-kind, private, and public dollars.

1. **Selection Criteria**

The Aspen Forum and its partners have identified the following selection criteria, and will assess applicants on the strength of their proposals in the following areas:

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| 1. **Experience and Track Record** | * Does the applicant understand the landscape of existing entrepreneurship programs/providers and have they selected partners whose mission and approach are aligned with the applicant’s vision for opportunity youth? * Does the applicant have in place a strategy for designing pathways that reduce racial and other inequities in access to entrepreneurship tools and opportunities and prioritizing vulnerable populations? * Does the applicant have established partnerships with curriculum providers, employers, and systems that can refer opportunity youth to the program, and other partners critical to the success of this effort? * Does the proposal incorporate a commitment to youth voice, ownership, and engagement in opportunity youth efforts? |
| 1. **Feasibility** | * Is the project accomplishable given the resources and the time available? |
| 1. **Impact** | * Is the project likely to produce the impact it seeks? Does the applicant have a plan to collect data that will demonstrate that impact (including intermediary measures)? |
| 1. **Long-Term Vision and Strategy** | * Does the applicant have a long-term strategic vision for this project beyond the initial one-year investment? How does the plan for year one map to the three-year plan for this effort? |
| 1. **Youth Voice and Leadership** | * Does the applicant clearly articulate the role of youth and a plan to engage youth as leaders in design and implementation? |
| 1. **Learning** | * Is the project likely to produce learning that could be useful locally and nationally? |
| 1. **Preferred Criteria: Sustainability** | * Does the applicant have a plan to leverage in-kind, private, and public dollars to sustain and grow the initial investment? How does this plan support the applicant’s long-term vision and strategy for this effort in their community? |

1. **Required Application Components**
2. **Youth Entrepreneurship Fund Cover Sheet**
3. **Proposal narrative that responds to Section III: Selection Criteria and addresses the prompts and/or questions raised below**. Proposal should be no longer than **8 pages** (Section 1 should not exceed two pages; the length of the other sections is at the discretion of the applicant).

Section 1: Experience and Track Record (not to exceed two pages)

* + - * Please describe the landscape of entrepreneurship education/support services and providers in your community. How are existing programs implemented and what are their goals for participants?
      * Describe your current partnerships with CBOs, systems, employers, and any other partners that will be part of this effort, including their ongoing role in your existing pathways. Please address the history of your efforts and any measurable accomplishments in the youth entrepreneurship space.
      * Describe the history of your youth engagement efforts. What is the role of youth at your collaborative table? How are youth currently engaged in meaningful leadership roles that draw on (and further develop) their expertise, especially in pathway design?
      * Describe how your approach incorporates an equity lens. How does the design of your existing pathways incorporate strategies for reducing racial, gender, and other inequities?

Section 2: Pathway Design and Impact

Describe proposed project in detail, including:

* 1. Key partners and their role in the design and implementation of the entrepreneurship pathway. How do you intend to partner with training programs, employers, associations, educational institutions, incubators/accelerators, financial education/empowerment providers, and others to test infusing entrepreneurship pathways into your current work with opportunity youth? What are the gaps in current partnerships and services and what are your long-term plans to fill these gaps? Please attach letters of commitment from key implementation partners.
* If you will have a contractual arrangement with partner(s) to implement this project, specify and describe which partners will be responsible for what activities.
* If your organization intends to provide any programmatic activities and/or direct services to youth itself, please identify these activities and the staff roles that will be responsible for their delivery.
* Please explicitly address the role of youth partners in pathway design and implementation and your strategy for infusing youth voice into pathway design and implementation.
  1. Please describe key components of the pathway to be delivered by each partner. Priority areas for the Aspen Forum include:
  + Entrepreneurship curriculum with a focus on teaching entrepreneurial mindset and positive youth development/leadership development;
  + Hands-on learning, including internships, job shadowing, professional mentoring by entrepreneurs;
  + Financial education/credit-building;
  + Connection to business development opportunities: incubators, accelerators, competitions, microfinancing/crowdfunding;
  + Strategies that reduce racial, gender and other inequities in access to entrepreneurship training and tools; and
  + Sectoral strategies to create pipelines into specific industries/sectors.
  1. Describe specific goals for Year 1 of implementation. How will you document progress towards meeting these participant and collaborative-level goals?
     + Name the specific participant-level or collaborative-level intermediate outputs you anticipate accomplishing in the first twelve months.
     + Identify aspirational three-year outcomes, including participant-level and systems change outcomes, should multiple years of funding be available.

4. Please list key activities and their milestones and time frames (approximations are fine)

1. Describe the intervention in detail, including:

* How many opportunity youth will be served overall and how many will be connected to each of the pathway components?
* How will you recruit youth?
* What is your plan for recruiting and supporting opportunity youth from communities and groups that have historically experienced exclusion from entrepreneurship programs and opportunities?

Section 3: Plan for Documentation and Evaluation

* Describe how you will measure and evaluate success of this effort, including your plans for 1) documenting learnings and 2) collecting data from partners. Please address your existing capacity to collect, share, and utilize data.
* Optional: If any of the pathway components have been evaluated/documented (for example, entrepreneurship curriculum that has been nationally recognized), please identify these components. You may also enclose any relevant documentation such as evaluation reports as attachments.

Section 4: Long-Term Vision & Plan for Financing and Sustainability

* Describe your long-term (at least three years) vision for entrepreneurship pathways for opportunity youth in your community. In your response, please address:
  + How will you leverage the initial one-year investment from the Aspen Forum to progress towards that vision?
  + What will change in how opportunity youth are connecting to entrepreneurship education and opportunities in your community after one year of implementation?
  + What systemic changes are necessary, in the long-term, to support youth entrepreneurship in your community? What progress do you expect to make in driving these changes after one year of implementation?
* Describe any existing public and private funding streams for this project. What in-kind resources can your partners provide to support the project? Please note that while it is not required to have secured a match or additional in-kind and public resources, preferences will be given to proposals that can demonstrate existing resources or articulate a plan to secure additional resources to support this effort.

1. **Budget and Budget Narrative**

* Please use the Youth Entrepreneurship Fund Cover Sheet to provide a 12-month budget for this proposal. Budget should include re-grant/pass-through of funds to pathway providers and/or other key partners.
* Please provide a budget narrative describing the total budget, the amount of funds requested (up to $50,000.00) and their proposed use, your plan for pass-through of funds to pathway providers and/or other key partners, and any in-kind/match resources available to support this work. Budget narrative should not exceed one page, single spaced.

1. **Attachments**

* Please attach letters of commitment and/or Memoranda of Understanding from all pathway partners.

**Proposals must be submitted to Yelena Nemoy at** [**yelena.nemoy@aspeninstitute.org**](mailto:yelena.nemoy@aspeninstitute.org)**. Deadline for submissions is September 26, 2017 by 5 pm Eastern Time. Please note that after an initial review of submissions, the Aspen Forum will provide each finalist with a memo with specific comments and suggestions on strengthening their proposal. The Aspen Forum may request additional information, due within one week of notification. The Aspen Forum intends to make up to three YEF awards.**

1. Association for Enterprise Opportunity, Linking Young Adults to Microbusiness: Providing New Pathways to Economic Opportunity (2016). <http://www.aeoworks.org/pdf/young-adults-report.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship, <https://www.nfte.com/what/our-programs> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)