1.0 Digital Summer Youth Employment Toolkit

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INTRODUCTION

Across the country, summer youth employment programs (SYEP) serve an important function in preparing youth and young adults in low-income communities for careers. These programs, which traditionally have offered workplace readiness preparation, career exploration, and subsidized job placements with government agencies, non-profit organizations, and private sector employers, improve economic, academic, and behavioral outcomes for young people.[1] The current COVID-19 crisis is exposing and exacerbating social inequality in the United States, and we are witnessing a fracturing of the few social and economic supports available for our country's most vulnerable young adults, including SYEP.

Summer youth employment programs are more important this summer than ever. At a time when many opportunity youth (OY) may have experienced loss of connection to school, youth programs, or work for several months, SYEP can provide a connection to important relationships with caring adults, and often serve as a bridge to postsecondary and other career pathway opportunities and an opportunity to gain noncognitive skills highly valued in the workplace. These relationships and connections are critical to ensuring young people can access mental health and other supportive services, all of which may be of critical need during the current crisis. More broadly, SYEP is an essential piece of what will be a long and difficult economic recovery for young people in the United States. Effective young adult talent development systems are catalysts for the overall economy. Finally, at a very basic level, summer youth employment programs provide a vehicle for transferring funds to low-income young people at a time of extraordinary financial, food and housing insecurity[2]; in effect they are young people's "stimulus check."

With social distancing and stay at home requirements, implementing SYEP this year is requiring innovative strategies and approaches, including for many a new emphasis on digital platforms and tools. This document represents a rapid gathering of information from the Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions (AIFCS) **Opportunity Youth Forum (OYF) network** and national partners in an effort to provide strategic and tactical resources to the field as quickly as possible to assist those planning and implementing SYEP at the local level. This is an initial scan of emergent practices, not a comprehensive analysis or

detailed quality review. Digital resources, practices, and tools are listed because a member of our broader network thought they were worth suggesting. Some are backed by past successful implementation or even evaluation; some are not. And while we have tried to describe work under consideration or underway in specific communities accurately, we are not taking time to have these descriptions checked for accuracy and may have not fully captured details as plans are fluid. Understanding that most of those planning SYEP for summer 2020 are urgently seeking ideas and tools to support remote programming in real-time with a short time for planning, we have chosen to publish this information without taking the time necessary for complete vetting.

Local advocates have worked (and continue to work) to preserve SYEP programming as a critical investment in young people and as an act of community resilience during a time of crisis. It is our hope that successful conversion of SYEP to virtual implementation will not only preserve this important, but relatively small, investment in young people, but will also help make the case for significantly increased public investment in strategies (digital and otherwise) for the large cohorts of young people who will be disconnected from career pathways upon graduation from high school and/or for those who have no postsecondary credential and are unemployed. If we are able to demonstrate "bright spots" with digital summer youth employment in the months ahead, this may create a "proof point" and suggest potentially scalable solutions for large public investments in youth and young adults as the country shifts toward what will be a long period of economic recovery. AIFCS looks forward to working with others in the field to advance this research and learning agenda beyond this toolkit.

MOVING FORWARD WITH SYEP IN 2020

A recent **National League of Cities** survey of large cities found that 30% planned to cut SYEP altogether, but many communities are moving forward with planning programs, albeit in modified form.[3] Some communities, such as Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, have publicly committed to SYEP; many others, such as Hartford, Connecticut, have built out detailed contingency plans and are awaiting final-hour local and state funding decisions.[4] As of press, youth-led advocates from **Teens Take Charge** are partnering with professional practitioners and intermediaries to implement a #SAVESYEP campaign in New York City, New York, where the Mayor announced in April the cancellation of what is usually one of the country's largest SYEP programs.[5]

SYEP programs are primarily supported by local funds, often supplemented by private grants. Some communities also leverage state general funds (e.g. Boston, Massachusetts and Hartford), federal dollars from WIOA (e.g. Austin, Texas and Newark, New Jersey), TANF (e.g. Albany, New York) or multiple state and federal funding streams (e.g. Philadelphia). The United States Department of Labor has emphasized that existing regulations allow program providers to be flexible in their response to the crisis as long as they are working with state and local workforce boards to document policy and procedure changes, including by implementing virtual services and using WIOA funds to purchase supplies and equipment "to assist in providing program services and training in a virtual setting during this time."[6] The **Boston Private Industry Council (PIC)**, for example, used $30,000 of WIOA funds to set up an emergency fund.

As they move forward with plans for SYEP, communities are shifting the proportions of various program components toward more career exploration and education-focused activities and away from work-based experiences. This is necessitated by the loss of employment and internship opportunities originally intended to be completed on-site. While the vast majority of such in-person placements have been cancelled due to the need for social distancing, some SYEP programs, such as the Mayor's Summer Jobs Program in Boston have had success working with employer hosts to convert these to remote employment and internship opportunities. In addition, those planning for summer youth programming are thinking of ways to emphasize postsecondary bridging activities to support the transition of 2020 high school graduates to college in the fall. In many cases, communities are offering several tracks of SYEP, or a menu of experiences to accommodate different young people's needs and a potentially changing landscape. Many programs are slightly condensing their duration.

Beyond SYEP, nearly one million summer internships are at risk this summer, according to the advocacy group **Pay Our Interns**.[7] Arizona State University students who created a crowdsourcing tool for their college peers report just over one third of all summer internships are cancelled, a similar figure found by the survey of recruiting company Yello.[8] While internship opportunities across industries have been cancelled, one recent survey of 110 employers found that 60% plan to offer virtual internships to college students.[9] Those planning SYEP understand that the young people with whom they work are in crisis and

point to a heightened need to offer enhanced supports (such as mental health, housing, and food, and help navigating available resources) and incorporate principles of trauma-informed care and social and emotional learning into their summer programming. In some cases, school counseling staff will remain available over the summer. In San Diego, **YouthWill** young people are being trained for jobs as virtual Youth Emergency Resource Ambassadors who contact other young people to check in to see how they are doing and whether they are in need of mental health supports or connections to other resources.[10]

Despite a near-universal pivot to mostly virtual programming for SYEP, some in-person experiences may be possible. For example, SYEP programs in Hartford and Del Norte County and Tribal Lands, California, are considering offering outdoor options, such as environmental restoration work, farming/gardening, and parks beautification projects, and in Seattle, Washington a small number of maritime internships considered "essential" will go forward. Community context, of course, shapes how safety considerations inform any response. For example, Del Norte County and Tribal Lands is a sparsely populated rural region with few COVID-19 cases as of this report. Many are waiting to find out if local summer camp programs will be open and, if so, whether the conditions would be safe for older youth to serve as camp counselors. In addition, some communities are engaging youth in COVID-related employment and community service opportunities. For instance, in San Francisco, California, and Chicago, Illinois, nonprofits that have received COVID emergency funds to provide social services to the community are employing young people to prepare food boxes, check on elderly residents, screen for relief funds, etc.

For more information about how communities are adapting SYEP to the current pandemic, see **the recording and materials from a webinar** co-hosted by the Aspen Forum for Community Solutions, **CLASP**, and JPMorgan Chase & Co. on May 28, 2020.

Across the OYF network, some virtual programming is part of nearly every plan for this summer. It is our hope this toolkit provides useful and strategic information as program leaders work to move to a completely or predominately online SYEP.

DIVING INTO DIGITAL

The shift to a virtual environment requires rapid adaptation in almost all program components.

Connectivity

There remains a great digital divide, and young people's access to electronic devices and reliable WiFi is a major consideration for SYEP planning. In some communities public schools have agreed to allow SYEP participants to keep district laptops or netbooks for the summer. Others have decided to use only platforms that are fully functional on a cellphone, which young people are much more likely to have. Some youth employment programs are setting up "internet cafes" outside their offices or public offices (e.g., libraries, career centers, etc.) so that the building's WiFi can be accessed. Federal WIOA funds may be used to pay for devices, internet access, and hotspots to make it possible for young people to participate in youth employment programming.[11] In addition, many local cable companies are offering free or reduced-cost internet service to low income households. In Los Angeles, California through their connection to **iFoster** and the **Alliance for Children's Rights**, young adults who are or have been in foster care have free access to mobile phones, laptops and hotspots.

Enrollment

Enrolling young people in SYEP remotely is a challenge. Traditionally, enrollment has taken place in person and on paper. In fact, needing to travel to physically enroll for programming has posed a barrier to some youth in the past. With social distancing orders in place, most SYEP programs must facilitate enrollment online. Programs report using secure online document management platforms such as ShareFile and DocuSign to allow students to upload photos of documents and provide electronic signatures. **Connect Detroit** quickly developed its own document management system using JotForm and Google's G-Suite to handle its enrollment process electronically.

In-House Content Delivered Through Online Learning and Webinar Platforms

Many SYEP providers will continue to deliver some or all of their own content, moving from in-person to online sessions. They report using platforms such as Google Classroom and Blackboard for more classes with assignments, and platforms like Google Hangout, Zoom,

Microsoft Teams, and Webex for live presentations. Those building out an online learning platform and hosting live video meetings to move their traditional programming online report providing considerable training for staff as they move to an online environment. Some programs are also providing training to young people on how to communicate professionally on video conferences for interviews and meetings with program staff. In San Francisco, **Bay Area Community Resources (BACR)** program staff differentiate their tools just as they do content to the specific audience of a group or individual young person to fit individual learning styles and communication preferences.

Career Exploration and General Workplace Preparation

Career exploration and workplace preparation activities are elements common to all SYEP programs, and many providers are planning to increase the proportion of time spent on these types of activities to off-set the reduction in work-based opportunities. There are many online learning platforms offering such activities. Many SYEP programs have used these in the past, usually in computer lab settings. While in the past many SYEPs have used career exploration and workplace preparation curricula as part of a one- or two-week preparation program prior to placement in employment for the remainder of the program, this year many are planning to rely more heavily on exploration activities throughout the summer. Many communities are offering additional modules in targeted domains. For example, in Philadelphia, the **Philadelphia Youth Network** is building out tracks not only in career exposure, but also in financial literacy and digital literacy/brand identity.

Employer-hosted Work-based Experiences

While many actual summer jobs and internships for youth and young adults have been cancelled, some employers have agreed to host previously planned work-based experiences remotely. In many cases, out of necessity these experiences will be more education- than work-based. For example, in Boston the Boston Private Industry Council (PIC) manages private sector job placement for the Mayor's summer jobs program. Of the approximately 1,200 onsite jobs with employers, about 500 are with hospitals. Although most of the hospitals have committed to still paying students, the move to remote programming makes doing most hospital work difficult. Instead, these employers plan to offer students a combination of group projects, training programing they have developed, workshops on LinkedIn Learning, and workshops offered by the PIC. SYEP program planners note that employers often need considerable support in supervising young people in remote summer work placements.

Consistent communication among PIC staff, employers, and youth participants is a critical practice in any circumstances. Now, feedback loops are focused on digital communication etiquette and project management procedures.

Industry Tracks, Credentialing, and Simulated Experiences

Some program leaders we interviewed have explored the possibility of career pathways tracks with industry-recognized certifications and credentials for participants interested in preparing for specific fields. Even if young people are not able to get real on-the-job work experience this summer, they can still prepare for work in a particular field by completing coursework and obtaining a credential or badge and exploring what working in that field would involve through completing simulated work assignments and receiving feedback. While we learned of programs going forward with sector-focused SYEP tracks for subsets of participants (for example, the public financial services sector in Washington, D.C.) and "microcredentials" are a common feature of online career exploration platforms, we did not identify specific digital pathways to employer-recognized credentials at the end of their SYEP. Many such programs of course exist (in varying concentrations) in communities separate from SYEP and are a critical part of the wider learning agenda on the topic of digital youth employment, but not the focus of this toolkit.

Postsecondary Bridging

Many SYEP programs are emphasizing digital postsecondary bridging activities this summer in recognition of the fact that most students lost guidance support in March. For instance, in April, **Unite L.A.** partnered with the Mayor's Office to launch "COVID College Connect," an initiative aimed at connecting high school seniors with college advisors for online help with financial aid and other admissions deadlines. They are currently attempting to expand the initiative county-wide to create regional support for the Class of 2020 to bridge the time between graduation and the start of college in the fall. Others are looking at the possibility of offering virtual college campus visits.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR ONLINE PROGRAMMING

Aside from the rapid pivot to all- or nearly all-digital SYEP this summer, online youth employment programming poses a number of challenges, including:

- **Creating and Maintaining Relationships**
  Because their work is based on relationships, youth program providers must think carefully about how to nurture and monitor those as they begin to enroll new program participants who will experience the whole program, from interview to program completion without meeting a case manager in person. In the rush to pivot to digital modalities, it is important not to lose focus on core positive youth development principles that undergird all effective programs.

- **Centering Social Emotional Learning (SEL)**
  SEL and a trauma-informed approach are more important than ever in this context. Connect Detroit, for example, is partnering with the **Youth Development Resource Center** to incorporate SEL curriculum into their digital platform VirtualJobShadow.

- **Getting Staff Past the Initial Hurdle of Moving Online**
  Moving to a distanced, all-digital environment radically alters the work of frontline youth-serving staff. Providing these staff with as much support and professional development as possible is critical to ensuring the smoothest possible shift to online programming.

- **Offering Inclusive Learning**
  As SYEP programs design digital offerings, they should consider ways to make online lessons and assignments accessible to all students, including students with cognitive learning or physical disabilities and students who are multilingual. At minimum, consider using Google Translate and Windows Accessibility tools. Connect Detroit uses VirtualJob Shadow to provide closed captioning in English and Spanish for some key features as well as components that are read aloud and works with specific partners resourced to provide supports to youth with varying abilities.

- **Getting a Window into Young People's Homes**
  Meeting with young people online provides an unusual and perhaps unwanted window into their home lives. Staff need training on being sensitive to this issue, mandated reporting laws, etc.

- **Selecting Appropriate Platform(s) and Providing Technical Support**
  Moving to an entirely digital program means staff and young people will need help using new technologies. Involving both groups in the selection of tools is recommended, as is keeping it mobile friendly. Young people are much more likely to have access to smartphones than laptops. As multiple communities, including Philadelphia, emphasized, electing technology platforms and designing communication strategies with phone-based usage in mind is critical.

- **Project-Based Learning (PBL)**
  Nearly all digital SYEP experiences will involve projects of some sort, whether assigned by employers, embedded in curriculum, or designed by young people. Thoughtful, intentional PBL practices can lead to high quality experiences. Creative use of PBL offers opportunities to center student interests, engage community context (through civic engagement, citizen science, or other domains) and blend online and offline activities. Inspiration abounds, such as the new **My Chi My Future** platform in Chicago.

- **Dealing with Screen Fatigue**
  Many of us are spending much more time staring at computer screens than we did just a few months ago. Many young people report being sick of screens after a spring of online school.

DIGITAL RESOURCES AND TOOLS FOR ONLINE PROGRAMMING

Enrollment

❖ **Career EDGE**

Students may complete an online application and upload documents on the platform of this comprehensive career exploration and workplace readiness curriculum (described further below).

❖ **Community Solutions Software**

Enrollment and payroll management tool designed for youth workforce programs.

❖ **DocuSign**

Send and sign documents digitally

❖ **JotForm**

Online form builder for collecting data online.

❖ **ShareFile**

Secure document sharing being used by PYN in Philadelphia this year.

General Online Learning and Webinar Platforms

❖ **Google Suite for Education**

Google Classroom and Google Hangout may be of particular relevance for those delivering their own programming remotely.

❖ **Kahoot**

Game-based mobile learning platform useful in making presentations/trainings more interactive and fun.

❖ **Microsoft Teams**

Online videoconferencing and collaboration.

❖ **Zoom**

Video conferencing app.

Career Exploration and General Workplace Preparation

❖ **Career EDGE**

Comprehensive career exploration and workplace readiness curriculum and digital framework for workforce development. Youth can record mock interview answers for later review by staff. Integrated online application and document uploads.

❖ **Career Hub**

Platform developed for youth workforce programs to communicate securely using text messages. Includes automated payroll verification and electronic gift-card distribution

❖ **Career Labs Online by Grads of Life**

2-week, 40-hour synchronous modular training program combining Year Up's proven methodology and professional skills training to equip Opportunity Youth with the skills, habits, and mindsets needed to be successful in the professional world. Cohorts of 20 are trained in key employability skills such as communication, collaboration, critical thinking, problem solving, and time management. Participants learn to work in team environments and develop an empowering growth mindset and positive self-concept. Recent implementations of the online version of the course in Santa Clara County, California had higher completion rates than the in-person program in this community. Can be purchased with Grads of Life/Year Up virtual facilitators or have program staff trained to facilitate.

❖ **Gladeo**

Career exploration tool with an emphasis on cultural competency.

❖ **Hats & Ladders**

Career readiness curriculum in a phone app. Includes implementation services and usage & performance tracking. Employs game mechanics and personalized instruction to motivate youth and young adults.

❖ **Headed2 CareerExplorer**

Cloud-based platform for career assessment, exploration and planning. Contains self-assessments, financial literacy tools, and comprehensive labor market information, including occupations, employment data and job postings. The system can also be used to manage/promote work-based learning opportunities within a community.

❖ **LinkedInLearning**

Free and paid online skill building modules with badges.

❖ **Metrix Learning**

Comprehensive workforce development solution including various tools to assess skill gaps, provide training content to close gaps, explore career pathways, and connect job seekers with open positions. Also helps business services to assist with recruitment, hiring, and internal training.

❖ **Naviance**

Comprehensive college, career and life readiness solution that helps districts and schools align student strengths and interests to postsecondary goals, improving student outcomes and connecting learning to life. PYN is using this tool in Philadelphia for SYEP.

❖ NYC Digital Internship Program, by **The Knowledge House** (point of contact), **Bloc Software** and **Student Dream.**

Focused on New York City as an alternative to the city's jeopardized SYEP, but open to national partnerships, this **platform** hosts curriculum and facilitates assessments, group work, project management, and check-ins. The Knowledge House's Exploratory Technology program is the default curriculum (with introductions to Software Development, UX & Design, Digital Marketing, Product Management, Technical Customer Support and QA) but program providers may upload their curricula. Students get access to synchronous "Lunch and Learns" with employers. Site license fee is $3,000 for program providers serving 100-500 summer youth.

❖ **Signal Success**

Comprehensive curriculum designed and tested by education and workforce development partners to help young people develop essential skills for future success. Students receive systematic instruction in core soft skills while engaging in meaningful future planning. Developed by the Commonwealth Corporation primarily for use in Massachusetts, including Boston.

❖ **Virtual Job Shadow**

Career exploration and planning platform designed for K-Adult. Programs for middle and high school-aged students include video job shadows and career advice.

❖ **WeThrive**

Blended learning platform with 25- to 50-hour modular youth entrepreneurship curriculum with synchronous and asynchronous options. WeThrive provides seed funding to students for real business ventures as they build skills, and offers opportunities to connect with employer mentors. $200 per student cost includes staff training.

❖ **Workforce Ready/ Cornerstone on Demand**

Short, online courses for students to develop essential non-technical workplace skills, such as interview preparation, networking, communication, collaboration, and critical thinking. Los Angeles piloted in 2019 and will be using as a 6-week curriculum with a small group of SYEP participants in 2020.

Employer-hosted Work-based Experiences

❖ **Asana**

Project management tool some programs are using to help interns, site supervisors, and program staff to manage remote internships. Licenses for $25/user/month.

❖ **ImBlaze** by Big Picture Learning

Internship management platform with functions for internship coordinators, students, and site supervisors.

❖ **Parker Dewey**

"Micro-internships" where students perform specific tasks and small projects (simulated or real) for employers who use the tool as a talent pipeline for experiential hiring. Geared at college students.

❖ **Symba**

Comprehensive internship platform that helps organizations manage the logistics of having a remote intern, from onboarding, project assignment, communication tools and feedback mechanisms. Matches interns and programs for online internships. Pricing is on a per-intern basis.

Industry Tracks, Credentialing, and Simulated Work Experiences

❖ **180 Skills**

Online skills training, instructor training plans, and certification testing in one comprehensive manufacturing skills training system. Work readiness modules may be of particular interest.

❖ **AWS re/Start**

Amazon Web Services offers this full-time 12-week curriculum for careers in cloud computing targeting unemployed or underemployed individuals including young people with a high school diploma or equivalency.

❖ **BrainCeek**

Career exploration curriculum with work simulations for young people to try out 4 different types of jobs in fields of finance and technology: 1) Investment banking, 2) Credit risk, 3) Cyber security, and 4) Data science. 40 hours of content broken into 45 minute to 3-hour chunks. Includes assessment report to help students understand strengths/weaknesses.

❖ **Inside Sherpa**

Offers virtual work experience programs that mimic entry-level work done at partner companies/organizations. Once enrolled, students are given a hypothetical set of tasks that an employee would expect to complete on a given workday and can eventually earn a certificate to display on their LinkedIn profile. Primarily designed for college students.

❖ **LRNG powered by Southern New Hampshire University**

City-based strategies to provide self-paced learning and work opportunities to everyone from high school students to working adults. The target audience is OY ages 13-22. Digital microcredentials can stack into certifications and degrees. Learners can unlock job shadows, internships, and interviews. Program can track their participants' activity on the LRNG app. Numerous OYF member communities are utilizing this platform for SYEP. $5,000 annual subscription for unlimited learners.

❖ **NAF**

NAF has opened up its CTE curriculum to the public during this time including content and remote learning resources in health sciences, hospitality and tourism, and STEM. Planning resources for engaging employers and creating virtual internships are also available.

❖ **Paragon One**

Externships and simulations with industry-specific training and tutoring provided by Paragon One staff. Includes one-week preparation training in a cohort.

❖ **ToolingUSME**

Partners with educators, workforce agencies, and the manufacturing industry to build capacity and provide workforce education. Training and development solutions include:

» Competency-based, industry-driven curriculum

» Alignment with nationally recognized certifications – NIMS, MSSC, AWS, PMMI, Siemens, and SME

» DOL-approved pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs

» Workforce performance assessments

Projects and Interactive Learning

❖ **Buck Institute**

Free curricular resources, tools and paid online professional development on best practices in project-based learning.

❖ **Environmental Education Projects**

Toolkits and activity guides for citizen science projects that require minimal outdoor time.

❖ **Exploratorium**

Wide range of creative STEM project ideas.

❖ **Facing History and Ourselves**

Collection of free resources for remote learning, community connections, remote book clubs, student journaling, and engaging conversations about the COVID-19 pandemic, democracy, and civic engagement. On-demand webinars on topics such as Teaching Complex Current Events and Supporting Students.

❖ **New York Times Lesson Plans and Resources for Educators**

Expansive library of lesson plans in wide range of subjects for use with NYT articles.

❖ **PBS LearningMedia Resources**

Videos, interactives, and lessons plans.

Accessible and Inclusive Learning

❖ **ExploreWork**

Career exploration and work preparation curriculum targeted to students with disabilities.

❖ **Microsoft Windows Accessibility Features and Apps**

Built in and third-party accessibility features to address vision, hearing, neurodiversity, learning, and mobility differences.

❖ **Voice Typing in Google Docs**

Use voice typing or voice commands using a computer microphone.

❖ **GetSchooled**

Free digital college and job advisor. Supports students with college applications, financial aid, beginning college, and succeeding at their first job. Students can upload their college essay application for feedback.

❖ **National College Access Network (NCAN)**

Recommendations on using evidence to inform pivots to digital college advising and incorporating tools like **SignalVine** and **Find the Fit** and **links** to the latest guidance on financial aid.

❖ **Swift Student**

Free, central repository of financial aid appeal/request letter templates for students whose financial circumstances have changed since they completed the FAFSA or otherwise need further explanation. Includes advice and templates for students who are homeless, currently or formerly in foster care, LGBT and unsupported by family, or undocumented, as well as students whose parents will not contribute information to their FAFSA or who have an incarcerated parent.

CONCLUSIONS

Youth and young adults were economically vulnerable before the current health and economic crisis; now, with calls for stay at home orders and social distancing, they will experience a disproportionate share of layoffs.[12] For this reason, it is imperative that communities support SYEP programs' ability to operate effectively in a digital environment to maintain connections with young people during this time of trauma and insecurity of basic needs. Employers such as Vertex Pharmaceutical in Boston and Wells Fargo in Los Angeles have stepped up to pivot their internships to virtual, and in Chicago, businesses like the technology company Relativity have signed a pledge to hire more young people from the city's most vulnerable communities, as interns, seasonal workers or full-time employees.[13]

While the current health crisis is providing a sharp push to enter the digital realm, it has long been apparent that the "**future of work**" includes increased technological intermediation. What we are learning and will learn from our work with young people in summer youth employment programs this summer no doubt will be helpful to the field, even when stay at home orders are lifted.

Preparing young people through virtual environments opens new possibilities. It can overcome barriers like lack of access to reliable transportation and (to a lesser extent) childcare. Forcibly upgrading the digital capacity of young adult talent development systems could have multiple benefits. One in three American workers has limited or no digital skills, and a full quarter of these workers are between ages 16-34, with these skills gaps disproportionately concentrated among Black and Latinx individuals due to longstanding inequities.[14] Every 2020 SYEP will involve some digital skill development, and in some communities this is a specific core focus. The shift could also catalyze more equitable on-ramps to jobs in high-wage sectors involving office work readily done remotely. Rural and tribal communities, for example, lacking access to local employers, might pool students through national programs or intermediaries to connect young people with opportunities at businesses who previously overlooked this pipeline of talent.

At the highest level, the reinvention of SYEP programs in the COVID-19 era, as with the innovation forced by the disruption across the workforce system, public schools and postsecondary institutions, presents an opportunity for bold reimagination, not just of

programs or pathways, but of whole systems and the connections among them. After 7 years of learning together, the Opportunity Youth Forum network has **a portfolio of effective strategies** for systems transformation through collective action. These are strategies to unravel the injustices that existed long before COVID-19. Through engaging youth as authentic partners at every step and developing strong coalitions across siloes with shared accountability toward a common agenda, we can leverage this moment of rapid adaptation to tackle the structural barriers at root of the inequities opportunity youth face.

OTHER RESOURCES AND FURTHER RESEARCH

We know that the field requires a longer-term, more intensive research agenda around the innovations, tools, programs and practices described in this toolkit, and AIFCS welcomes connections from others contemplating such work at the national level. Please contact **mike.swigert@aspeninst.org**.

In addition, we encourage you to visit our **COVID-19 Opportunity Youth National Resource Library**. Unlike this toolkit, this resource library will be continuously updated. It focuses on a holistic range of practical opportunity youth-focused topics ranging from K-12 and postsecondary practices, to national advocacy, social services and health, non-profit organizational needs, and resources tailored to tribal communities.

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5   See Teens Take Charge #SAVESYEP: **https://www.teenstakecharge.com/syep**

6   The United States Department of Labor Education and Training maintains a series of technical assistance resources and frequently asked questions (FAQs) to address grants management questions related to COVID-19 (Retrieved May 2020): **https://www.workforcegps.org/resources/2020/03/18/23/35/Coronavirus-COVID-19-Resources**. See in particular: **https://www.workforcegps.org/-/media/Global-Site/Content/Resources/COVID-FAQs/WIOA_Youth_FAQs_COVID_19_20200429.ashx**

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