

**100,000 Opportunities Initiative™ Demonstration Cities Pathways to Careers Fund**

**Request for One-Page Letters of Intent to Apply**

The Pathways to Careers Fund seeks to create, accelerate, and expand innovative career pathways[[1]](#footnote-1) to improve job placement and retention for opportunity youth. The Fund builds on the work of the 100,000 Opportunities Initiative™ Demonstration Cities and seeks to deepen efforts already underway in Phoenix/Maricopa County. The Pathways to Careers Fund and 100,000 Opportunities Initiative™ Demonstration Cities are projects of the Aspen Forum for Community Solutions (“Aspen Forum”).

1. **Background and Purpose**

In the United States there are currently 4.9 million youth between the ages of 16 and 24 who are out of school and not working. At the same time, there are nearly 6 million job openings. Jobs that require some training beyond high school, but not a four-year degree – sometimes called middle-skill jobs – make up the largest part of the labor market in the United States. However, young people are often unaware that these opportunities are available, nor are they aware of the steps they need to take to prepare for and secure these jobs. Joining the workforce in an entry-level position is often an important first step to gaining the additional education and training necessary to advance to higher skilled opportunities. At the same time, employers often do not have clear strategies to effectively recruit, train, and retain young workers.

In response, Demonstration Cities are committed to creating or expanding the pathways young workers need to build skills, attain education and workforce credentials, and ultimately advance in their careers; employers are critical partners in these efforts. Thus, partnership with at least one employer is a required component of all proposals to the Pathways to Careers Fund; a list of sample pathways follows this RFP in Appendix B. Companies, like those engaged in the 100,000 Opportunities Initiative™ Coalition (see Appendix C), help to launch careers for young people who are just entering the workforce as well as to develop the potential of those youth who have some work experience but are looking to gain new skills that will lead to a successful career. These companies have joined together and are operating with the belief that, with the right skills and training, opportunity youth represent an unrealized pipeline of talent and an economic engine that can be ignited.

Opportunity youth include a wide range of young people, from those nearing completion of their High School Equivalency, to those exiting the juvenile justice system, to those who have been cycling through low-wage, unstable employment for several years. These young people will require differentiated support to successfully participate in the labor market and develop careers.

*Rationale.* To support 100,000 Opportunities Initiative™ Demonstration Cities to effectively align employer demand and career pathways with a supply of trained opportunity youth – we seek to pilot and test employer-connected pathways at the local level. The Pathways Fund will support the innovation needed to work collaboratively across systems, including workforce and education (K12 and post-secondary), to create pathways for opportunity youth.

*Approach.* The Pathways to Careers Fund is soliciting proposals to develop and document pathways that support training, education, and the transition to employment, as well as retention and ongoing career growth and learning for opportunity youth. A list of sample pathways projects is included in the Appendix B.

The Pathways to Careers Fund builds on the work of each Demonstration City’s backbone organization. These organizations play a coordinating role and are dedicated to aligning multiple systems and programs to better serve opportunity youth. Proposals should be aligned with the backbone organizations’ strategy. The backbone organization for Phoenix/Maricopa is [Opportunities for Youth](http://www.opp4youth.org/about-2/) at Arizona State University’s College of Public Service and Community Solutions.

Projects should also be designed with replication and scale in mind, and aimed at serving populations with systemic/historic barriers to opportunity. All projects must demonstrate partnership with employers as a key component of the proposal design. Applicants to the Pathways to Careers Fund must be existing providers such as CBOs, community college programs, workforce system organizations, or adult education programs; eligible applicants may include partnerships among these providers but must include at least one employer partnership. In most cases, the Pathways to Careers Fund award amounts will range from $25,000 to $100,000. One time grants of up to 24 months will be awarded in January 2018. Employer partners can be from the 100,000 Opportunities Initiative™ coalition (see Appendix C) or can be other employers.

*Pathway Development.* The Pathways to Career Fund seeks to invest in proposals that, with employers as partners, and ideally co-designers, clearly articulate and intentionally link education and/or training with successful employment outcomes for opportunity youth. Proposals may support pathways that help opportunity youth become work-ready and successfully transition to employment or support opportunity youth who are already working to persist and advance. (See Appendices A and B for more description of what constitutes a career pathway, and for examples of the kinds of projects this fund seeks to support.)

1. **Eligibility Criteria**

*Geography*

The 100,000 Opportunities Initiative™ Demonstration Cities Pathways to Careers Fund focuses on the five existing Demonstration Cities, and this solicitation is specific to Phoenix/Maricopa County – and hence restricted to Letters of Intent from organizations serving young people in Phoenix/Maricopa County.

*Target Population*

The Demonstration Cities and Pathways to Careers Fund are focused on opportunity youth. Equity is a priority of the Aspen Forum. We have a deep commitment to improving outcomes for the most vulnerable youth. We welcome applications to the Pathways to Careers Fund that focus on creating more equitable outcomes for specific groups, such as, but not limited to, young men of color, youth involved in the child welfare system or transitioning out of foster care, homeless youth, youth involved in the juvenile justice system, or parenting youth.

*Eligibility Criteria*

In addition to focusing on improving education and/or workforce outcomes for young people in Phoenix/Maricopa County:

1. Projects must be completed within 24 months of the start date
2. Projects must include collaboration with at least one employer
3. The applicant must be a non-profit organization
4. Projects funded through the Pathways to Careers Fund will be documented by the Aspen Forum and its partners to be shared via presentations and reports. All applicants must be willing to collect and share programmatic and outcome data with the Aspen Forum, its evaluation partners, its backbone partners, and have information about their project shared. All grantees of the Pathways Fund must be willing to participate in a third-party evaluation conducted by Equal Measure.

*Preferred Eligibility Criteria*

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

1. Support retention, persistence, and opportunities to advance in employment
2. Feature employers as designers or co-designers
3. Scale an existing proven effort (for examples of different paths to scale that could be proposed, see Appendix B)
4. Demonstrate innovation in pathway design
5. Focus on reducing racial/ethnic inequities in employment and/or education outcomes
6. **Selection Criteria**

The Aspen Forum and its partners have identified the following selection criteria for the Pathways to Careers Fund and will assess eligible applicants on the strength of their proposal in these areas:

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| 1. **Experience and Track Record**i. Serving an opportunity youth populationii. Developing partnerships with employersiii. Commitment to youth voice, ownership, and engagement in the opportunity youth employment effort |
| 2. **Feasibility: is the project accomplishable given the resources and the time available?** |
| 3. **Impact: is the project likely to produce the impact it seeks? Is the impact meaningful? Does the applicant have a plan to collect data that will demonstrate that impact?** |
| 4. **Sustainability and replicability:** **Does the project have plans for sustaining the efforts beyond the grant period and/or how could the project be replicated?**   |
| 5. **Learning: is the project likely to produce learning useful locally and nationally?** |

1. **Application Process**
2. Applicants to the Pathways to Careers Fund must electronically submit a Letter of Intentto Emma Uman at **Emma.Uman@aspeninstitute.org** by 5:00 p.m. Pacific Time on Friday, September 15, 2017. We understand that plans will likely be emergent at the time of the Letter of Intent submission and that there will likely be some iteration and revision between a Letter of Intent and the full proposal.

Letters of Intent should, in **no more than one-page**:

* Succinctly describe the CBO applicant’s experience working with opportunity youth – how long have you worked with this population, how many youth per year, on what issues, towards what goals, etc.
* Briefly describe the proposed project -- what services will be provided/what activities will happen with youth and employers, the goals for youth at the end of the project, and an approximate number of youth to be served over what time period
* Identify known or potential employer partners for this project and their role (i.e. hiring, co-designing training curricula, offering internship or job-shadow experiences, etc.), and how the CBO and employer(s) would work together
1. Applicants will receive feedback from the Aspen Forum on Letters of Intent by Friday, September 22, 2017.
2. Full proposals will be due by October 20, 2017.

**Appendix A**

**“Career Pathway” Definition**

For the purposes of this Fund, the Aspen Forum uses the definition of “career pathway” as outlined in the [Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act](https://www.congress.gov/113/bills/hr803/BILLS-113hr803enr.pdf), Sec. 3 (Def.7). Note: Proposals do NOT need to have every element outlined below to be considered for the Pathways to Careers Fund.

The term “career pathway” means a combination of rigorous and high-quality education, training, and other services that:

* Aligns with the skill needs of industries in the economy of the state or regional economy involved;
* Prepares an individual to be successful in any of a full range of secondary or postsecondary education options, including registered apprenticeships;
* Includes counseling to support an individual in achieving the individual’s education and career goals;
* Includes, as appropriate, education offered concurrently with and in the same context as workforce preparation activities and training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster;
* Organizes education, training, and other services to meet the particular needs of an individual in a manner that accelerates the educational and career advancement of the individual to the extent practicable;
* Enables an individual to attain a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent and at least one recognized postsecondary credential; and
* Helps an individual enter or advance within a specific occupation or occupational cluster.

**Appendix B**

**Sample Pathways to Careers Fund Projects**

This list is intended to provide context for the types of projects that could be selected for funding from the Pathways to Careers Fund – Phoenix/Maricopa County. These examples are meant to be illustrative, not to provide a formula that projects must follow. The Pathways Fund seeks to support innovation and creativity in pathway design. Alignment with an example listed below does not guarantee funding.

* + A workforce training organization partners with two employers that agree to interview all youth who successfully complete the training, and a mentoring organization, that will provide on-going career navigation and support to all the youth for a year following the completion of the training, with the expectation that retention of OY will increase by 25%.
	+ An existing program that scales to prepare additional opportunity youth for employment in growth sectors.
	+ An existing training program that currently has employer partnership innovates with elements of the program design to improve concurrent education outcomes for vulnerable sub-populations, such as young men of color. The existing program has the data capacity to examine outcome sub-population outcome data.
	+ A program that has existing employer partners that wants to scale (either through new partners or to additional locations of current partners) but needs to capture the essential program elements, and evaluate effectiveness; and will create a guide to support scaling and expansion.

**Appendix C**

**List of 100,000 Opportunities Initiative Coalition Members**

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| Accenture | Nordstrom |
| Alaska Airlines | Panda Express |
| Chipotle | Papa Johns |
| Cintas | PCC Natural Markets |
| CVS Health | Pizza Hut |
| Delaware North | Porch |
| Domino's | Potbelly |
| EY | Prudential |
| FedEx | Red Robin |
| Five Guys | Republic Services  |
| Food Services of America | Savers |
| Gene Juarez | Sprinkles |
| Greyston | Starbucks |
| Hilton WorldWide | Sweetgreen |
| HMS Host | Swiss Post |
| Hyatt | Taco Bell |
| JCPenney | Target |
| JP Morgan Chase | Teavana |
| Leisure Care | T-Mobile |
| Lyft | Toms  |
| Macy's  | Ulta |
| Mars | Villa |
| Microsoft | Walgreens |
| MOD Pizza | Walmart |

**Projects do NOT have to only work with employers on this list.**

1. The Aspen Forum uses the definition of “career pathway” as outlined in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, Sec. 3 (Def.7); for reference, the full definition is included in Appendix A. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)