



# Equity Counts

Using Data to Increase Equity and Improve Metric Outcomes  
for Opportunity Youth

by Suzanne Towns

September, 2019



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The Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions promotes collaborative, community-based efforts that build the power and influence of those with the least access to opportunity, and supports communities to come together to expand mobility, eliminate systemic barriers, and create their own solutions to their most pressing challenges. Launched in 2012 at the Aspen Institute, the Forum for Community Solutions envisions a future where communities create their own vibrant and lasting solutions to the social and economic problems that they face. The Forum for Community Solutions believes that if communities have more power to lead change, we will create a more just and equitable society.

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Equal Measure, Equity Counts' technical partner, is a Philadelphia-based nonprofit organization that works with foundations, nonprofit organizations, and public entities to advance social change. For more than 30 years, we have partnered with organizations like these working on complex, often messy, social issues to help create more powerful, equitable, and enduring systems and positive outcomes. To have a more direct impact with clients, Equal Measure offers five service lines – program design, evaluation, capacity building, technical assistance, and communications. Through these services, we help our clients clarify program goals, support implementation, engage in learning and plan improvement, conduct mixed-method developmental evaluations, frame narratives to have the strongest impact, and share what we have learned together with the field. Whether it's improving access to college education and careers, expanding access to healthy foods, or building opportunities for financial empowerment, we help our clients make communities stronger, healthier, more equitable, and more inclusive. For more information, visit:

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## About the Author

**Suzanne Towns** is a Senior Consultant at the Forum for Community Solutions, leading the Equity Counts initiative. Suzanne's expertise is in public- private partnerships local, state and national program development and philanthropy. Her work over the last two decades has focused on community-based economic development, workforce development, poverty alleviation and advancing gender equity.

## Acknowledgements

OYF would like to thank all 17 of our participating network communities for their leadership and participation during this first year of Equity Counts, with deep appreciation for the contributions of our six data collection pilot communities: Austin, Boston, Chicago, Oakland, Philadelphia and Santa Clara. Additional thanks go to colleagues and reviewers Ken Thompson and Monique Miles from OYF and Justin Piff, Jennifer Thompson and Robert Roach from Equal Measure for their thoughtful contributions to and editing of this publication.

We are grateful to our generous funder, Ballmer Group, for its support of Equity Counts.

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# Executive Summary

Equity Counts (EC) was launched in the fall of 2018 with support from Ballmer Group and in partnership with 17 of the Aspen Institute's Forum for Community Solutions (FCS) Opportunity Youth Forum (OYF) **network communities**. The ultimate goal of Equity Counts is to build capacity for data collection, analysis and use at both the network and community level to drive and inform programmatic and policy decisions, increase quality of services, and ultimately accelerate improved and more equitable outcomes for opportunity youth.

Opportunity youth (OY) are, by definition, amongst the hardest-to-reach youth in our communities. Unlike youth who are connected to school systems, postsecondary institutions, or employers, opportunity youth - defined by OYF as "young people between the ages 16 to 24 who are neither enrolled in school nor participating in the labor force" – do not regularly interact with these systems. There is no system or single point of contact through which opportunity youth are engaged, and through which progress and outcomes are measured. Rather, opportunity youth, if connected at all, float among service providers, in and out of school, and between temporary jobs.

Efforts to track opportunity youth and provide services are fraught with logistical and technical challenges and are almost impossible to do consistently. To achieve these goals, data and measurement approaches need to focus on the success of individual OY in the context of the services and programs they are engaged in. To improve outcomes and deepen impact, however, we must be able to track youth reconnection consistently across communities and over time.

OYF has achieved significant impact over the last year in moving our network to a more rigorous and consistent approach to understanding opportunity

youth. In partnership with Equal Measure (who has evaluated the **place-based work of FCS OYF** over the past three years), and six OYF communities which served as data collection pilot sites, we have developed a new set of OYF common measures and approach for calculating the number and types of OY in communities within our network.

## Equity Counts Data Collection Pilot (DCP) Communities

- **Austin Opportunity Youth Collaborative**, Austin, TX
- **Boston Opportunity Youth Collaborative**, Boston, MA
- **Thrive Chicago**, Chicago, IL
- **Oakland-Alameda County Opportunity Youth Initiative**, Alameda County, CA
- **Project U-Turn**, Philadelphia, PA
- **Santa Clara County Opportunity Youth Partnership**, Santa Clara County, CA

The new methodology uses customized annual American Community Survey (ACS) data to focus more closely on specific geographic areas within our network of communities and to disaggregate data by key demographics, such as race, gender and other key variables. As a result, we are now able to calculate the following OYF common measures for our network communities:

## || Overall community disconnection rate

The rate of young people disconnected from work and school (i.e., opportunity youth).

## || High school disconnection rate

The rate of young people without a high school diploma/GED and not working who are disconnected from high school.

## || Postsecondary disconnection rate

The rate of young people with a high school diploma/GED, without a postsecondary credential who are disconnected from postsecondary education and not working.

## || Workforce disconnection rate

The rate of young people with a postsecondary credential, but not enrolled in postsecondary, who are disconnected from the workforce.

Each OYF common measure calculates the percentage of youth who are uniquely disconnected from a particular segment of the education-to-workforce continuum. This approach to identifying, segmenting and disaggregating the OY population based on annual ACS data is unique and we are excited to bring this new methodology and suite of resources to our network and to the field. We will use this methodology going forward to better understand the OY population trends and demographics across our network, and to inform resource development, learning and program improvement, national OY policy and advocacy efforts and increase community-wide OY outcomes.

During this first year, we also sought to learn more about how to “operationalize equity” in a data-related context. Explicit in our efforts are a commitment to

collect and analyze data with a focus on conducting a deeper level of disaggregation within each OYF common measure to help communities identify and understand where there are disparities along racial, ethnic and gender lines, which subsets or sub-populations of the communities are disproportionately affected by negative outcomes, and how resources can be more efficiently targeted to address outcome gaps. This information can be used to help understand and inform place-based program improvement and systems changes that will drive improved outcomes for youth.

As the focus of Equity Counts is about using data to drive deeper impact and improve outcomes, Equity Counts partners and participating communities developed a new OYF Data Use Framework to help clarify specific types of data use and identify and track related outcomes:

- **Communicating the vision:** Data are used to articulate and build commitment towards a shared vision for connecting the community’s youth to education and employment pathways and advancing equitable outcomes.
- **Case-making:** Data are used to communicate with funders, policymakers, the media, the general public and other stakeholders to articulate the need for support in advancing the OY agenda.
- **Continuous improvement:** Data are used to assess, improve, and target the collaborative’s and partners’ OY supports or services.
- **Understanding youth and their needs:** Data are used to understand “who” opportunity youth are to ensure effective engagement and support.



- **Partner accountability:** Data help the collaborative's partners "own" their contributions to the OY agenda.
- **Assessing partnership health:** Data are used to make sure the collaborative's infrastructure – including communication channels, decision-making processes, and work groups – are functioning properly, equitable, and inclusive.

Improved data usage is also dependent on the capacity and resources within network partner collaboratives. To better understand OYF communities' capacity for data collection, analysis and use and what resources would be needed for improvement, we conducted a data capacity analysis with all 17 participating Equity Counts sites. The data capacity assessment focused on three areas: data infrastructure, data-specific functions within the backbone or collaborative, and the current or potential opportunities for young people to help define what success and meaningful impact looks like.

Upon review of the data capacity assessment results, approximately 75% had a dedicated data person, and 50% have a data workgroup, shared data base and produce publicly available data. Sites felt strong in their ability to use community level data to understand the needs of OY in their communities, communicate the vision or goal of their collaborative and make the case for funding or policy changes. Areas of growth included better collection of partner level or programmatic data, and progress assessment and program improvement at the individual partner and collaborative level. Sites also identified a desire for deeper capacity to convene partners and facilitate data-related working groups and to explore additional opportunities for youth participation and leadership. Based on these learnings, as well as our past

approaches to data collection and use, and insights from our third-party evaluator, we identified key data related functions, select competencies and common needs and analyzed them by collaborative level of experience.

Additionally, this past spring each participating site created preliminary four-year plans to indicate how they foresee using OY data to drive deeper and more equitable improvements in their communities. This included identifying specific uses and outcomes, preliminary populations or OYF common measure areas of focus, how they would address equity and youth participation, and what resources would be needed to accomplish their goals. Upon review and analysis of the plans, all sites identified a need to develop or strengthen their data infrastructure to collect, analyze and use OY-specific partner, community and longitudinal data to better understand the needs of OY, as well as to increase coordination of efforts across partners and improve provision of services. In addition to serving OY who are already disconnected, most sites are seeking to learn more about when youth become "off-track" and likely to disconnect, and some of the key interventions and factors that help to prevent this from occurring. As they considered how to address opportunity gaps and inequities, about one third of communities were focused on place-based and population specific strategies, specifically for black and latinx populations, and foster care and criminal justice involvement.

To support and learn from communities during this past year we provided one on one technical assistance to each of the 17 participating sites. We also established a community of practice to share learnings and resources across both Equity Counts sites and all of OYF. Initial focus areas were related to year one deliverables: OYF common measures and data use framework, data capacity assessment tool development



and completion, clarifying potential youth roles and multi-year data plan development. We also met with several national level partners to share our work and determine how we might align efforts in the future.

The findings of the data capacity assessment, multi-year data plan development and learning activities informed our development of a flexible, equity-centered approach to building data capacity to improve outcomes which we will utilize going forward to support communities at the early, intermediate and advanced level of data use.

We are extremely proud of the work OYF communities and our partners have accomplished over the last year. Our partner communities have embraced the need for greater shared accountability and more rigorous, data-driven approaches to get to deeper impact and improved outcomes. As a result of our activities, we are well positioned to move quickly into scaled implementation and execution as we move forward. As a network, our communities are ready to enter the next phase of OYF work for and with the youth and young adults in our country who have too often been shut out of opportunity.

# Introduction

With a growing network of over 26 communities, national partners and systems leaders, the Opportunity Youth Forum (OYF), an initiative of the Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions (FCS), was launched in 2012 (as the “Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund”) to leverage momentum coming out of the **White House Council for Community Solutions**. OYF is comprised of a network of urban, rural, and tribal communities seeking to scale multiple reconnection pathways that achieve better outcomes in education and careers for opportunity youth, typically defined as young people between the ages of 16 and 24 who are disconnected from school and work. Approximately one-quarter of the estimated 4.6 million, or about 1.2 million, of all opportunity youth in the U.S. live in the areas in and around Opportunity Youth Forum communities.

Over the last six years, OYF has achieved tremendous success in supporting the burgeoning opportunity youth (OY) movement. It has put the most economically disadvantaged, socially isolated and vulnerable young people on the national radar, while also investing in a national network at scale and the local infrastructure to support economic mobility for OY across a wide range of communities. Our work with communities has successfully focused on promoting systems-level change in these communities, a critical first step to get to scale on significant change in youth and young adult outcomes.

An **independent** evaluation of our network partners by Equal Measure has demonstrated OYF communities succeeding in improving cross-system and sector collaboration, increasing public revenue and funding streams, changing the narrative around the barriers youth face, and other important dimensions that are supportive of improved youth outcomes. Most notably, several communities, working

in partnership with cohorts of OY, have seen improved youth outcomes in pilot projects. As we aim to build on this success, our network seeks to scale youth-level impacts through enhanced use of data for change at the systems and program levels.

Foundational to OYF’s work is a network-wide emphasis of and commitment to three cross-cutting priorities:

- collection and use of data to drive improvement;
- increase equity by closing gaps and reducing disparities caused by race, place and gender; and
- youth engagement

Over the years, we have worked with communities across our network to increase their capacity to better collect and use data, encourage and support youth leadership, and to engage a diverse group of partners in developing local solutions. These priorities inform the system improvement measures and surveys we conduct annually. As a result of these efforts we now have many communities within our network ready to leverage data and improve practices for accelerated change.

As FCS reviewed OYF’s network-wide impact from our first five years, we saw a great opportunity to catalyze “OYF 2.0,” allowing us to go deeper in our efforts to improve the lives of young people by building upon existing place-based data infrastructure to achieve even greater equity driven outcomes and impact for opportunity youth. As a result, OYF launched Equity Counts in the fall of 2018. This document will provide an overview of our activities, accomplishments and learnings from year one and highlight the opportunities for continued growth as we move forward in the future.

# *Launching Equity Counts*



With support from Ballmer Group and in partnership with 17 of our OYF network **communities**, we launched Equity Counts (EC) in the fall of 2018. The ultimate goal of Equity Counts is to build capacity for data collection, analysis and use at both the network and community level to drive and inform programmatic and policy decisions, to increase quality of services, and ultimately accelerate improved and more equitable outcomes for opportunity youth. Opportunity youth are, by definition, amongst the hardest-to-reach youth in our communities. Unlike youth who are connected to school systems, postsecondary institutions, or employers, opportunity youth - defined by OYF as “young people between the ages 16 to 24 who are neither enrolled in school nor participating in the labor force” – do not regularly interact with these systems. There is no system or single point of contact through which opportunity youth are engaged, and through which progress and outcomes are measured. Rather, opportunity youth, if connected at all, float among service providers, in and out of school, and between temporary jobs.

Efforts to track opportunity youth and provide services are fraught with logistical and technical challenges and are almost impossible to do consistently. To achieve these goals, data and measurement approaches need to focus on the success of individual OY in the context of the services and programs they are engaged in. To improve outcomes and deepen impact, however, we must be able to track youth reconnection consistently across communities and over time. Only then will the movement to reconnect opportunity youth get the attention of funders, policymakers, and other stakeholders it deserves. Equity Counts is intended to be a multi-year effort; we estimate that this project could take five years to complete across the OYF network.

In our first year, we focused on several key priorities. We sought to create a rigorous and consistent set of OYF common measures and a methodology which can be used over time to determine whether community-wide changes in OY numbers are happening. By developing community-wide indicators of OY success and progress at the population level (disaggregated, as possible, by key demographic factors such as race, gender, age and others) we would create important OYF-specific baseline information to provide a snapshot to indicate how OY efforts are progressing in their community. This baseline would serve as a basis for comparison as we seek to analyze the needs and outcomes for OY in future years.

We also sought to better understand the current data-related capacity, resources, infrastructure, opportunities for youth participation and leadership, and other needs across our network to inform future funding and resource development in support of deepening our impact. Additionally, we wanted to create a learning community to support and facilitate knowledge exchange and capacity building across the network.

Through an open application process, 17 OYF communities applied to participate in Equity Counts. Via a competitive application process, six communities were selected to serve as “data collection pilot” (DCP) sites. The DCPs would work closely with FCS staff and consultants, and Equal Measure, our technical and evaluation partner, to develop our new OYF common measures and data collection methodology and serve as test communities for our preliminary data analysis using the new resources.

## EQUITY COUNTS CORE PRIORITIES AND OUTCOMES:

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1. Develop OYF network-wide agreed upon definitions and approaches to measurement and outcomes
2. Create and support a culture of and deeper capacity for data use in OY collaboratives and amongst partners
3. Identify and create meaningful roles and opportunities for community and youth participation and leadership in determining needs and developing solutions
4. Understand and improve where and how programs, organizations, and systems are accelerating success and producing equitable outcomes
5. Recognize and lift-up community driven best practices and proven successes, strengthening the OFY network and broader field

## Participating OYF Communities

Community	Backbone	DCP Site
Atlanta, GA	United Way of Greater Atlanta, Atlanta Opportunity Youth Collaborative	
Austin, TX	Workforce Solutions Capital Area, Austin Opportunity Youth Collaborative	✓
Boston, MA	Boston Private Industry Council & Boston Opportunity Agenda, Boston Opportunity Youth Collaborative	✓
Chicago, IL	Thrive Chicago, Thrive Chicago	✓
Denver, CO	Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce, Denver Opportunity Youth Investment Initiative	
Hartford, CT	Capital Workforce Partners, Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative	
Hopi Reservation, AZ	The Hopi Foundation, Hopi Opportunity Youth Initiative	
Los Angeles, CA	Alliance for Children's Rights, Los Angeles Opportunity Youth Collaborative	
Maine, Southern Rural	Muskie School of Public Service, University of Southern Maine, Southern Maine Youth Transition Network	
New Orleans, LA	Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives, Tulane University, Employment and Mobility Pathways Linked for Opportunity Youth (EMPLOY)	
Oakland, CA	Urban Strategies Council, Oakland-Alameda County Opportunity Youth Initiative	✓
Philadelphia, PA	Philadelphia Youth Network, Project U-Turn	✓
Phoenix, AZ	Arizona State University, College of Public Service and Community Solutions, Opportunities for Youth	
San Diego, CA	San Diego Youth Development Office, San Diego Youth Opportunity Pathways Initiative (PATHWAYS)	
San Jose/Santa Clara County, CA	Kids in Common, Planned Parenthood Mar Monte, Santa Clara County Opportunity Youth Partnership	✓
South King County, WA	Community Center for Education Results, The Road Map Project	
Tucson, AZ	United Way of Tucson and Southern Arizona, Youth on the Rise	



# *Year One Impact*



The purpose of Equity Counts is better data use for improvement of outcomes and reduction of disparities amongst youth – to move beyond collecting data for ‘compliance’ purposes. In order to increase and improve data use to improve programs and deepen partner accountability, it is important to both build technical capacity and increase trust and partnership strength at the collaborative level. To help frame our approach on the technical side, the following steps were identified:

1. Define and set measures to be collected
2. Collect information
3. Analyze information
4. Use information

## **Developing OYF Common Measures and Definitions**

Over the past year, we achieved significant impact in moving our network to a more rigorous and consistent approach to understanding opportunity youth-related data. In partnership with Equal Measure (who has evaluated the place-based work of FCS OYF and other networks, including Strive Together, Lumina Foundation Community Partnership for Attainment Initiative and the Gates Foundation’s Communities Learning in Partnership) and six OYF communities which served as data collection pilot sites, OYF developed a new standard methodology and set of common measures to calculate the number of OY in our communities.

At the most basic level, our communities want to monitor the rate of their young people, ages 16-24, who are disconnected from work and school (i.e., Opportunity Youth). Monitoring this rate over time can help determine whether efforts – both preventative and responsive – to connect young people with education or career pathways are working. However, this rate does not communicate where the greatest

need for reconnection lies – high school, postsecondary education, or the workforce – or where communities are making progress in reconnecting youth. And, a reduction in the community disconnection rate does not reveal what outcomes are being achieved, simply that fewer youth are disconnected from one year to the next.

Our new methodology uses annual American Community Survey (ACS) data to expand measurement approaches to counting OY in customized geographic areas for each collaborative and creates new OYF network-wide common measures which can be run every year and compared year-to-year. It also includes a new approach to dividing up the OY population, based on their progress attaining a HS degree, a postsecondary credential, and getting a job. In addition to a community-wide youth disconnection rate that many communities already use, our three new ways of tracking youth disconnection provide an opportunity to understand connection to “preferred connection points.” Depending on an opportunity youth’s circumstances, their preferred outcome or connection point could be high school, or postsecondary education, or employment.

These rates are mutually exclusive and exhaustive: they capture the disconnection “type” of all OY in a community and each is counted in only one of the three disconnection rates. Over time, communities can use these rates to determine whether they are closing the gap of youth disconnection from each point along the education-to-career continuum.

During this first year, we also sought to learn more about how to “operationalize equity” in a data related context. Explicit in Equity Counts is a commitment to collect and analyze data with a focus on conducting a deeper level of disaggregation to help communities identify and understand where there

are disparities along racial, ethnic and gender lines, which subsets or sub-populations of the communities are disproportionately affected by negative outcomes, and how resources can be more efficiently targeted to address opportunity gaps. In addition to tracking disconnection from education and employment pathways, our new approach also disaggregates OY data by race, gender and other important demographic factors - allowing for a deeper analysis of where there are existing disparities and inequities.

This new OYF measurement focuses at the community level. It uses the same underlying Census data as is already commonly used by some communities to measure numbers of opportunity youth and should not produce contradictory information to existing measurement approaches. It's not a method to evaluate program-level data, so it does not seek to replace existing program-level data collection efforts in use by organizations and communities.

This new approach will be a valuable new tool for use at the network and national level and will inform and drive work across all of OYF. While this first year focused on community-wide population level data, work in subsequent years will expand to include service-level data and collection of individually identifiable data on youth for the purpose of improving specific programs. We will use this methodology going forward to better understand the OYF-wide OY population trends and demographics across our network, and to inform network resource development, learning and program activities, and national OY policy change and advocacy efforts.

In addition to the six DCP sites who participated in the preliminary data analysis, Equal Measure will be conducting an analysis for all OYF network communities, which will be made available in

the fall of 2019. This will create a standard and common baseline for our network, and allow for deeper understanding of trends, gaps and needs by community, across regions, and by geographic variables such as urban or rural or tribal. We are excited to bring this resource to the network and field and will work with communities and research and evaluation partners to see how this new approach can best add value.

## New OYF Common Measures

The OYF common measures are defined as follows:

### **Community Disconnection Rate:**

The rate of young people aged 16 to 24 who are disconnected from work and school (i.e., opportunity youth).

### **High School Disconnection Rate:**

The rate of young people without a high school diploma/GED and not working who are disconnected from high school.

### **Postsecondary Disconnection Rate:**

The rate of young people with a high school diploma/GED, without a postsecondary credential who are disconnected from postsecondary education and not working.

### **Workforce Disconnection Rate:**

The rate of young people with a postsecondary credential, but not enrolled in postsecondary, who are disconnected from the workforce.

## Data Collection Pilot Findings

Upon completion of the work to develop the new methodology and definitions, we conducted a preliminary data analysis using the new approach with our six DCP sites.

### April 2019 Preliminary DCP Data Analysis (including estimated population count)

	Austin	Boston	Chicago	Oakland	Philadelphia	Santa Clara County	Total (DCP)
Total 16-24 year old population	264,972	113,503	326,190	177,558	193,713	211,269	1,287,285
Number of opportunity youth	21,657	4,922	47,478	14,262	33,808	13,729	135,856
<b>Community-level Opportunity Youth Outcomes</b>							
Community Disconnection Rate	8.2% (n=21,657)	4.3% (n=4,922)	14.6% (n=47,478)	8.0% (n=14,262)	17.5% (n=33,808)	6.5% (n=13,729)	10.6% (n=135,856)
HS Disconnection Rate	10.0% (n=5,584)	7.6% (n=1,005)	14.1% (n=10,912)	10.0% (n=3,846)	13.3% (n=5,530)	5.3% (n=2,607)	10.7% (n=29,484)
Postsecondary Disconnection Rate	14.7% (n=14,613)	5.1% (n=3,105)	27.1% (n=32,630)	11.1% (n=8,168)	32.3% (n=26,327)	10.2% (n=8,172)	18.0% (n=93,015)
Workforce Disconnection Rate	7.0% (n=1,460)	5.6% (n=812)	10.6% (n=3,936)	14.6% (n=2,248)	14.3% (n=1,951)	10.5% (n=2,950)	10.3% (n=13,357)
<b>Secondary Measures</b>							
HS/GED Attainment Rate	94.0% (n=182,979)	96.9% (n=95,584)	93.6% (n=228,200)	94.1% (n=126,357)	94.8% (n=142,503)	95.3% (n=149,345)	94.5% (n=924,968)
Postsecondary Attainment Rate	24.1% (n=20,754)	55.7% (n=14,459)	32.2% (n=37,047)	31.6% (n=15,403)	18.5% (n=13,615)	48.3% (n=28,086)	31.8% (n=129,364)

*\*Values reflect the weighted estimates from the ACS 1-year file from 2017.*



## Key Findings from the Preliminary DCP Data Analysis

**Community disconnection rates varied, with Philadelphia the highest at 17.5% and Boston the lowest at 4.3%.**

- Philadelphia: 17.5%
- Chicago: 14.6%
- Austin: 8.2%
- Oakland/Alameda County: 8.0%
- Santa Clara County: 6.5%
- Boston: 4.3%

**Across all six DCP communities combined, the characteristics of OY (16-24 years old, not working or in school) were as follows:**

- 53% male
- 48.5% nonwhite, non-Hispanic
- 35.4% Hispanic (any race)
- 16.1% white, non-Hispanic
- 86.2% 19-24 years old
- 71.8% high school diploma or less

However, there was variation across communities in the characteristics of their OY, especially the racial/ethnic breakdown. For example, in some communities, Hispanics were the largest racial/ethnic subgroup: in Santa Clara County, 63.2% of OY are Hispanic and in Austin 53.3% of OY are Hispanic.

**In five of the six communities, young men were more likely than young women to be OY.**

- For example, 16.4% of young men in Chicago are OY compared to 12.8% of young women.

**In five of the six communities, nonwhites (non-Hispanic) and Hispanics were more likely than whites to be OY.**

- For example, in Philadelphia, 21.2% of nonwhites (non-Hispanic) and 19.9% of Hispanics are OY compared to 9.6% of whites.

**In each DCP community, the highest segmented disconnection rate was the postsecondary disconnection rate.**

This rate (percent disconnected from postsecondary education among those with a HS credential but no PS credential, and not working) ranged from 5.1% in Boston to 32.3% in Philadelphia. Along the continuum of disconnection (high school – postsecondary - workforce), this was the most common point of disconnection.

**Disaggregating postsecondary disconnection rates by race/ethnicity shows large disparities.**

In all six DCP communities combined, 22.5% of Hispanics and 24.6% of nonwhites (non-Hispanic) are disconnected from postsecondary education compared to 7.5% of whites.

- More detailed disaggregation also points to large inequities. In Chicago, 9.2% of Asians and 7.9% of whites are disconnected from postsecondary education compared to 27.4% of Hispanics, 37% of bi/multi-racial, and 49.2% of black/African American young people. **Black youth are five times more likely to be disconnected from postsecondary education compared to white and Asian youth in Chicago.**
- Similarly, in Philadelphia, 11.3% of Asians and 12.2% of whites are disconnected from postsecondary education compared to 41.9%

of Hispanics and 53.2% of blacks/African Americans. **Black youth are over four times more likely to be disconnected from postsecondary education compared to white and Asian youth in Philadelphia.**

**Workforce disconnection rates – youth with a PS credential who are not in school and who aren't working – ranged from 5.6% in Boston to 14.6% in Oakland/Alameda County:**

- Oakland/Alameda County: 14.6%
- Philadelphia: 14.3%
- Chicago: 10.6%
- Santa Clara County: 10.5%
- Austin: 7.9%
- Boston: 5.6%

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**“Having a population-level goal is not enough—we need to break it down by race and gender. In Chicago, Latinx youth disconnection rates are lower than black youth and female OY disconnect rates are lower than males. We cannot have a one-size-fits-all approach and that's why we developed specific goals to address these specific populations.”**  
– Thrive Chicago

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### **OYF Data Use Framework**

In addition to defining the common measures and conducting the preliminary data analysis, and as part of our focus on increasing data use, we felt it was important to identify specific ways data can be leveraged to improve impact. A framework of six core

uses of data which span place-based work, collectively at the community and partner/collaborative levels was initially developed by Equal Measure and presented to participants for consideration and revision. The OYF Data Use Framework includes the following categories and definitions:

#### **COMMUNICATING THE VISION:**

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*Data are used to articulate and build commitment towards a shared vision for connecting the community's youth to education and employment pathways and advancing equitable outcomes.*

This vision is often communicated in the form of a single public goal or set of goals. The collaborative may share annual progress reports through dashboards, report cards, or similar public-facing publications to report on progress towards this vision.

#### **CASE-MAKING:**

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*Data are used to communicate with funders, policymakers, the media, the general public and other stakeholders to articulate the need for support in advancing the OY agenda.*

These data may illustrate OY characteristics/ demographics (race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, education level), disparate outcomes pointing to inequity, or other data necessary to articulate the need to support the OY agenda and where that support can be directed.

#### **CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT:**

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*Data are used to assess, improve, and target the collaborative's and partners' OY supports or services.*

Such data use takes place within the context of intentional continuous improvement processes (e.g. Plan-Do-Study-Act Cycles) and follows structures for ensuring the right data are looked at, at the right



intervals, to understand and improve where programs, organizations, or systems are accelerating success and producing equitable outcomes.

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#### UNDERSTANDING YOUTH AND THEIR NEEDS:

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*Data are used to understand “who” opportunity youth are to ensure effective engagement and support.*

These data may describe youth characteristics (e.g., race/ethnicity, geographic location, systemic barriers, and youth assets) and their support/service/education/employment needs, and may come from a variety of sources, including partners or youth themselves. Data are disaggregated to identify inequities in the system and design targeted interventions.

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#### PARTNER ACCOUNTABILITY:

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*Data help the collaborative’s partners “own” their contributions to the OY agenda.*

Partner-specific data may be used to communicate whether, and to what extent, they are helping OY achieve educational, career, and life outcomes. Collaboratives may also create internal scorecards or other forms of documentation to inform action planning and ensure that partners have shared responsibility for improving OY outcomes.

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#### ASSESSING PARTNERSHIP HEALTH:

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*Data are used to make sure the collaborative’s infrastructure – including communication channels, decision-making processes, and work groups – are functioning properly, equitable, and inclusive.*

These data help to ensure that the appropriate structures, processes, and capacities necessary for the backbone and collaborative to be effective are in place.

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**“Hartford’s leadership met with policy makers to share data and recommendations related to OY needs in response to state budget cut threats. These data and conversations led to the Best Chance program’s (for former offenders) inclusion in the governor’s budget for two years.”**

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#### Data Capacity Assessment

To help us better understand the key infrastructure, functions and resources necessary to create and sustain a more rigorous approach to using data, all 17 Equity Counts sites participated in a data capacity self-assessment. We wanted to know what sites at varying levels of size and capacity had in place, what were their specific needs and challenges related to data and explore how we might best leverage their expertise as we look to increase overall capacity across the OYF network. We also sought to identify where and how young people and members of the populations being served might contribute to better understanding needs, defining success and informing the development of solutions.

The data capacity assessment focused on three areas: data infrastructure, data-specific functions within the backbone or collaborative, and the current or potential opportunities for young people to help define what success and meaningful impact looks like. Based on these learnings, our past approaches to data collection and use, and insights from prior evaluations conducted by Equal Measure, we identified key data-related functions, select competencies and common needs and analyzed them by collaborative level of experience.

## Examples of Information Collected

### Data Infrastructure

What resources and how experienced are communities in the following areas:

- When the collaborative began to focus on OY
- Number of full-time equivalents employed by collaborative's backbone organization that are dedicated to work with OY
- Collaborative has a dedicated individual (or team) who focuses on data-related tasks. Number of FTE
- Data staff are employed directly by the backbone organization. If not, organization where staff are employed.
- Collaborative has a data workgroup/ action team. Specific sectors and partners represented.
- Collaborative has youth included on data workgroup/ action team
- Collaborative partners input or submit data to a shared database.
- Collaborative has data sharing agreements with the following types of institutions to receive data and outcomes regarding youth
- Types of community and partner level data currently collected
- Level of collaborative confidence about the data collected
- Data is used to count the number served and track outcomes
- Method of data sharing or use

### Data Specific Functions and Capacity

To what extent and how well do communities:

- Clean data: Prepare data for analysis and presentation
- Process data: Manage the overall flow of data-related information and activities
- Analyze data: Conduct the appropriate analysis to raise or answer questions
- Disaggregate data: Analyze data according to meaningful priority populations (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, neighborhood, age)
- Inquire about data: Ask the right questions about data
- Communicate data: Explain data and their implications in easy to understand language/visuals
- Translate data: Turn data findings into actionable recommendations
- Facilitate understanding: Work through meaningful conversations to help stakeholders understand their data and their implications

### Data-related Youth Participation and Leadership

How young people are connected to data work:

- Collaborative regularly solicits input from youth to inform its strategies
- Collaborative has structures in place to engage youth in shaping and refining its agenda
- Collaborative collects stories from youth about their lived experiences
- Collaborative has a direct role for youth in data collection, use or analysis

Upon review of the data capacity assessment results, approximately 75% had a dedicated data person, and 50% have a data workgroup, shared database and produce publicly available data. Sites felt strong in their ability to use community level data to understand the needs of OY in their communities, communicate the vision or goal of their collaborative and make the case for funding or policy changes. Areas of growth included better collection of partner level or programmatic data, and progress assessment and program improvement at the individual partner and collaborative level. Sites also identified a desire for deeper capacity to convene partners and facilitate data-related working groups and to explore additional opportunities for youth participation and leadership. These results informed our development of a flexible, equity-centered data approach which we will utilize going forward to support communities at the early, intermediate and advanced level of data use.

### **Planning for Deeper Impact**

To build on accomplishments from this first year, 15 participating Equity Counts communities within OYF completed a data-specific multi-year plan to help clarify and focus on the key priorities and needs which were critical to achieving deeper impact at the local level. Sites were asked to engage collaborative partners and stakeholders in this process and work together to develop preliminary goals, project plans, budgets and an equity-based rationale for the priorities they identified. Each participating site created a four-year plan to indicate how they foresee using OYF baseline and local partner data to drive deeper and more equitable improvements in their communities. This included identifying specific OYF Data Use Framework uses and outcomes, OYF common measure areas of focus, specific subpopulations or place based areas of focus, how they would address equity and youth participation, and what resources would be needed to accomplish their goals.

Upon review and analysis of the plans, all sites identified a need to develop or strengthen their data infrastructure to collect, analyze and use OY-specific partner, community and longitudinal data to better understand the needs of OY, as well as to increase coordination of efforts across partners and improve provision of services. In addition to serving OY who are already disconnected, most sites are seeking to learn more about when youth become “off-track” and likely to disconnect, and some of the key interventions and factors that help to prevent this from occurring. As they considered how to address opportunity gaps and inequities, about one third of communities were focused on place-based and population specific strategies, specifically for black and latinx populations, and foster care and criminal justice involvement.

Additional focus areas included specific initiatives to develop youth leadership and skills, establishing quality standards for reengagement programs driven by youth experiences and voice, to allow for more accountability and improve services, and ways in which technology can be leveraged to increased effectiveness in connecting to youth. These plans, along with development of standard OYF common measures and definitions, and the OYF baseline analysis which will be completed for all OYF communities going forward, leave us well positioned to deepen our impact in future years.

### **Developing a Community of Practice to Scale Learnings and Accelerate Impact**

In addition to sharing aggregate data analysis findings and providing one on one technical assistance to the participating communities during phase one, we also established a community of practice to share learnings and resources across both Equity Counts sites and all of OYF. Initial focus areas were related to year one deliverables: OYF Common Measures

and Data Use Definitions, Data Capacity Assessment tool development and completion, clarifying potential youth roles and multi-year Data Plan development. Additionally, we met with several national level partners to share our work and explore how we might align efforts across networks and to share learnings in the future. As a result of our activities in this first year, we are well positioned to move quickly into scaled implementation and execution going forward.

# Conclusion

## Moving Forward

**T**he Opportunity Youth Forum is extremely proud of the work accomplished in the first year of Equity Counts. The communities we worked with have embraced the need for greater shared accountability and more rigorous, data-driven approaches to get to deeper impact. The sites are ready to set significant impact goals and to drive their collaboratives forward.

In addition to this year one summary overview, we will be sharing two more technically focused documents created by Equal Measure which will provide additional detail on the methodology and data analysis approach developed this year as resources for those who would like to learn more. We will share baseline data with our network, work with OYF sites to identify which of the common measures and priorities they are focusing on locally, and to set data informed goals and targets to address specific community needs and gaps. We will also expand our focus to include partner level data, allowing for analysis of how local systems, processes, and funding are contributing to outcomes, and how we might use our reach and leverage to improve and sustain local and national efforts. Our community of practice will continue, and future work may include an even deeper focus on data disaggregation by race, place and other characteristics, specific factors contributing to impact with each common measure area, or collection and alignment of specific partner level data in addition to the population baseline.

Implementing and scaling this approach, combined with an investment in site level data-related capacity building and training, will allow each of our communities to have a consistent baseline, analyze

trends and identify subpopulation specific inequities – thus more efficiently using resources and deepening their impact. This process will allow us to identify and target how we leverage our network and resources across FCS portfolios to achieve the most significant and deepest impact in improving outcomes for OY.

We are also engaging partners in the research and evaluation space to see how we collectively continue to align resources and identify and address data gaps more broadly to meet the needs of OY in our communities. These analyses will also help to better identify systemic and policy changes necessary to advance outcomes and deepen the impact across the field. As a network, we are ready to enter the next phase of OYF, for and with the youth and young adults in our country who have too often been shut out of opportunity.