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COLLECTIVE IMPACT
for Opportunity Youth

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Discovering better ways to solve social problems

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About This Report

This report is intended to serve as a call-to-action for communities to bring together systems and stakeholders to improve outcomes for Opportunity Youth and to provide a high-level framework for a collective impact approach that will enable them to do so.

To inform this report, FSG interviewed experts that work with Opportunity Youth at the local, state, and national levels, and conducted secondary research to leverage the sizable literature existing in the field. We also conducted focus groups with former Opportunity Youth that are now on a solid path to education and employment. Examples, learning, and results from community-based collective impact and Opportunity Youth initiatives are cited throughout the report. A full list of interviewees and resources may be found in the Appendix.

Defining Opportunity Youth

We define Opportunity Youth as youth between the ages of 16 and 24 who are neither enrolled in school nor participating in the labor market. This definition comes from the White House Council for Community Solutions and other prominent resources in the field, including *Opportunity Road* and *The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth*. While we recognize the critical importance of ensuring that youth are supported from cradle to career, this paper will address only the challenges and approaches around the population of youth aged 16 to 24 who are already disconnected, and not those who are at-risk or off-track but still in school.

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Foreword

This is an important moment in time for Opportunity Youth in our country. While innovative community based programs like YouthBuild, Youth Corps, and countless others have worked for decades to support these youth on pathways to success at the local level, Opportunity Youth have gone largely unrecognized at the national level and have been underserved by the systems designed to support them. However, the recent work of the White House Council for Community Solutions, with stellar leadership from Chair, Patty Stonesifer, has helped to expand interest, commitment, and momentum for achieving better outcomes for Opportunity Youth. For the first time in decades, there is authentic focus and a strong call to action from the highest levels of government, pushing us to break down institutional silos and pull together across sectors on behalf of, and with, Opportunity Youth.

Employers in today's economy face critical needs that can be addressed by supporting this population. We are currently experiencing the lowest levels of youth employment our country has seen since World War II. Yet jobs go unfilled because employers cannot find the skilled talent they need. If we are able to better educate and equip our nation's youth for the workforce, they possess tremendous untapped talent for our business and our economy.

The framework outlined in this paper is meant to address the needs of Opportunity Youth and employers, building upon national momentum in order to drive local action through a new approach to social change called collective impact. Truly supporting these populations will require the kind of quality, multi-systems approach that is inherent in collective impact. It will also require that we take the time to authentically engage Opportunity Youth in helping to inform and shape solutions.

Our hope is that this paper will encourage communities to work together, with Opportunity Youth at the table, across sectors and with industry, in order to expand pathways to education and economic opportunity so that youth have what they need to succeed in communities and, ultimately, across the country. We look forward to following the work as communities seize the moment for collective impact for Opportunity Youth.

Sincerely,
Stephen Patrick and Patrice Cromwell

Executive Summary

Each year, over one million American youth become disconnected from the systems that are designed to educate and prepare them for their future. Known as Opportunity Youth, this population totals approximately 6.7 million in the United States and is comprised of youth who are between the ages of 16 and 24 and are neither enrolled in school nor participating in the labor market.[1] They are called Opportunity Youth as a reflection of the optimism they have for finding a pathway to economic stability, and as a reminder that investing in their futures represents an immense opportunity for employers and the nation. By improving outcomes for this population, businesses and communities have the potential to increase savings for society, improve the quality of talent available to employers, and interrupt a multigenerational cycle of poverty for youth and their families.

Significant momentum is building around improving outcomes for Opportunity Youth. With strong leadership from the White House, there is increased national attention and targeted resources focused on this population. Together with a growing body of research and the promising work of existing programs and partnerships around the country, it is clear that the time is ripe for putting Opportunity Youth at the top of our collective agenda. This report is intended to serve as a call-to-action for communities to bring together systems and stakeholders to improve outcomes for Opportunity Youth and offers a framework that will enable them to do so. Key findings are summarized below and expanded upon in the full report that follows.

The Challenge of Opportunity Youth

Opportunity Youth can become disconnected from education or career opportunities at various ages and stages in their lives and for a variety of reasons. Some may face personal challenges that lead them to drop out of school, including a lack of role models or positive social and emotional support, having feelings of “not belonging” or being unwanted, or having family or parenting responsibilities. Yet too often, the challenges that these youth face relate to a failure of the systems designed to support them—for instance, a mismatch between available education options and a youth’s needs and goals, policies that focus disproportionately on discipline over rehabilitation, a lack of special services that allow youth to remain engaged (such as childcare or transportation), or educational disruptions caused by involvement with the foster care or juvenile justice system coupled with a deficiency of on-ramps provided to get youth back on track. These challenges can vary significantly for each individual, but must be examined and understood if communities are to effectively meet the needs of their local population of Opportunity Youth.

[1] Belfield, C., Levin, H. and Rosen, R. (2012), *The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth* in association with Civic Enterprises for the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

What Opportunity Youth Need to Attain Education and Career Success

While there are multiple pathways to education and career success for Opportunity Youth, the development of these pathways typically draws upon four common components:

- **Re-engagement.** Identifying youth who have been disconnected from education and careers on a local level, understanding the specific needs of the population, and working closely with youth to connect them to programs and supports that help them surmount their individual challenges.
- **Educational Momentum.** Helping youth reach early and frequent education milestones in addition to attaining longer term education goals, such as completing a high school degree, GED, and postsecondary credential or degree.
- **Connection to Career.** Connecting youth with relevant work experiences to help them gain the credentials and connections that will facilitate their entry into family-supporting careers.
- **Youth Development.** Developing the leadership skills and addressing the social and emotional needs of youth to help them become engaged and productive members of their communities.

While these components are critical to the development of effective pathways for Opportunity Youth, communities must also overcome a series of systemic barriers in order to meet the needs of this population. Disconnected and **fragmented programs and services**, an **inadequate supply of high-quality, high-impact programs and pathways** with on-ramps for even the most challenged youth, and a **lack of funding directed to Opportunity Youth** make it difficult for these youth to learn about, access, and benefit from the programs that could help them.

Communities need to connect and refocus these systems hand-in-hand with Opportunity Youth to align polices and resources to favorably impact their life trajectories. A collective impact approach—where cross-sector stakeholders come together with youth to collaboratively identify and solve a complex social problem—poses a significant opportunity for communities to work together with Opportunity Youth to enable them to develop their confidence, skills, and self-efficacy, obtain a postsecondary credential or certificate with labor market value, and meaningfully connect to sustainable careers.

How to Launch a Collective Impact Effort to Increase Success for Opportunity Youth

Lessons from the field highlight four key steps that help lay the foundation for a successful collective impact effort for Opportunity Youth:

1. Identifying influential champions and forming a cross-sector group,
2. Scoping and segmenting the population to define the problem,
3. Creating urgency and making the case for change, and
4. Establishing financial resources to launch the effort.

Having these elements in place will not only help key stakeholders understand the urgency of the problem, but will catalyze a coalition of actors—including youth, mayors and other public officials, employers, K-12 and postsecondary education leaders, nonprofit service providers, private funders, child welfare and juvenile justice leaders, and others—to engage in the effort over time. Once a community has built the foundation for a collective impact approach and gained initial momentum to address the challenge of its local Opportunity Youth, it is important to identify *how* a community is going to collectively make change. There are several key steps that help communities organize for impact, including:

1. Reaching out to key community stakeholders,
2. Creating a common agenda,
3. Identifying shared measures, and
4. Developing a backbone organization for coordination and support.

These steps ensure that communities will have the resources and the road map for identifying critical pathways for Opportunity Youth, and ultimately, improving their chances of leading productive lives.

Conclusion

The time is ripe for local communities to identify and engage their Opportunity Youth, and to align and strengthen the fragmented systems and services that support this population. By engaging in collective impact, the many players who seek to support Opportunity Youth can work together more effectively to build the on-ramps and pathways these youth need to attain educational and career success. Improving outcomes for Opportunity Youth is a complex, multi-faceted challenge—a challenge that no one organization can solve alone, but one that communities can solve together.

Introduction

Bernard was sixteen when he left high school. He never knew his father and his mother was incarcerated when he was 6 years old, leaving him to bounce from one foster home to another throughout his childhood. Each adjustment to a new family and a new school set him back emotionally and academically and his grades suffered for it. He did not see the point in finishing high school, and didn't have any adults in his life who encouraged him to feel differently. After dropping out of school, being in the foster system meant that he had housing, but when he turned 18 that support vanished. Bernard was homeless for five years, constantly moving between drop-in shelters and the streets. Fortunately, through a youth worker at a drop-in shelter, Bernard was connected to a program that provided access to GED classes, individual academic and emotional support, and opportunities to pursue a college education. Today, Bernard is completing his bachelor's degree in engineering and has a 4.0 GPA. He has discovered a new confidence and an understanding that he can succeed in school and in his career despite the enormous challenges of his past. Bernard has transformed his life.

Bernard was homeless for five years, constantly moving between drop-in shelters and the streets. Fortunately, through a youth worker at a drop-in shelter, Bernard was connected to a program that provided access to GED classes, individual academic and emotional support, and opportunities to pursue a college education.

Meanwhile, Marisa is a bright girl who did well in junior high but became increasingly less engaged once she entered high school. She didn't see how her classes were relevant to her life and figured she didn't need a high school diploma to succeed. When a group of older girls began bullying her and no one at school seemed to care, she dropped out. Once out of school, she discovered how hard it was to get a job without a diploma or GED and she now works at a local fast food restaurant. She has considered going back to school, but doesn't want to be the kid who is older than everyone else and she doesn't see any other options for moving forward.

Through a chance meeting with a youth worker, Bernard's life was set on a new path. But for every Bernard, there are over 1 million like Marisa who become disconnected and never re-engage with the systems designed to support them. What can communities do to ensure that all youth like Bernard and Marisa are given a chance to succeed?

Each year, over one million American youth like Bernard and Marisa become disconnected from the systems that are designed to educate and prepare them for successful careers. These youth join the approximately 6.7 million[2] existing Opportunity Youth in the United States between the ages of 16 and 24 who are neither enrolled in school nor participating in the labor market.[3] These youth face a range of challenges: low performing schools, limited community resources, a lack of family support, and inadequate assistance from systems charged with serving them. Regardless of their specific circumstances, these young people have one thing in common—they have been disconnected from any viable pathway leading to a productive life and career.

The impact of this disconnection is felt not only by Opportunity Youth, but also by the communities in which they live, and the nation at large. Opportunity Youth pose significant costs to taxpayers, as they have lower lifetime earnings and are more likely to need government support. The average Opportunity Youth costs taxpayers $13,900 per year between the ages of 16 and 24, and a total of $148,790 over the rest of their lifetime.[4] This translates to $4.75 trillion for the aggregate lifetime costs to society for the Opportunity Youth population as a whole when factoring in lost earnings, costs to victims of criminal activity, private health expenditures, and lost economic gains from a less educated workforce.[5]

Meanwhile, U.S. businesses are calling for more and better-trained talent to compete on the global stage. Despite high unemployment, there are over three million open jobs in the U.S. that employers are unable to fill with qualified workers.[6] Indeed, 63 percent of jobs are projected to require some postsecondary education by 2018 versus just 28 percent in 1973.[7] This includes both high-skill jobs that necessitate a four-year degree or more (33 percent), as well as middle-skill jobs which require some college or certification, but less than a four-year degree (30 percent).[8]

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[2] Belfield, C., Levin, H. and Rosen, R. (2012), *The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth* in association with Civic Enterprises for the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

[3] Of this 6.7 million, 3.4 million are ”chronic” Opportunity Youth, meaning they have never been in school or work after the age of 16, and 3.3 million are “under-attached” Opportunity Youth, meaning they have had some schooling and work experience after age 15 but have not progressed through college or secured a stable attachment to the labor market. Bridgeland, J. and Milano, J. (2011). *Opportunity Road: The Promise and Challenge of America’s Forgotten Youth*. Washington, DC: Civic Enterprises.

[4] Belfield, C., Levin, H. and Rosen, R. (2012), *The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth* in association with Civic Enterprises for the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey News Release*, November 8, 2011.

[7] Carnevale, Strohl, and Smith. “Help Wanted: Projections of Jobs and Education Requirements through 2018.” June 2010.

[8] Ibid.

Helping break the cycle of poverty for Opportunity Youth presents tremendous possible savings for society and resources for employers. Yet the systems that touch Opportunity Youth are highly fragmented today, posing a significant challenge for these youth to reach their educational and economic potential. Greater coordination, support, and alignment between K-12 systems, community-based organizations (CBOs), the postsecondary education system, employers, the child welfare system, the juvenile justice system, and other key stakeholders are desperately needed if we are to meet this challenge in communities across the country. At the same time, these changes will not be feasible or effective if they are not informed by and developed in partnership with youth themselves. A collective impact approach, where cross-sector stakeholders and the youth they intend to serve come together to collaboratively identify and solve a complex social problem, is a promising new way for communities to work together to re-engage Opportunity Youth on pathways to success in their life and career.

There is significant momentum building around this issue, which gained national attention last year when the White House Council on Community Solutions identified cross-sector collaboratives for Opportunity Youth as its leading priority. Regulations and funding at the federal and state levels are beginning to include more flexibility for resources to support youth once they are past the ages of 18 or 21. The Aspen Institute is launching a national forum and an Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund to develop community-based models to serve Opportunity Youth. Moreover, there have been significant research conducted and tools developed to support this population and inform related community efforts. Recent contributions include research on the size and cost of the population (*The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth)*, greater understanding of the perspectives of and challenges faced by Opportunity Youth (*Opportunity Road),* and services and toolkits for local communities (such as the Forum for Youth Investment's Ready by 21 tools and resources and Jobs for the Future's Back on Track Designs). Recent research has also highlighted the effectiveness of national and local programs that support Opportunity Youth, including YouthBuild USA, New York's Multiple Pathways to Graduation initiative, National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program, and Year Up. (See Appendix for a full list of resources and existing efforts.)

Communities across the country from Mobile to Portland to Philadelphia are taking action to improve the chance of success for Opportunity Youth. Near the Texas-Mexico border, the Pharr–San Juan–Alamo Independent School District has dramatically increased its high school graduation rate from 62 percent in 2007 to 87 percent in 2010 through extensive dropout prevention efforts coupled with an intensive re-engagement and reenrollment strategy for Opportunity Youth in partnership with South Texas College.[9]

Communities across the country from Mobile to Portland to Philadelphia are taking action to improve the chance of success for Opportunity Youth.

Yet many of these efforts are still nascent. Philadelphia's Project U-Turn is the only prominent initiative today that demonstrates the launch and implementation of a comprehensive collective impact approach for Opportunity Youth. Project U-Turn brings together representatives of the School District, city agencies, foundations, youth-serving organizations, parents, and youth themselves in a citywide collaborative that serves as a model for communities nationwide that are seeking a coordinated approach to improve outcomes for Opportunity Youth. Through its efforts, Project U-Turn has effected policy change, made funding services for out-of-school youth a priority, and created an aligned service delivery system to serve Opportunity Youth. This work has led to the creation of thirteen new schools for off-track and out-of-school youth, called Accelerated Schools in Philadelphia; a re-engagement center that facilitates a dropout's enrollment in an appropriate educational option; and an education support center within the child welfare system that supports education stability for youth in dependent and delinquent care. The campaign has leveraged more than $175 million in public and private resources and led to a 12 percent growth in Philadelphia's high school graduation rate since its launch in 2004.

The time is ripe for local communities to identify and engage their Opportunity Youth, align the fragmented systems and services that support them around pathways to educational and career success, and improve the outcomes for these youth and their communities. This report, informed by conversations with Opportunity Youth and experts that work with this population, was designed to highlight the underlying challenges facing Opportunity Youth and offers a framework to help communities come together to address these challenges.

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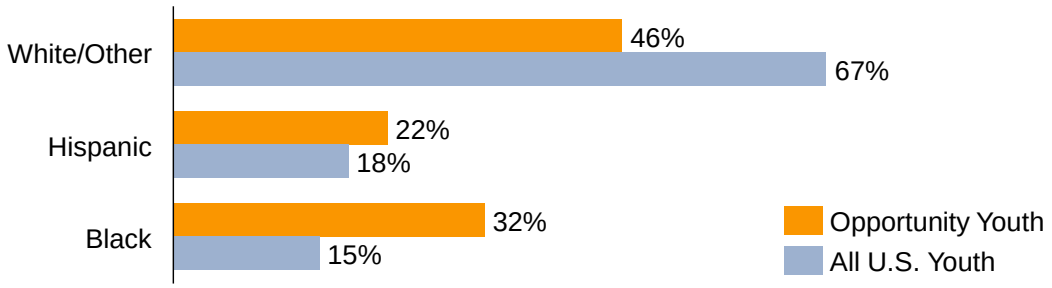
[9] Le, C. (2012), *Launching Early College Districtwide: Pharr–San Juan–Alamo's "College for All" Strategy,* Jobs for the Future Early College Design Services and Educate Texas.

The Challenge of Opportunity Youth

Understanding the National Opportunity Youth Population

Opportunity Youth are a large and growing population, making up at least 17 percent of all youth nationwide between the ages of 16 and 24.[10] These youth come from a range of backgrounds, yet a disproportionate percentage are from minority and low-income populations. Of Opportunity Youth aged 19 to 24 in 2012, an estimated 32 percent were black and 22 percent were Hispanic (see Figure 1).[11] Of those not living with their parents, 71 percent are considered poor versus 27 percent of connected youth.[12]

Figure 1: Percentage of the Population by Ethnicity



Source: Belfield, C., Levin, H. and Rosen, R. (2012), *The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth* in association with Civic Enterprises for the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

National research shows that Opportunity Youth fall into three primary segments based on age and educational attainment:

- Young high school dropouts (aged 16 to 18),
- Older high school dropouts (aged 19 to 24), and

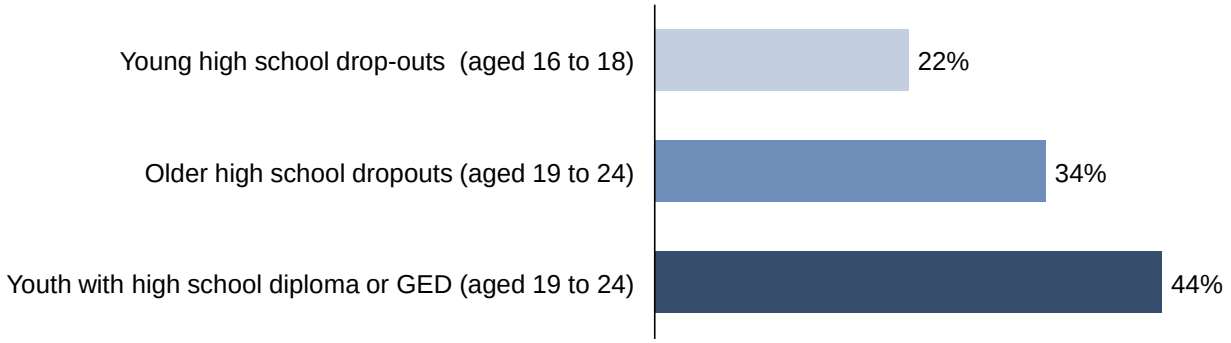
[10] Belfield, C., Levin, H. and Rosen, R. (2012), *The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth* in association with Civic Enterprises for the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

[11] Ibid.

[12] U.S. Congressional Research Service. (2009), *Disconnected Youth: A Look at 16- to 24-Year Olds Who Are Not Working or in School* by Adrienne L. Fernandes & Thomas Gabe.

- Youth with high-school diplomas and GEDs but who are disconnected from postsecondary education and unable to gain a foothold in the labor market.[13]

Figure 2: Opportunity Youth Population by Segment



Source: Rosch, J., Brinson, D., and Hassel, B. (2008), *Youth at High Risk of Disconnection: Disconnected Youth Data Update*, prepared by Public Impact for the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Across these three primary segments, there are important sub-populations of Opportunity Youth that can be defined by the specific challenges and barriers they face. For example, sub-populations include returning veterans, teen parents, immigrant youth, homeless and/or incarcerated youth, and those with mental or physical health issues, among others. At the same time, degree of preparation for work or school and the ability to take advantage of career and education opportunities are key factors to understanding the unique needs of Opportunity Youth.[14] For example, among youth who have dropped out of high school, there are those who are both near and far from graduation (i.e., youth that dropped out of high school when they were very near to graduation and lacking only a few credits or those who dropped out of high school in their first or second year with very few credits completed); while among youth with a high school diploma or GED, some have completed apprenticeships or other certifications that may increase their "marketable" skills to employers. These sub-populations vary greatly by community and are critical to understand in order to help identify the types of services and supports that may have the greatest impact on reconnecting a community's population of Opportunity Youth.[15]

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[13] Many practitioners in the field further subdivide Opportunity Youth without a high school degree into "old and far," "old and close," and "young and far" segments based on age and distance from degree completion; this is an important designation for developing programming and pathways for this population.

[14] The White House Council for Community Solutions has developed a segmentation of Opportunity Youth that outlines four large sub-groups of the population based upon their degree of preparation and ability to take up opportunities. See Appendix B for more detail.

[15] There are several resources that can provide a rough estimate of these subpopulations, or of the number of youth in general that face these challenges. According to a 2008 report by Public Impact, among youth "at-risk" of disconnection between the ages of 14 and 18, there were 91,000 incarcerated youth, 136,000 who were in foster care and had dropped

How Youth Become Disconnected from Education and Career

Aliyah was in the 10th grade when she left school to care for her mother who suffered from congestive heart failure. As her mother's health improved, Aliyah re-enrolled but was forced to leave again as her mother's health declined. While she was home with her mother, Aliyah got a call from the school counselor who told her she was so far behind that it would be a "waste of time" to come back. Before her mother died, she made Aliyah promise to pursue her education. Aliyah's grandmother helped her to get back on track and enroll in a program for high school dropouts, where she ultimately earned her high school diploma, got a number of trade certifications, and embarked on a career in a field that reflects her passion for science.

While she was home with her mother, Aliyah got a call from the school counselor who told her she was so far behind that it would be a "waste of time" to come back.

Opportunity Youth can become disconnected from education or career opportunities at various ages and stages in their lives and for a variety of reasons (see Figure 3). Like Aliyah, many youth may also drop out of and re-enter education or the workforce multiple times in their lives. These youth can face personal challenges that cause them to become disconnected from education and career opportunities, including lacking role models or positive social and emotional support, having feelings of "not belonging" or being unwanted, or having family or parenting responsibilities.

Too often, the challenges that youth face relate to a failure of the systems designed to support them. For instance, there can be a mismatch between available education options and a youth's needs and goals, policies that focus disproportionately on discipline over rehabilitation, a lack of special services that allow youth to remain engaged (such as childcare or transportation), ineffective links between education systems, or educational disruptions caused by involvement with the foster care or juvenile justice system coupled with a deficiency of on-ramps provided to get youth back on track. Understanding these challenges and loss points is an important step for communities as they consider how to re-engage local Opportunity Youth.

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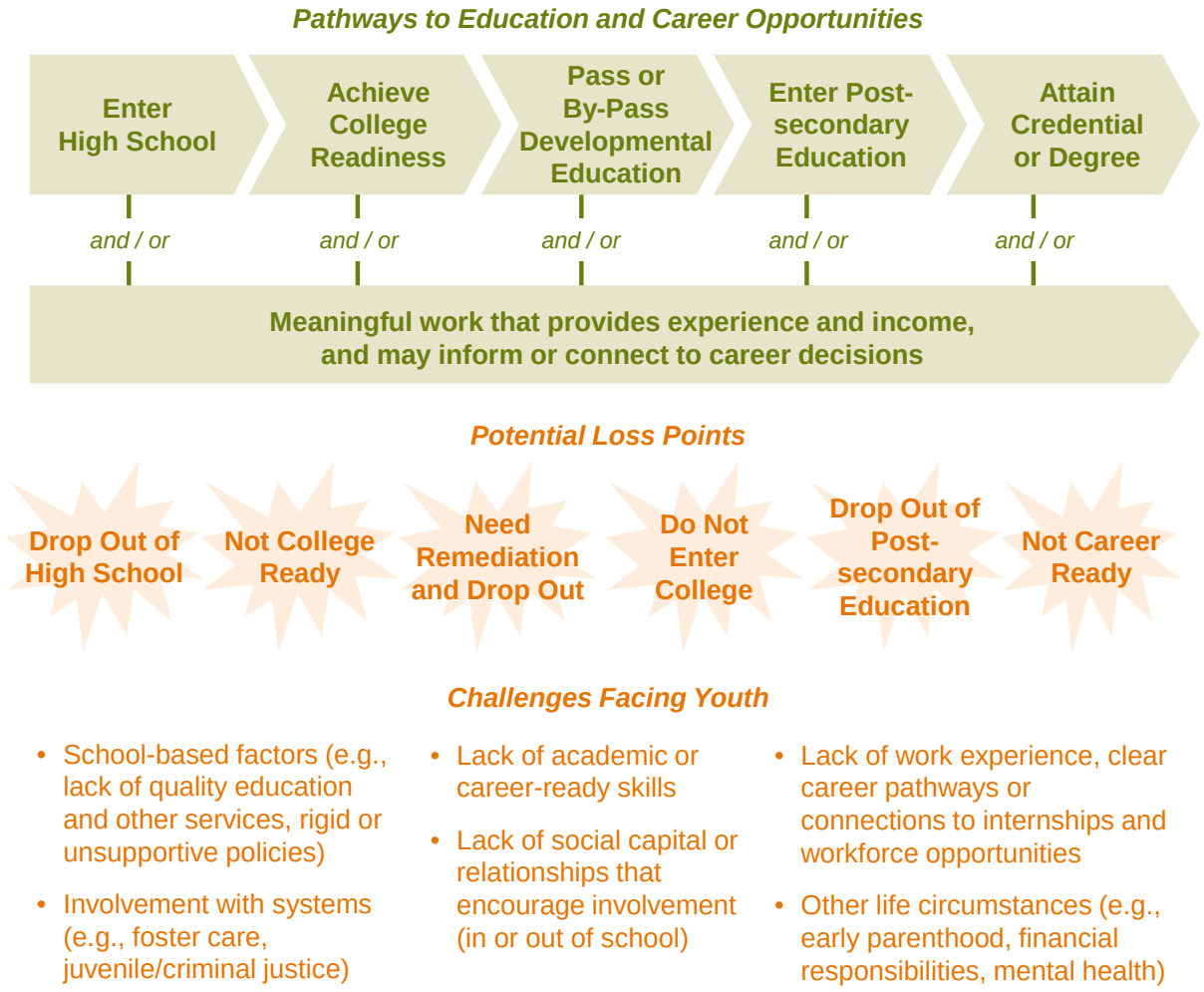
out of school, and 129,000 who were teen mothers and had dropped out of school. There were an additional 474,000 incarcerated youth between the ages of 19 and 24; of these, 52% had less than a high school degree, 31% had a GED, 14% had a high school diploma, and 4% had at least some college. Congressional Research Service data from 2009 showed that 429,000 Opportunity Youth aged 16 to 24 had family caregiver responsibilities but no children of their own; 57,000 had a child but no additional family caregiver responsibilities, and an additional 279,000 had both a child and additional family caregiver responsibilities. Source: U.S. Congressional Research Service. (2009) *Disconnected Youth: A Look at 16- to 24-Year Olds Who Are Not Working or in School* by Adrienne L. Fernandes & Thomas Gabe.

Figure 3: Loss Points and Challenges for Opportunity Youth



Note: While this diagram suggests a linear path through the Education to Career Pipeline, in reality it is often more complex. Opportunity Youth can leave or fall out of the pipeline and re-engage multiple times in their lives and, ideally, connections to the workforce should be embedded throughout the pipeline.
Source: Adaptation of Jobs for the Future Education and Workforce Agenda

What Opportunity Youth Need to Attain Education and Career Success

Multiple Pathways Are Critical for Reconnection

The individual challenges and needs of Opportunity Youth vary greatly, and so must the on-ramps Opportunity Youth take to reconnect to education and career pathways. A 16-year-old teen mother who dropped out and is looking to finish her high school diploma and earn a career credential in the medical field has different needs than a 22-year-old recent immigrant seeking to improve his literacy and work in construction. Communities must design multiple pathways to success for Opportunity Youth that address the various challenges they face. At the same time, stories from youth and practitioners in the field point to four common components needed to develop effective pathways toward education and career success: re-engagement, educational momentum, connection to career, and youth development.[16]

Re-engagement. Successful re-engagement begins by identifying youth that have been disconnected from education and career on a local level to understand the specific needs of the population, followed by working closely with youth to connect them to programs and supports that will help them surmount their individual challenges. The Pharr–San Juan–Alamo Independent School District leveraged school district data to identify youth who had dropped out of high school and to help assess their degree of preparation for the workforce. The data revealed that a large percentage of youth who had dropped out of high school were near graduating, but had failed to complete their final coursework. District staff then used community-based efforts, including door-to-door outreach by local leaders, to engage these youth and connect them to the College, Career, and Technology Academy (CCTA), a college-connected dropout recovery school the district created in partnership with South Texas College, where they would be able to complete their high school diploma while earning college credits.[17]

Assessing a youth's individual needs, including literacy and education level, life goals, and the specific challenges or barriers they may have faced in their life, is paramount to connecting them with the appropriate services and programs. At Philadelphia's Re-Engagement Center, clients are welcomed by interns who provide peer support, then interviewed by Re-engagement Center specialists to determine if problems like depression, anxiety, or hyperactivity require referrals. These specialists, from the School

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[16] Note: While this paper does not seek to address fundamental needs in education, it must be acknowledged that the ideal environment would be one in which youth never become disconnected. Preventing students from becoming Opportunity Youth requires significant shifts in our education systems, some of which are included in the approaches outlined here and others must be addressed through broader education reform efforts.

[17] Le, C. (2012), *Launching Early College Districtwide: Pharr–San Juan–Alamo's "College for All" Strategy,* Jobs for the Future Early College Design Services and Educate Texas.

Allen, L.. and Wolfe, R. (2010), *Back on Track to College: A Texas School District Leverages State Policy to Put Dropouts on the Path to Success,* Jobs for the Future.

District of Philadelphia and the city's Department of Human Services, can pull up all of a youth's records through a computer system that has integrated data from the schools and city agencies. The specialists work with the young people to decide on the most appropriate program for them. Understanding the characteristics of local Opportunity Youth is an essential first step to ensuring appropriate re-engagement strategies are developed that appeal to and meet the unique needs of the population.

Educational Momentum. Programs and interventions around education vary based on youth's age and level of educational attainment, but should include reaching early and frequent education milestones in addition to attaining longer term education goals such as completion of a high school degree, GED, and postsecondary credential or degree. For instance, the Coalition for Responsible Community Development (CRCD), YouthBuild Charter School of California, and Los Angeles Trade Technical College have partnered to create a charter school called the CRCD Academy that offers free classes to students between the ages of 16 and 24 to help them obtain their high school diploma while also gaining college credits. In addition to working towards their high school diploma, earning college credits helps youth realize they are "college material" and encourages them to continue to progress in their education. Jobs for the Future (JFF) has developed a model called Back on Track Through College that is designed to drive the growth and adoption of an aligned pathway through the first year of postsecondary education for Opportunity Youth in many more schools and programs across the country. Back on Track draws on lessons learned from partnering with YouthBuild USA, the National Youth Employment Coalition, and the Corps Network to support a set of postsecondary success pilot sites, as well as from JFF's deep experience working with off-track students and former dropouts in Philadelphia, New York City, Denver, and Pharr-San Juan-Alamo, among others. The model outlines three overlapping program phases and accompanying features that prepare young people for the intensity of postsecondary academics, support their transition to postsecondary education, and ensure they complete the first year of their postsecondary education. In the development of such pathways, a critical component is the design of a customized plan that outlines an educational pathway suited to the student's age, skills, and goals and that helps to connect youth with the resources, courses, and credential programs they need to be successful.

Connection to Career. Creating clear linkages to career opportunities is essential to engaging Opportunity Youth. These youth often face significant challenges to employment due to a variety of reasons, such as lack of a high school credential or limited connections in the job market. Privileged youth are often able to connect to the workforce through informal networks maintained by their parents and formal networks created by the schools that these youth attend. For Opportunity Youth, however, such networks often do not exist and so initiatives are increasingly involving local businesses, colleges, and others to provide training and experiences that connect youth to long-term career opportunities within their communities. Communities can utilize labor market data and partner with the business community to identify and help prepare youth for relevant local employment opportunities. Jobs for the Future's Counseling to Careers program provides schools, CBOs, and community colleges with the tools to better connect students with programs of study that align with their interests and with regional employment needs. Providing a chance for Opportunity Youth to acquire experience and skillsets through internships, apprenticeships, or jobs allows them to begin to build long-term careers. For example, Year Up takes youth with a high school diploma or GED that have been disconnected from the workforce through an

intensive, one-year program that prepares them for careers and includes job skills training, postsecondary education, mentoring, and internship opportunities. Year Up works closely with businesses such as Microsoft, State Street Bank, and Fidelity Investments to offer quality corporate internship opportunities to Opportunity Youth that often lead to future employment. Similar to JFF, Year Up also ensures that its training programs are aligned with the needs of local employers to create relevant opportunities for youth that lead to real labor market pay off. As these programs highlight, connecting youth to career opportunities is central to any effort focused on Opportunity Youth.

Youth Development. There are many reasons youth become disconnected from education: lack of quality schools, inadequate social supports, no meaningful connections to adults and peers, fragile family structures, limited services, and a lack of youth engagement in developing solutions meant to address the complexities of their daily lives. The shortcomings of systems and supports leave Opportunity Youth feeling unwanted or a burden, and the relevance of education to their lives and future becomes unclear. Addressing the social and emotional needs of these youth is critical to helping them develop confidence and prepare them for the workforce. Many national programs such as YouthBuild USA and local initiatives like Improved Solutions for Urban Systems (ISUS), a partner in the National Youth Employment Coalition's highly successful Postsecondary Success Initiative, credit improved outcomes to exposure and experiences that allow youth to discover their passions and goals and the supportive relationships of adults and peers that encourage youth to overcome challenges. YouthBuild programs are 6 to 24 months in duration and enable youth to work full-time toward their high school diploma or GED, receive job-skills training, and develop a sense of self-worth by succeeding and failing in a supportive environment. Along with a strong focus on support and mentoring, the program contains a heavy emphasis on providing leadership training and creating leadership opportunities for Opportunity Youth. By deepening youth's skills and knowledge, these efforts enable youth to develop stronger self-confidence, self-belief, and a desire and capacity to do something meaningful for themselves, their families and their communities. Moreover, these programs have created strong mechanisms for elevating Opportunity Youth as a part of the solution and as a key thought partner in program design through youth leadership councils and youth-led programming.

Across these four components, youth and practitioners interviewed for this paper raised a number of considerations that lay the foundation for designing comprehensive strategies for reconnecting the diverse sub-populations of Opportunity Youth and for scaling up multiple pathways aimed at reconnecting Opportunity Youth to education and career success in communities. Firstly, **sustained customized support** that provides personalized guidance is perhaps the most essential consideration to help youth progress along education to career pathways in a way that makes sense for them and their context. As the challenges many youth face are complex, it is also important that communities develop pathways that include a **comprehensive set of services** that meet a holistic set of needs from academic support to social and emotional support to career guidance. Similarly, transitions between systems (e.g., K-12 to postsecondary, juvenile justice to K-12 or probation, aging out of foster care, etc.) are places where youth can drop out and where supports need to be specifically designed to **bridge systems**. These supports can include connecting youth with postsecondary opportunities, job training, and internships early in pathways or adopting a "no wrong door" approach to coordinated services for Opportunity Youth, where

youth are connected with the services they need regardless of the program or system they initially contact. All of the systems that are meant to serve Opportunity Youth need to align around positive education and employment outcomes.

Systemic Barriers Hinder Reconnection and Success for Opportunity Youth

Opportunity Youth have hope for their futures, and demonstrate persistence in pursuing their future potential despite the challenges they face. A representative national survey of several hundred Opportunity Youth found that 73 percent are "very confident" or "hopeful" that they will be able to achieve their goals related to education and career and 54 percent of Opportunity Youth say they are looking for full-time work.[18] Although young people who leave school before attaining a diploma may wait years to find a "second chance" opportunity, 60 percent eventually get a high school credential, most often through completing a GED. Many of these young people later enroll in two- or four-year colleges, but fewer than one in ten earn a postsecondary degree.[19]

The challenges these youth face are exacerbated by systemic barriers to re-engagement with education and career opportunities. These barriers include: (1) the fragmentation and complexity of navigating existing systems, (2) an inadequate supply of quality pathways, services, programs, and on-ramps for Opportunity Youth, and (3) the lack of funding directed to re-engagement of and support for Opportunity Youth. Too often the systems that should support Opportunity Youth end up creating road blocks and dead ends because they are disconnected from one another. Communities need to connect and refocus these systems, hand-in-hand with Opportunity Youth, to align polices and resources to favorably impact the life trajectories of this population. A public policy agenda that addresses these systemic barriers and focuses on Opportunity Youth at the local, state, and federal levels is an important complement to improved coordination at the community level.

Systems Are Fragmented and Difficult to Navigate

Systems and stakeholders positioned to serve Opportunity Youth are often unaligned, uncoordinated, or ineffective (see Figure 4). Currently, many youth are expected to navigate a complex maze of systems, services, and programs as they complete their education and prepare for a career. The greater the number of challenges youth face, the harder and more confusing this navigation becomes. For example, one individual may need to maintain contact with a probation officer, access tutoring or counseling supports, coordinate transferring to a new school, *and* chart a course toward a postsecondary credential—all before considering how to afford college and ultimately how to begin a successful career.

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[18] Bridgeland, J. and Milano, J. (2011). *Opportunity Road: The Promise and Challenge of America's Forgotten Youth*. Washington, DC: Civic Enterprises.

[19] Almeida, C., Johnson, C., and Steinberg, A. (2006). *Making Good on a Promise: What Policymakers Can Do to Support the Educational Persistence of Dropouts.*

In addition, the various systems and organizations that support Opportunity Youth may not be focused on education and career outcomes. For example, the juvenile justice system may be oriented towards strict compliance rather than on reconnecting youth to education and work. Greater alignment around improved outcomes for Opportunity Youth involved with the juvenile justice system could include: (1) coordination between juvenile justice, education, mental health, substance abuse, and child welfare systems to ensure integrated high-quality services for youth and to facilitate successful re-entry (e.g., developing guidelines to implement strengths-based, developmentally appropriate education curriculum for system-involved youth that is aligned with state education standards), and (2) ensuring prompt enrollment in school for youth who are exiting the juvenile justice system.

The Quality and Availability of Existing Programs Are Insufficient

There are also challenges associated with the quality and availability of existing programs for Opportunity Youth. Involvement with a recovery or reconnection program is not a guarantee of positive outcomes or a long-term career. Access to programs providing high-quality, comprehensive supports and a transparent pathway to the future is a challenge. This challenge is particularly felt by older youth for whom there is a dearth of programming focused on meeting their needs. For example, there are far too few Adult Basic Education programs, and those that exist are often not successful in creating educational momentum, especially for young adults. Studies have shown that less than 3 percent of adults who started in adult basic education moved into credit courses and completed a community college associate degree.[20] Practitioners note the high demand for and short supply of programs that provide wraparound support, linkages to postsecondary education, training and jobs, and income through stipends that incentivize further training and education.

Existing Funding Streams Do Not Target Opportunity Youth

Many communities that have developed some programming for this population lack the resources or funding streams to effectively serve broad segments of Opportunity Youth and to scale programs that are working. This is partly due to constraints on how funding can be utilized, which limits the provision of support services, recuperative schools, or dropout recovery programs that are best positioned to improve the outcomes of this population. For example, funding for older Opportunity Youth populations is a particular challenge. These youth age out of eligibility for state education per pupil dollars, which is often one of the largest funding sources available to programs that support Opportunity Youth. Moreover, many states and districts contract out alternative education programs to community providers which frequently receive far fewer per pupil dollars than traditional schools. Yet these providers often serve students who have experienced gaps in their schooling and need greater academic and social supports. A small number of states and communities have become more flexible in how funds can be used or have increased the maximum age for per pupil dollars, improving services and programs for Opportunity

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[20]Prince, D. and Jenkins, D. (2005). *Building Pathways to Success for Low-Skill Adult Students: Lessons for Community College Policy and Practice from a Statewide Longitudinal Tracking Study*. New York: Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University.

Youth.[21] Yet even in those communities, funding is often inadequate. In a time of tightening purse-strings, a collaborative approach can be critical for blending funding streams and ensuring dollars are directed toward initiatives that achieve real, measurable impact for this population.

Collective Impact Is Needed to Help Communities Reconnect Opportunity Youth

One approach that communities can take to address these challenges is to better align and coordinate the fragmented systems, programs, and services that touch Opportunity Youth (see Figure 5). A collective impact approach, where cross-sector stakeholders come together with youth to collaboratively identify and solve a complex social problem, poses an important opportunity for improving outcomes for the 6.7 million Opportunity Youth across the country. A collective impact approach allows multiple community stakeholders to explicitly prioritize the improvement of educational and workforce outcomes for Opportunity Youth and then work together to identify, re-engage, and connect these youth, putting them on a path to a successful life and career (see What Is Collective Impact?).

A collective impact approach allows multiple community stakeholders to work together to identify, re-engage, and connect Opportunity Youth, putting them on a path to a successful life and career.

The coordination and alignment inherent in collective impact can be leveraged to strengthen outreach and re-engagement efforts; differentiate complementary and reinforcing efforts; identify programmatic gaps that need to be filled; enable the sharing of information about individuals to prevent further disconnection; align local, state, and federal public policy efforts; and inform adjustments to resource and funding flows. Developing a common agenda for Opportunity Youth includes outlining a clear vision for change, how the community intends to get there and how community partners can work together with each other and with youth through mutually reinforcing activities to support improved outcomes for Opportunity Youth. Collective impact also enables regular measurement of key outcomes to track progress and inform practice over time. The use of data can inform communities as to which programs and activities are getting strong results. As stakeholders align their activities and avoid duplication of programs or services, there is increased leverage and funding flows become more efficient.

[21] For instance, Texas allocates per-pupil funding based on average daily attendance (ADA) for recovered students immediately, without the one-year (or even two-year) delay found in many other states. House Bill 1137 supported the efforts through its authorization of state funding for school districts to collect ADA to help young people up to age 26 receive high school diplomas. Source: Allen, L. and Wolfe, R. (2010), *Back on Track to College: A Texas School District Leverages State Policy to Put Dropouts on the Path to Success,* Jobs for the Future.

Figure 4: Fragmentation and Lack of Alignment between Systems with Potential to Positively Impact Opportunity Youth

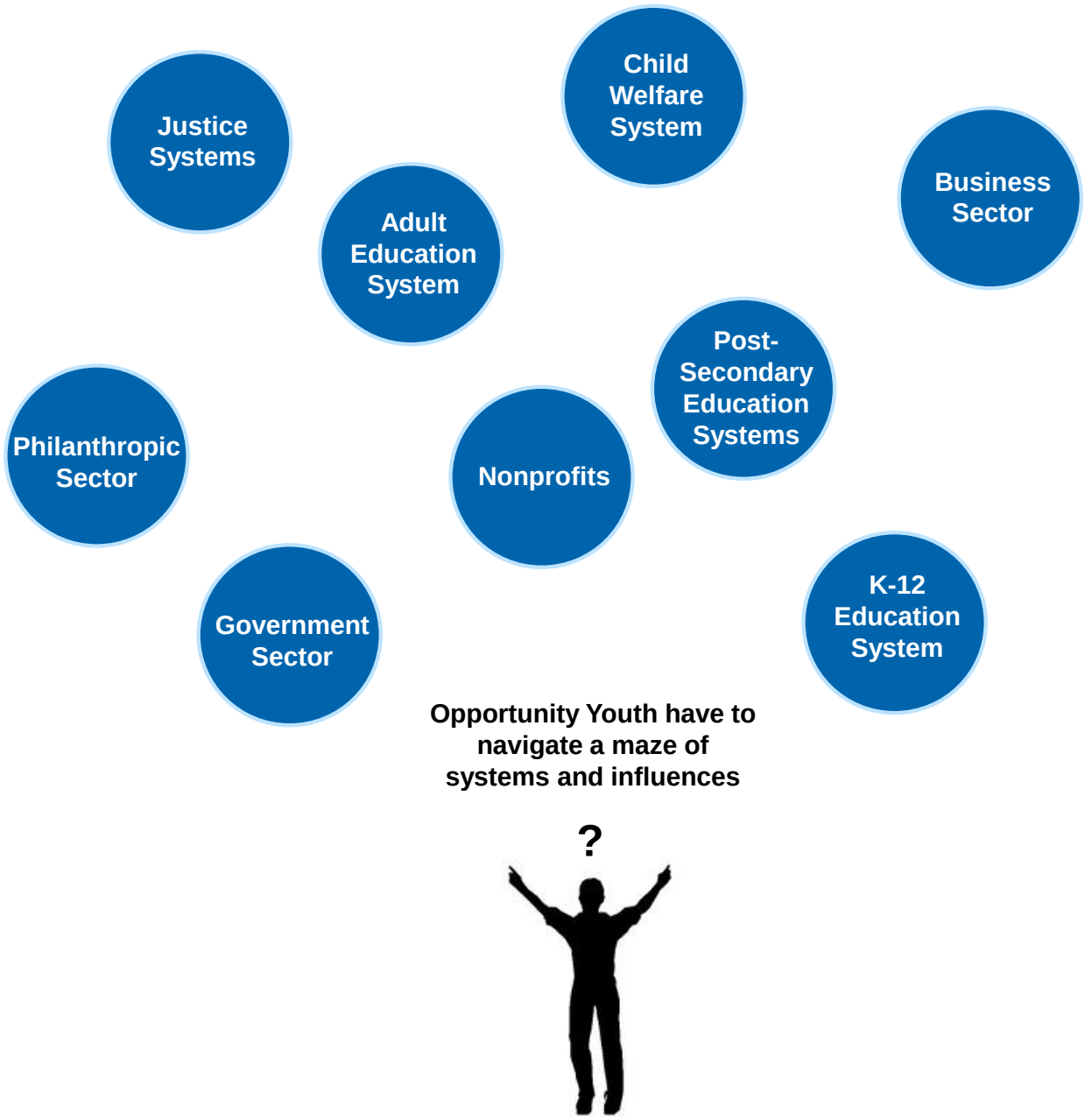

Figure 5: A Vision for Systems Aligned to Achieve Better Outcomes for Opportunity Youth

WHAT IS COLLECTIVE IMPACT?

Collective impact is an approach to solving societal problems based on the idea that no organization acting alone can solve complex issues.[22] A collective impact approach requires the commitment of a group of organizations—including nonprofits, government, business, and philanthropy—to coordinate their efforts around a clearly defined goal. All collective impact initiatives share five key components: a common agenda, shared measurement, mutually-reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support.

The Five Components of Collective Impact

- Common Agenda: All participants have a shared vision for change, including a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions.
- Shared Measurement: Collecting data and measuring results consistently across all participants ensures efforts remain aligned and participants hold each other accountable.
- Mutually Reinforcing Activities: Participant activities must be differentiated while still being coordinated through a mutually reinforcing plan of action.
- Continuous Communication: Consistent and open communication is needed across the many players to build trust, assure mutual objectives, and create common motivation.
- Backbone Support: Creating and managing collective impact requires a separate organization(s) with staff and a specific set of skills to serve as the backbone for the entire initiative and coordinate participating organizations and agencies.

In collective impact, stakeholders understand that social problems touch many different systems and cannot be solved in isolation by a single organization or program. Collective impact leads to increased cross-sector alignment and learning, with the corporate and government sectors included as essential partners. Progress depends on building relationships and trust while working toward the same goal and measuring the same things. Organizations actively coordinate their action, measure progress, and share lessons learned.[23] The final section of this report focuses on how communities can lay the foundation for developing these components and launch a collective impact effort to improve educational and career success for Opportunity Youth. While what is outlined here is typical of many collective impact projects, each effort must be customized to the local context. Therefore, it is important to note that some of these steps and key elements could be sequenced or executed differently in order to better suit the needs of a particular community.

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[22] Kania, J. and Kramer, M. (2011), "Collective Impact," *Stanford Social Innovation Review.*

[23] Hanleybrown, F., Kania, J., and Kramer, M. (2012), "Channeling Change: Making Collective Impact Work," *Stanford Social Innovation Review.*

PHILADELPHIA'S PROJECT U-TURN

Philadelphia's Project U-Turn is the only prominent initiative today that demonstrates the launch and implementation of a comprehensive collective impact approach for Opportunity Youth leading to measurable impact. Established in 2004 out of the work of the Youth Transition Funders Group, Project U-Turn is based on the early and sustained efforts of Philadelphia's Workforce Investment Act Youth Council. Today, the initiative has evolved into a broad partnership involving representatives from the school district, public agencies, philanthropy, community-based organizations, parents, and youth, with the Philadelphia Youth Network (PYN), a nonprofit youth workforce development intermediary, providing backbone support and coordination.

The structure of the initiative is loose-knit; there is no formal Memorandum of Understanding. This enables Project U-Turn to use an "inside-outside" strategy, where stakeholders can work collaboratively "inside" the initiative and still fulfill their individual mandates, as needed, "outside" the campaign. A broad cross-sector steering committee oversees the initiative, youth are actively engaged in decision-making, and targeted working groups address challenges through specific strategies. These structures allow for continuous communication and the alignment of mutually-reinforcing activities, such as the creation of the Accelerated Schools, development of a Re-engagement Center, creation of an education support center inside the child welfare system, and establishment of pathways that include postsecondary and career connections.

Project U-Turn charts progress and learns from its efforts through the use of shared measures, including high school graduation rate, percentage of 9th graders on track for on-time graduation, number of high quality seats in the system for off-track youth, and dollars resourced toward the effort. To inform this work, Project U-Turn commissioned ground-breaking research that merged data from multiple systems (e.g., child welfare system, juvenile justice system, education systems) in order to understand the dimensions of the dropout crisis in Philadelphia and to craft strategies for resolving it. To date, the initiative has seen measurable progress across several of its key metrics, including:

- High School Graduation Rate: Gradual, but steady growth in Philadelphia's high school graduation rate (a 12 percent increase since its launch in 2004).
- Number of High Quality Seats in the System for Off-Track Youth: Rising number of programs for Opportunity Youth throughout the city (the number of Accelerated Schools has grown from one to thirteen in just five years).
- Dollars Resourced Toward the Effort: Growth in funding for efforts targeting Opportunity Youth (leveraging hundreds of millions of dollars from an initial starting grant of $275,000).

Project U-Turn offers a powerful example of a collective impact approach specifically focused on Opportunity Youth, and serves as a roadmap for communities across the nation to embark on this work.

How to Launch a Collective Impact Effort to Increase Success for Opportunity Youth

Initiating Action

Lessons from the field highlight four key steps that help lay the foundation for a successful collective impact effort for Opportunity Youth: (1) identifying influential champions and forming a cross-sector group, (2) scoping and segmenting the population to define the problem, (3) creating urgency and making the case for change, and (4) establishing financial resources to launch the effort. Having these elements in place will not only help key stakeholders understand the urgency of the problem but will catalyze a coalition of actors to engage in the effort over time.

Identifying Influential Champions and Forming Cross-Sector Group

One of the most critical factors in initiating collective impact is identifying one or more influential champion(s) who has the credibility necessary to bring CEO-level cross-sector leaders together around Opportunity Youth and the knowledge necessary to advise the work effectively. Existing efforts have noted how important these champions are in the early stages of collective impact, and suggested that those who are deeply respected and trusted at the local level are best positioned to play this role. This could include, but is not limited to, mayors, heads of the community college or K-12 education systems, funders, employers, prominent nonprofit leaders, and, importantly, representatives of the Opportunity Youth population themselves. Once identified, these players can form a critical advisory group for the project. For example, Mary Jean Ryan is the Executive Director of the Community Center for Education Results, the backbone organization that supports the Road Map Project, a cradle-to-college education effort in South Seattle and South King County that recently initiated a collective impact approach to target outcomes for Opportunity Youth. Ryan has leveraged her experience and expertise in the economic development and education fields to bring together key stakeholders across the region. She, along with several other prominent local leaders, has played an instrumental role in reaching out to key stakeholders, including district superintendents, college presidents, elected officials, local businesses, and leaders of community-based organizations, to secure a broad base of ever-expanding support for the Road Map Project and to create an advisory body that provides ongoing guidance to the project.

In addition to having credibility in the community, it is important that champions be perceived as interested in cultivating change, rather than receiving credit personally or for their own organizations. The Philadelphia Youth Network (PYN) championed the Project U-Turn campaign because of genuine interest in creating transformative change for youth in Philadelphia. Creating this change requires PYN to play the role of “backseat leader” by positioning its partners to take credit for advancing the work. This cements its partners’ ownership of the effort and helps to ensure sustainability rather than positioning PYN as driving its own agenda.

Scoping and Segmenting the Population to Define the Problem

Conducting data analysis to determine the size and composition of the local Opportunity Youth population is crucial to define the problem facing a community and to identify which strategies and stakeholders may be part of the solution. For example, if the majority of the population is comprised of high school dropouts with only a few credits needed to earn their high school diploma, a relatively short-term dropout recovery and academic acceleration program may help youth to complete a diploma or GED and bridge to postsecondary education. On the other hand, if the community has a significant proportion of English language learners who are far from obtaining the credits they need to earn a high school diploma, additional resources may be best directed towards English language fluency programs, or programs that combine language skills with technical skills such as the Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) program in Washington State. Similarly, if the population includes a large number of youth who have been incarcerated, involving the justice system in the collective impact effort becomes critical. Communities will need to better understand the range of Opportunity Youth sub-populations in order to develop an appropriate set of stakeholders and solutions for achieving impact.

Experts suggest that initial analysis to scope the population (i.e., determine the size and composition) and make the case for action can be fairly high-level, and distinguish these efforts from later, in-depth data work that is used to inform the specific design of new pathways, establish shared metrics, and track the progress of the collective impact initiative. Research exists that offers a national perspective of the scope, segmentation, and economic impact of the opportunity youth population, such as new research by Columbia University that provides information on the economic impact of opportunity youth on states and local communities.[24] Stakeholders can also piece together data from a variety of existing sources, including the K-12 education system, foster care system, juvenile and criminal justice system, the U.S. Census and American Community Survey, community college system, adult basic education programs, workforce and labor systems, surveys of local youth, focus groups, or other sources focused on specific populations. For example, the Boston Private Industry Council (PIC), which convenes the Youth Transitions Task Force, partnered with Northeastern University's Center for Labor Market Studies to blend data from the U.S. Census, American Community Survey, National Student Clearinghouse, the Boston Public Schools' database, and the PIC's own records of contact with youth in order to initially scope its target population and set broad impact goals. Specifically, the data analysis examined the number of out-of-school and out-of-work youth in Boston along the following dimensions: age (all, 16-19, and 20-24), ethnicity (White, Black, Asian, Hispanic, Other), educational attainment (no high school diploma, high school diploma/GED, some college, bachelor or higher degree), and income level (poor, near poor, low income). The initial analysis in 2006 reported that each year, some 3,000 students graduate from Boston Public Schools, while roughly half that many drop out; and that dropouts in Boston are disproportionately Black, Latino, low income, and male.[25] Understanding the size and composition of

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[24] Including *The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth* (2012) by Clive Belfield, Henry Levin, and Rachel Rosen; and *The Economics of Investing in Opportunity Youth* (2012) by Clive Belfield and Henry Levin (forthcoming).

[25] Boston Youth Transitions Task Force (May 2006). *Too Big To Be Seen: The Invisible Dropout Crisis in Boston and America*.

the local Opportunity Youth population is critical to informing the community of the challenge at hand and determining how to address it.

Creating Urgency and Making the Case for Change

Creating urgency for change typically stems from a community's understanding of the problem in a local context, frustration with current approaches, and a call to action from key stakeholders, including funders, businesses, and other leaders. Lessons learned from existing initiatives aimed at supporting Opportunity Youth highlight the importance of using data to make the case for targeting this population. This includes: (1) community-specific data that highlights the severity of the local problem, (2) findings from national reports that make an economic case for targeting Opportunity Youth, and (3) evidence from successful programs that effectively serve this population, such as the significant improvements in youth outcomes that have been made in Philadelphia or districts in the Rio Grande Valley. Different stakeholders have different motivations and interests, and respond to different methods of creating a sense of urgency. For example, stakeholders could be motivated by the potential to build a skilled labor force, enhance the community's reputation and standing, reduce the economic costs and taxpayer's burden of Opportunity Youth, grow the local economy or support social justice. Frustrations stemming from a lack of progress or success with previous approaches can also be harnessed to create an interest in and excitement for adopting a new approach like collective impact.

Project U-Turn used clear and careful communication of data on high school dropouts to make the case for change among influential stakeholders, including district superintendents and the mayor. Creating urgency for change relied on both having the data and using it as a rallying cry, where information was shared in forums and formats that garnered the attention of key leaders. As leaders grew to understand the nature of the problem and cost to the city, and began to trust that they would be given space and support to create the necessary change, momentum grew for a new solution and more stakeholders joined the campaign.

Establishing Financial Resources

Securing an initial financial commitment to launch the collective impact effort is important for building and maintaining early momentum. These resources are needed to fund efforts to scope the population, create urgency for change, and establish a collective impact infrastructure. Potential funding sources for launching Opportunity Youth initiatives include local and national philanthropic foundations, businesses, local United Ways, K-12 systems, and postsecondary institutions among others. Early funding for collective impact initiatives often comes from a local funder with a strong interest in and commitment to the community. Project U-Turn was founded through a $275,000 grant from the Youth Transition Funders Group (YTFG) as one of five demonstration sites addressing dropout rates through community collaboratives, and supplemented with $600,000 in funding for its first two years from the William Penn Foundation, a member of YTFG based locally in Philadelphia and dedicated to improving the quality of life in the Greater Philadelphia region.

In addition to securing initial funding to support a collective impact effort, communities can better align and leverage existing resources to support Opportunity Youth, including "blending" funding from multiple resource streams to support their work. For example, the Forum for Youth Investment, which helps community and state collaboratives achieve collective impact for children and youth, is working with four members of its Children's Cabinet Network in Colorado, Nevada, Iowa, and Florida to develop partnerships with state and local government to align policies to serve Opportunity Youth. In Florida, the Children's Cabinet and the Children's Services Council of Broward County are working together to blend funds from state and federal programs at the local level—including the Workforce Investment Act, 21st Century, Supplemental Education Services, and local Summer Youth Employment program—to provide services and supports that increase high school graduation rates and enable youth to successfully transition to postsecondary education or employment.

Nationally, private and government funding for these efforts is on the rise. The Aspen Institute recently launched the Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund to support community projects that help youth make connections to education and employment, with initial support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, Bloomberg Philanthropies, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, and the Annie E. Casey Foundation, as well as Nancy and Miles Rubin. The fund will provide grants of up to $500,000 each to ten or more collaboratives, and will require local communities to match fund resources, ensuring up to $1 million to help achieve better outcomes for Opportunity Youth. Competitive government grants, such as the Social Innovation Fund, Promise Neighborhoods, and Choice Neighborhoods, are also playing a catalytic role in seeding community collaboratives and bringing evidence-based solutions to scale. President Obama's 2013 budget includes Performance Partnership Pilots for Disconnected Youth, a provision to allow selected states and communities to use money from different federal funding streams to pilot innovative approaches that could include collective impact efforts. Performance Partnership Pilots are being developed to test effective models and uses for flexible funding at a local level, where communities will have access to a total of $130 million of existing federal funding. Collective impact initiatives should consider opportunities to advocate for policies at the federal, state, and local levels that continue to increase funding available for Opportunity Youth programs.

Each of these elements—establishing the target population for the work, having a respected and credible champion(s), a sense of urgency for change, and committed financial resources—contribute to a strong foundation for collective impact. With these pieces in place, an initiative is well-positioned to move forward and organize the community and align multiple local systems for action.

Organizing for Impact

Moving from building the foundation for collective impact to organizing for impact is a pivotal transition. Once a community has the initial momentum around a collective impact approach to supporting Opportunity Youth, it is important to identify *how* a community is going to collectively make change. There are several key steps that help to guide collective action and improvement, including reaching out to key community stakeholders, creating a common agenda, identifying shared measures, and developing a backbone organization for coordination and support. These steps lay the foundation for identifying critical pathways for Opportunity Youth and ultimately improving educational and career outcomes for this population.

Reaching Out to Key Community Stakeholders

As Project U-Turn illustrates, building urgency for change helps champions and other supporters reach out to key players across systems and organizations to bring them to the table. Relevant stakeholders for Opportunity Youth could include the youth themselves; K-12 education systems; community and four-year colleges; vocational and technical schools; out-of-school programs; justice and court systems; law enforcement; municipal, county, or state leaders; the foster care system; the Departments of Health or Child Welfare; local employers; chambers of commerce; foundations; community-based organizations; workforce development organizations; adult basic education systems; charter or recuperative schools; and others. The initial scoping of the Opportunity Youth population is useful for determining who needs to be involved to ensure that the local organizations that touch Opportunity Youth are included. Similar to efforts around creating urgency for change, outreach plans should consider the interests and motivations of stakeholders to engage in the initiative. An important theme emphasized by sites that are engaged in this work is the need for the direct involvement of the community members and group(s) most affected. The authentic engagement of Opportunity Youth helps to ensure that their knowledge, opinions, and input

inform and improve the efficacy and usefulness of the change strategies developed. This engagement can take many forms, from youth inclusion on the advisory committee, to the development of an Opportunity Youth council or similar body that meets regularly as part of this effort, to the use of youth surveys and focus groups for gathering input. The intent should be both to garner youth input and to build a next generation of leaders.

Some types of stakeholders (e.g., community colleges looking to increase enrollment and persistence, businesses looking to improve quality and stability of labor force) may have clear interests for involvement that can be leveraged. ISUS, which runs charter schools in Dayton, Ohio, and provides real-life job skills training (e.g., in construction, nursing, etc.) to dropouts and court-involved youth, won support from a variety of community stakeholders—including the Rotary Club of Dayton, community colleges, local hospitals, and the Dayton Foundation—by understanding their interests and motivations for involvement. For instance, a partnership with ISUS appealed to the Rotary Club of Dayton because ISUS students help to rehabilitate blighted neighborhoods and build quality low income housing. Similarly, ISUS leaders earned financial support from a local hospital for helping to re-build the neighborhood in which it resided.

Crafting a Common Agenda for Opportunity Youth

Developing a common agenda is a critical component of a collective impact approach. In developing a common agenda, a community comes to a shared understanding of the problem and crafts an aligned and coordinated approach to finding a solution. The common agenda should account for specific local needs and should incorporate the opinions of local youth, as issues facing Opportunity Youth can vary by community and are often context specific. It is also important to build from existing efforts and collaborations that are targeting youth, rather than starting from scratch. In many communities, there may already be multiple initiatives targeting specific challenges for youth, such as reducing teen pregnancy or violence, or increasing high school graduation. The value and intent of applying a collective impact approach is to tie ongoing initiatives into a broader community-wide effort focused on improving outcomes for Opportunity Youth. The common agenda can expand or evolve over time, and may start with a more limited focus in order to build agreement among stakeholders. For example, Project U-Turn initially brought stakeholders together to increase high school graduation rates and decrease dropout rates, but has evolved to focus more broadly on ensuring youth are able to succeed in postsecondary placements and ultimately in career opportunities.

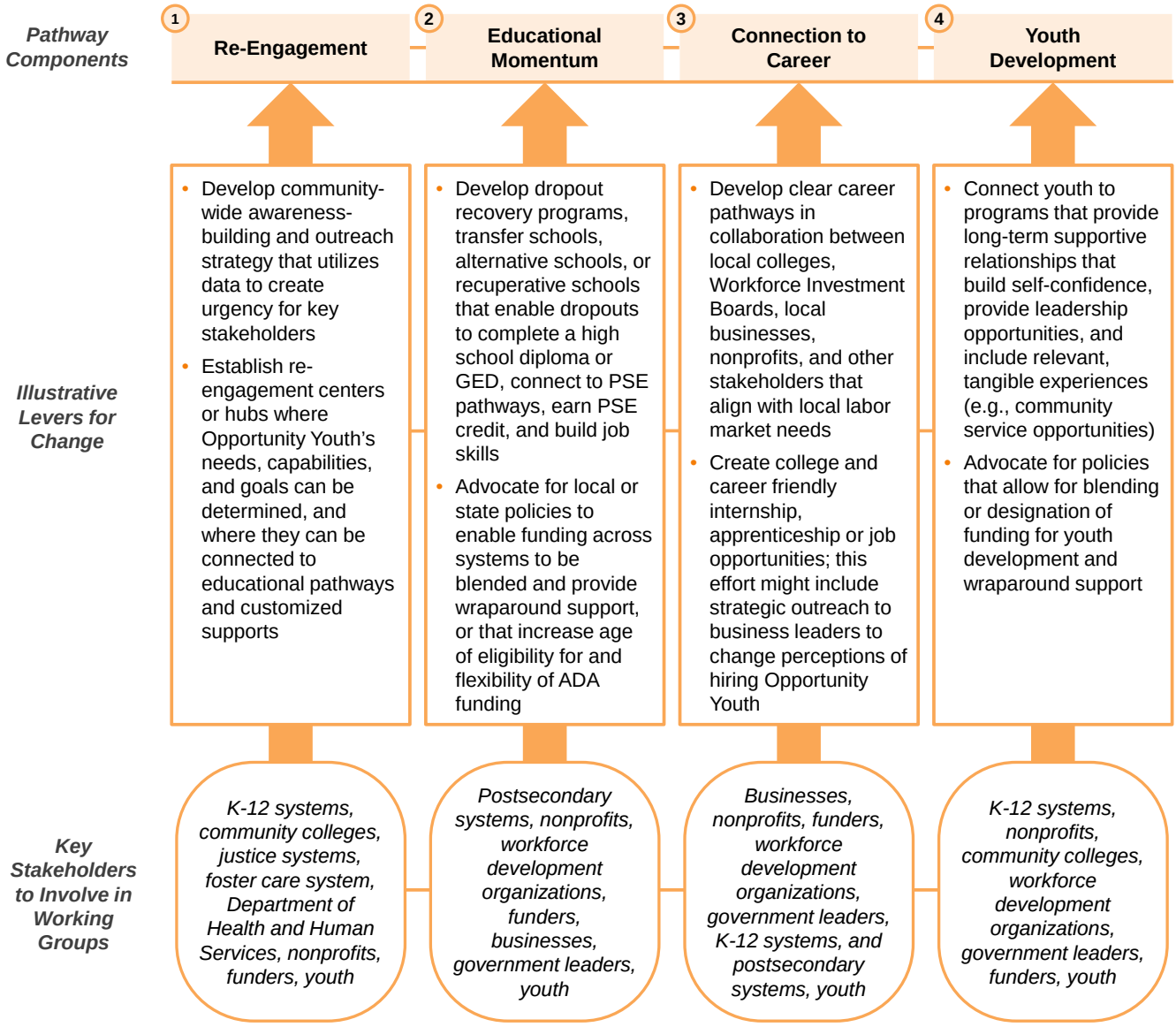
While community context is important, there are also widespread trends that can be useful for informing the development of a common agenda. Among programs supporting Opportunity Youth, there is a growing emphasis on the four common pathway components described in the “What Opportunity Youth Need to Attain Education and Career Success” section above: re-engagement, educational momentum, connection to career, and youth development. As communities craft a common agenda to improve outcomes for Opportunity Youth, it is helpful to consider how each of these components can reconnect Opportunity Youth to pathways to success.

The next step for stakeholders to develop the common agenda is to identify and prioritize which levers will help them to achieve the change that they seek. Identifying key levers for change provides an initial blueprint for action by outlining what needs to happen and by whom. It is also important in this process to identify some relatively “quick wins,” where key stakeholders can see the potential for longer term positive change. Typically, part of establishing a common agenda includes the formation of working groups to identify and prioritize high-impact levers for change. Example levers for change for Opportunity Youth related to each pathway component could include:

- A focus on re-engaging Opportunity Youth by providing customized supports to meet the individual needs of these youth and to help them navigate the myriad transitions between institutions.
- Accelerating educational momentum through opportunities to make up for lost time, including the opportunity to earn college credits through dual enrollment, and contextualized learning so that youth can earn their high school degree and make a successful transition to postsecondary education that will result in a credential with value in the labor market.
- Developing connections to careers through partnerships with local businesses or job training programs and attention to planning informed by academic/career goal setting and real time labor market information about strong and growing regional industry sectors.
- Emphasizing youth development by offering wraparound supports to youth and providing civic engagement and other meaningful opportunities for young people to gain the experience of being of value to others.

While these levers are valuable on their own, multiple levers are needed to create functional systems and clear on-ramps for Opportunity Youth. (See Figure 6 for illustrative levers of change.)

Figure 6: Illustrative Key Levers for Change for Opportunity Youth



While each of the levers can be worked on independently, the power of collective impact is best realized when aligned stakeholders combine these components to develop clear pathways for Opportunity Youth. It is important to note that solutions are often not known in advance. Community stakeholders must agree on a common agenda, prioritize key areas of leverage, and work together to discover what emerges as the most effective approaches to improve outcomes for Opportunity Youth, and adjust as they go along.

Developing Shared Measures for Opportunity Youth

Another key component of collective impact efforts is to develop a common set of shared measures that allows a community to track progress on outcomes for Opportunity Youth and adjust and improve over time. Accessing data for this population can be challenging, as there are often sensitivities around sharing and releasing data collected on Opportunity Youth. Developing data sharing agreements between systems and stakeholders, which can be time and resource intensive, may be necessary. Being able to clearly define and describe the common agenda, including the change and actions that a community collectively seeks, is an important part of building the trust that is necessary to facilitate the development of these data sharing agreements. With shared measures established, potential data providers understand the importance of their data in defining and tracking key outcomes over time, and have a clear sense how the shared measures relate to the initiative's common agenda. Further, if all stakeholders that serve Opportunity Youth agree to common metrics, then resources and funding flows can be invested to align with these priorities.

Opportunity Youth initiatives use a wide variety of measures to understand and describe the populations that they serve. Most focus on key measurements of educational or work outcomes; however, experts are increasingly recognizing the importance of ensuring that youth are growing in confidence, optimism, and self-efficacy; these types of data points should also be considered for inclusion. Given that over 60 percent of jobs nationwide will require some form of postsecondary degree by 2018, it is also recommended that rates of postsecondary success or attainment of a credential with labor market value serve as one of the core metric goals for any collective impact effort focused on Opportunity Youth.[26]

[26] Carnevale, A.., Smith, N., and Strohl, J. (2010), *Help Wanted: Projections of Jobs and Education Requirements through 2018,* Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce.

Example measures by pathway component (re-engagement, educational momentum, connection to career, and youth development) are listed in the table that follows.

Sample Indicators by Pathway Components	
Re-engagement:	• Opportunity Youth reached • Youth connected to programs • Community stakeholders involved in outreach • Number of re-engagement centers / youth served • Number of high-quality seats in the system for off-track youth • Youth connected other services
Educational Momentum:	• High school academic performance / credits earned • Attainment of high school diploma / GED • Enrollment in college classes/programs of study • Postsecondary persistence, retention, and attainment • Literacy and basic number skills • Number and type of high-quality pathways offered to Opportunity Youth
Connection to Career:	• Placements in internships or work opportunities • Retention of position after twelve months • Training credentials • Employer satisfaction • Identification of clear career pathway leading to credential with value in local/regional labor market
Youth Development:	• Frequency of engagement with mentors or advisors • Development of peer networks of support • Feeling of self-confidence, self-efficacy • Frequency of engagement with community through service • Availability and use of supportive services such as childcare, transportation, mental health and substance abuse counseling, emergency financial assistance, etc.

Identifying a Backbone Organization

Having dedicated capacity to support a collective impact initiative is critical. Selection or creation of a backbone organization is a key piece of developing the infrastructure needed to launch and sustain these efforts. Successful backbone organizations perform six key functions for collective impact efforts: (1) guide vision and strategy, (2) broker relationships to align activities, (3) establish shared measurement practices, (4) build public will, (5) advance policy, and (6) mobilize funding.[27] Backbone organizations also play a crucial role in supporting continuous communication and coordinating mutually reinforcing activities among participating partners. Backbone organizations are often missing from more traditional collaborative approaches, and are a key component of collective impact.

Existing efforts around Opportunity Youth have different types of organizations playing the backbone coordinating role, including CBOs (either existing or new), funders, and school districts. Yet the common thread across these organizations is an ability to garner the community's trust, as well as the respect of other stakeholders involved in the initiative. The Philadelphia Youth Network (PYN) serves as the backbone organization for Project U-Turn and is responsible for convening partners, helping develop the common agenda and work plan, and communicate progress. Because PYN is considered a neutral partner, they are able to effectively work with each stakeholder in the collaborative to ensure that individual activities are understood and shared goals are met.

Practitioners highlight how important it is for organizations playing the backbone role to be committed to a long-term investment in the initiative (i.e. no less than 10 years), and to have the capacity to transform the role over time to adapt to the changing needs of the effort. Recognizing up front that collective impact efforts take time and require sustained investment is equally important for funders and other key stakeholders, and should be communicated by the backbone organization to ensure a common understanding of the initiative's goals and timeline across the collaborative. The first two phases of collective impact (i.e., initiating action and organizing for impact) alone typically take between six months and two years, as demonstrated by Project U-Turn, where staff note that a significant amount of time and effort is required in order to coordinate and align stakeholders through individual or group calls and meetings.

Having begun to engage the community, and with a common agenda, shared measures, and backbone organization in place, a community is well-positioned to collectively pursue—and achieve—improved education and career outcomes for Opportunity Youth.

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[27] Note that some of these functions differ from what was originally outlined in FSG's article *Channeling Change: Making Collective Impact Work.* These changes reflect the most current research and analysis on best practices related to the role of backbone organizations, as outlined in FSG's recent Stanford Social Innovation Review blog series *Understanding the Value of Backbone Organizations in Collective Impact*. Turner, S., Merchant, K., Kania, J., and Martin, E., (2012), "Understanding the Value of Backbone Organizations in Collective Impact," *Stanford Social Innovation Review.*

Conclusion

Millions of youth possess tremendous untapped potential to benefit themselves, their families, and their communities, but lack the opportunities that would enable them to do so. Despite hardship, these youth remain optimistic and have big dreams about what they hope to achieve in life. Yet, their personal challenges are exacerbated by systemic barriers to re-engagement with education and career pathways. Disconnected and fragmented programs and services, an inadequate supply of high-quality, high-impact programs and pathways with on-ramps for even the more challenged youth, and a lack of funding directed to Opportunity Youth make it difficult for these youth to know about, access, and benefit from the programs that could help them. Collective impact poses a significant opportunity for communities to work together with Opportunity Youth to enable this population to develop their confidence, skills, and self-efficacy, obtain a postsecondary credential or certificate with labor market value, and meaningfully connect to sustainable careers.

There is significant momentum at the national, state, and local levels for communities to support Opportunity Youth through a collective impact approach. National programs like YouthBuild, Gateway to College, Jobs for the Future, Youth Villages, and Year Up, as well as local community-focused initiatives such as the work by the Philadelphia Youth Network, the Pharr–San Juan–Alamo Independent School District, the Boston Private Industry Council, and many others provide effective models for prioritizing outcomes for Opportunity Youth and “braiding” existing funding sources. These efforts provide important best practices for better serving Opportunity Youth that can be leveraged by local communities. Meanwhile, Project U-Turn in Philadelphia offers a powerful example of a collective impact approach specifically focused on Opportunity Youth, and serves as a roadmap for communities across the nation to embark on this work. Communities can begin identifying local champions, creating urgency for change, and establishing and repurposing revenue streams and other financial resources for collective impact.

Collective impact poses a significant opportunity for communities to work together to enable Opportunity Youth to develop their confidence, skills, and self-efficacy, obtain a postsecondary credential, and meaningfully connect to sustainable careers.

Collective impact offers a way for the various stakeholders that touch Opportunity Youth to work together more effectively, and to provide youth with the education and career opportunities they need to succeed in life. Improving outcomes for Opportunity Youth is a complex, multi-faceted challenge—a challenge that no one organization can solve alone, but one that communities can solve together.

Appendix A: Example Best Practices for Improving Opportunity Youth Outcomes, By Sector

While every community must determine its own critical strategies for improving Opportunity Youth outcomes based on the local context, the following examples may provide a useful starting place when it comes to identifying the types of strategies that different systems and players can employ.

School Districts (Secondary Schools)[28]

- Set ambitious goals for cohort graduation rate and progress benchmarks for meeting these goals in a defined period of time
- Include successful transition of young people to and through postsecondary education as one of multiple indicators districts use for college/career readiness
- Create multiple youth-friendly means to reach out-of-school youth, publicize options, and work with youth to connect them to options that get them back on track to postsecondary success
- Develop a well-defined strategy and robust set of options for recovering dropouts and building their educational momentum for postsecondary success
- Accountability and financing policies that incentivize dropout recovery/recuperative schools serving off track and out-of-school youth
- Partner with CBOs to develop and operate schools and/or provide the academic, social, and emotional supports necessary for student success

Postsecondary Systems[29]

- Partner with School Districts and other K-12 providers to provide transition support counseling and programs, including summer bridges, supported dual enrollment, non-cognitive development, and college skills for success
- Conduct admission processes that are not prejudicial to students coming from nontraditional schools
- Dedicate institutional resources to support access, acceleration, and persistence of students who enter not fully prepared

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[28] Based on an adaptation of *Partners in Action: Responsibilities for Educating Off Track and Out of School Youth* (Jobs for the Future, 2011).

[29] Ibid

- Support student entry into and success in “best bet” programs of study (e.g. academic and technical skills and work experience linked to high demand careers)
- Provide wraparound supports and intrusive advising to Opportunity Youth
- Use creative off-site, satellite faculty and other approaches, including dual enrollment for Opportunity Youth to connect with them where they can be found (e.g., CBO programs, alternative schools, or in juvenile justice or other systems and institutions)

Philanthropic Sector

- Use convening power to pull all of the partners together to take on Collective Impact for Opportunity Youth
- Fund the core support needs of the backbone organization and/or fund the critical data development and data analysis and support needs for the collaborative
- Fund critical startup costs and leverage public resources to scale up back on track pathways to success programs in the community
- Make grants that recognize, reward, and incentivize cross-sector and cross-system collaboration in the community (e.g., grants that support deeper partnerships between postsecondary education and the other systems that work with Opportunity Youth)
- Help to support and push for the authentic engagement of opportunity youth in the design and development of the solutions meant to serve low income youth and young adults
- Work with government to build public/private partnerships that utilize the financial, intellectual, and human capital resources of each sector in more innovative and efficient ways
- National funders can also join a new funding collaborative at the Aspen Institute—the Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund—that will provide grants to local communities and backbone organizations and require a match from local/place-based investors

CBOs and Training Providers

- Work with school systems to build credit recovery options and other forms of anywhere, anytime learning for dropouts seeking to earn secondary and, eventually, postsecondary credentials
- Work with school systems to align and integrate workforce training and social supports to alternative education pathways
- Individually or in collaboration with other partners, create “re-engagement” centers where Opportunity Youth can learn how to reconnect to education, training, employment, and any needed social services
- Build connections to area postsecondary education institutions, including the development of satellite education and training programs within the community

- Ensure that current education and training programs are explicitly designed to meet the needs of, and receive direct feedback from, Opportunity Youth (e.g. skill-building for low-literate young people and work experiences for young adults with little or no work history) and also impart entry-level skills consistent with the requirements of area employers
- Support and create structures and systems for the authentic engagement of youth voice in the shaping of solutions and for providing regular feedback for continuous improvement

Child Welfare System

- Actively engage youth in their case planning
- Base policy and practice on effective youth and adult partnerships
- Create mechanisms for data sharing between the child welfare and education systems
- Ensure that public child welfare agencies meet obligations under Fostering Connections to provide education continuity for young people in foster care
- Develop partnerships among the child welfare agency, department of labor, and other community-based resources and programs to help get young people connected to work experiences
- Engage with community partners to create broad support systems for transitioning youth in the areas of education, employment, financial capability, social capital, housing, and health care

Juvenile Justice System

- Align funding, policies, and partnerships to ensure youth get the education options they need while in the care of the justice system in order to keep, maintain or resume academic progress and to ease re-enrollment upon release
- Ensure that court-involved youth are able to access the youth employment and workforce development programs available in their communities (or provide work and skill-building opportunities via models such as restorative justice) and ensure that these programs are responsive to youth needs and challenges.
- Implement new or enhanced non-secure alternatives to secure confinement, including workforce development opportunities, targeted to youth who would otherwise be locked up and—whenever possible—based in neighborhoods where court-involved youth are concentrated
- Develop tailored strategies for dual-system youth (e.g., youth involved in both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems)
- Address behavioral health issues directly (i.e., mental health, substance misuse) and develop pro-social alternatives to gangs or crews
- Pay persistent and determined attention to combating racial disparities, including careful study to identify specific strategies to eliminate bias and ensure a level playing field for kids of color

Businesses and Employers

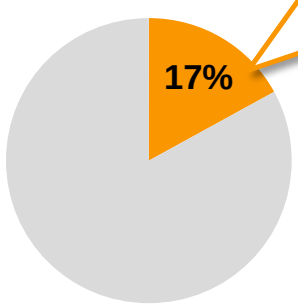
- Develop a training or employment program for Opportunity Youth such as a soft skills training program (e.g., soft skill workshops, employee mentors), work ready skills training program (e.g., job shadow days, career exploration guidance), or learn and earn training program (e.g., paid internships, permanent positions that provide on-the-job training or allow for continued learning and development)[30]
- Collaborate with school system and programs to provide work experiences that are structured to support college- and career preparation
- Build stronger linkages between students' educations and opportunities in high demand fields with career advancement possibilities
- Partner with schools, youth development providers, or other organizations to offer wrap-around supports that will enable Opportunity Youth to work (e.g., transportation, day care)

[30] For more information on how to create these programs, see Opportunity Nation's Toolkit for Employers: Connecting Youth and Business.

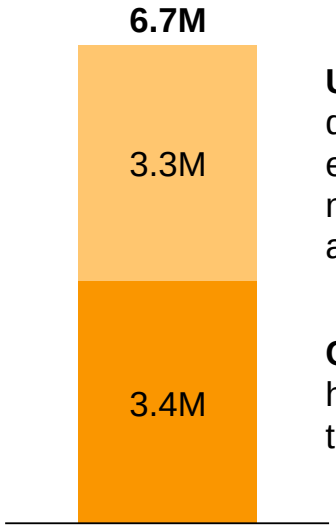
In the U.S., There Are 6.7 Million Opportunity Youth Who Are Neither Enrolled in School Nor Working

Opportunity Youth Represent 17% of the Total Youth Population, Age 16-24

Total = 39.8M



Definition of Opportunity Youth: *youth between the ages of 16 and 24 who are neither enrolled in school nor participating in the labor market*

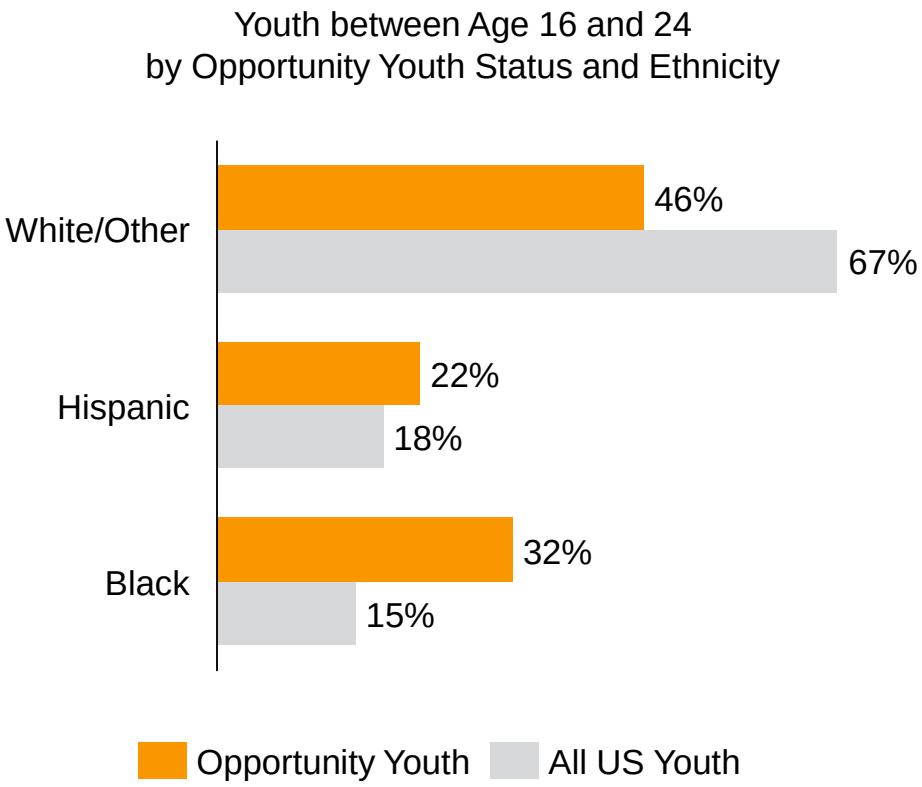


Under-Attached Opportunity Youth: despite some schooling and some work experience beyond 16, these youth have not progressed through college or secured a stable attachment to the labor market

Chronic Opportunity Youth: these youth have never been in school or work after the age of 16

Sources: The White House Council for Community Solutions; Belfield, C., Levin, H., & Rosen, R. (2012) The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth.

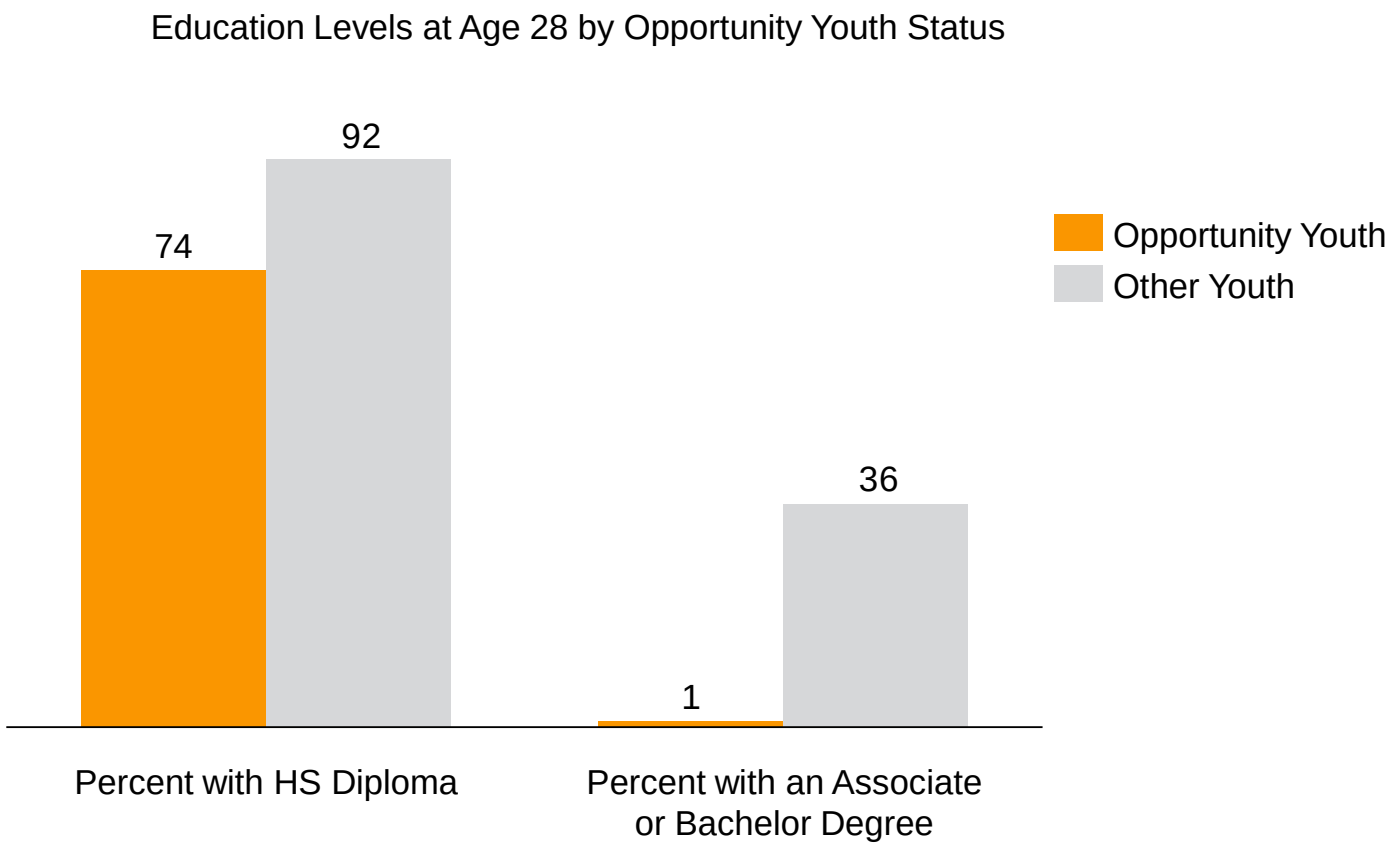
A Disproportionate Number of Opportunity Youth Are from Minority and Low-Income Populations



Of Opportunity Youth not living with their parents,
71 percent are considered poor
versus 27 percent of connected youth

Sources: Belfield, C , Levin, H. and Rosen, R. (2012), The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth in association with Civic Enterprises for the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Fernandes, Adrienne L., and Gabe, Thomas (2009), *Disconnected Youth: A look at 16- to 24-year olds who are not working or in school,* U.S. Congressional Research Service.

Opportunity Youth Have Significantly Lower Rates of Educational Attainment than the Rest of the Population



Sources: Belfield, C., Levin, H., & Rosen, R. (2012) The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth.

The Backgrounds of Opportunity Youth and the Challenges Facing them Vary Widely

32%
are single mothers

21%
lack health insurance

75%
grew up in households without a parent who graduated from college

55%
live apart from their parents

44%
were raised by a single parent

Though motivated to work, these youth continue to face barriers, including the high cost of education, the **need to take care of their families**, lack of transportation, difficulties balancing school and work priorities, and **not knowing how to apply to college or obtain financial aid**.

Two Factors Define an Opportunity Youth's Prospects – Their Degree of Preparation for Work or School, and Their Ability to Take Advantage of That Opportunity

		Definition	Examples
Degree of preparation for work or education	Higher	▪ Has enough preparation for work (or further education) to have "marketable" skills	▪ High school graduate ▪ GED or other certification ▪ Completed apprenticeship
	Lower	▪ Needs further education or work preparation to be marketable for appropriate opportunities	▪ High school dropout ▪ Learning disabilities ▪ Language barriers
Ability to take opportunities for work or education	Higher	▪ Able to move into work or further education if connected to an appropriate opportunity	▪ Manageable family obligations ▪ Basic health and welfare in place ▪ Actively interested in work or educational opportunities
	Lower	▪ Faces barriers that make it difficult or impossible to move into work or further education, even if an opportunity exists	▪ Full-time caregiver for family/child ▪ Mental or physical health issues ▪ In prison or justice system ▪ Homeless, or issues with food or transportation ▪ No encouragement from mentors

Source: *Early Findings on the Fact-Base on Disconnected Youth,* The White House Council for Community Solutions, June 3, 2011.

Opportunity Youth Can Be Segmented into Four Quadrants Based on These Factors

Degree of preparation

Higher

C: "Facing obstacles outside education" ▪ High school or better education ▪ Unable to transition ▪ 45-50% (1.5-1.6m)	**A: "Mismatched with employment system"** ▪ High school or better education ▪ Able to transition ▪ 10-17% (0.5-0.7m)
D: "Facing multiple hurdles" ▪ Less than high school education ▪ Unable to transition ▪ 30-35% (1.0-1.1m)	**B: "Mismatched with education system"** ▪ Less than high school education ▪ Able to transition ▪ 5-10% (0.2-0.3m)

Lower

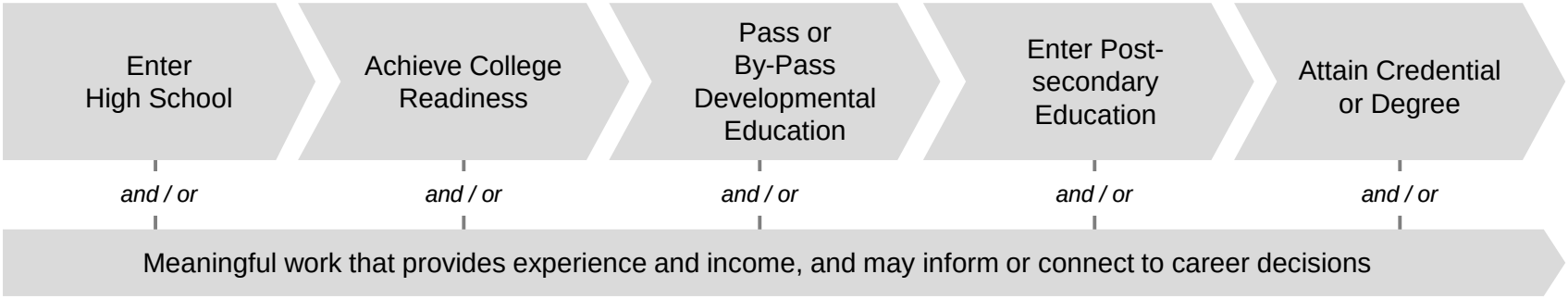
Lower — Higher

Ability to take up opportunities

Source: *Early Findings on the Fact-Base on Disconnected Youth,* The White House Council for Community Solutions, June 3, 2011 which was based on Current Population Survey (March, 2011), Bureau of Justice Statistics (1997, 2002, 2009, 2010)

There Are Many "Loss Points" Where Opportunity Youth Can Fall Out of the System and Become Disengaged from School and Work

Pathways to Education and Career Opportunities



Potential Loss Points

Challenges Facing Youth

- School-based factors (e.g., lack of quality education and other services, rigid or unsupportive policies)
- Involvement with systems (e.g., foster care, juvenile/criminal justice)
- Lack of academic or career-ready skills
- Lack of social capital or relationships that encourage involvement (in or out of school)
- Lack of work experience, clear career pathways or connections to internships and workforce opportunities
- Other life circumstances (e.g., early parenthood, financial responsibilities, mental health)

Source: Corcoran, M., Hanleybrown, F., Steinberg, A., and Tallant, K. (2012) *Collective Impact for Opportunity Youth,* FSG.

The Economic Burden from Failing to Invest in Opportunity Youth Is Substantial

The average Opportunity Youth costs taxpayers **$13,900** per year between the ages of 16 and 24,

and a total of **$148,790** over the rest of their lifetime.

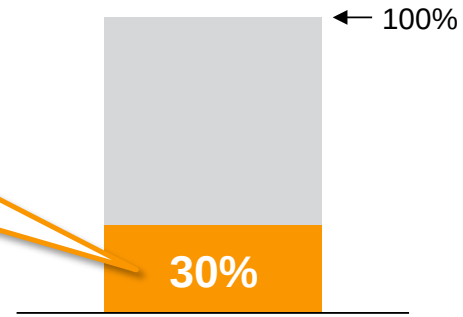
This translates to **$4.75 trillion** for the aggregate lifetime costs to society for the population as a whole when factoring in lost earnings, costs to victims of criminal activity, private health expenditures, and lost economic gains from a less educated workforce.

Sources: Belfield, C., Levin, H., & Rosen, R. (2012) The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth.

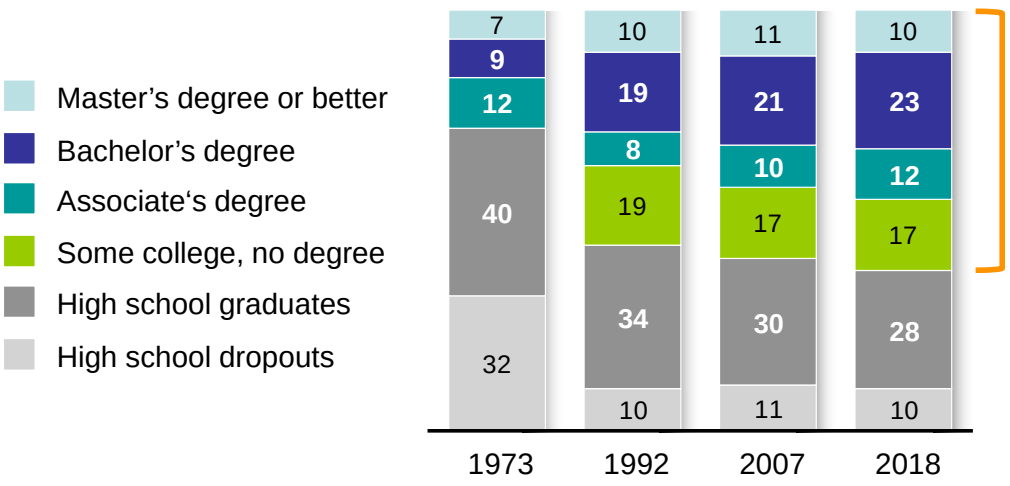
Businesses Stand to Benefit Significantly If These Youth Are Connected to School and Work

Despite high unemployment, 30 percent of US companies have difficulty finding appropriately skilled workers to fill job vacancies…

US Companies with Positions Open for >6 Months That They Could Not Fill



Percentage of workforce, by education level



… and by 2018, 63 percent of job openings will require some post-secondary education, suggesting that educating youth is as critical as ever

Source: McKinsey Global Institute website. Early Findings on the Fact-Base on Disconnected Youth, The White House Council for Community Solutions, June 3, 2011 which was based on Carnevale, Strohl, and Smith. "Help Wanted: Projections of Jobs and Education Requirements through 2018." June 2010 .

Four Critical Components Are Needed to Develop Effective Pathways to Education and Career Success for Opportunity Youth

Pathway Components

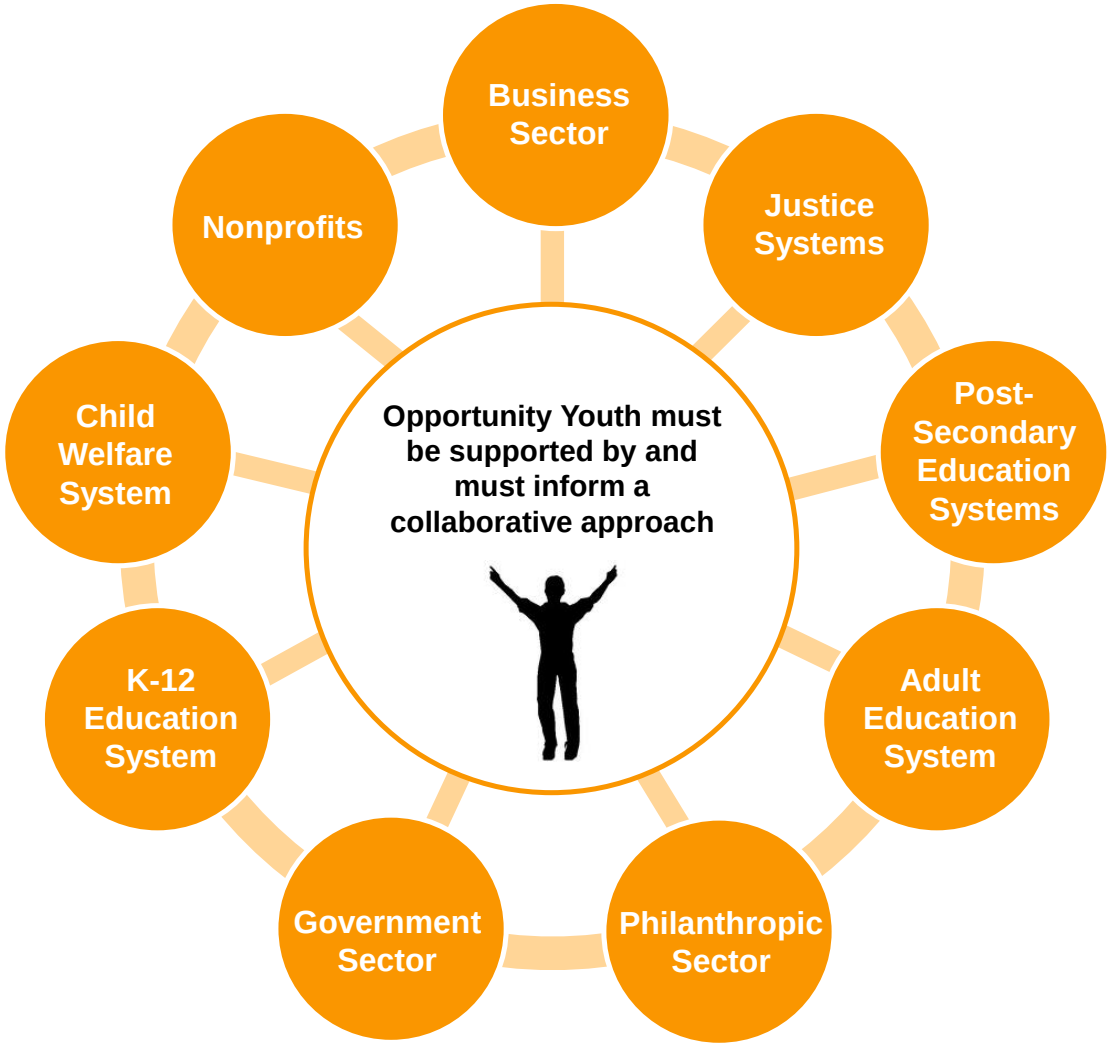
1 Re-Engagement	2 Educational Momentum	3 Connection to Career	4 Youth Development

Sample Levers for Change

Re-Engagement	Educational Momentum	Connection to Career	Youth Development
• Develop community-wide awareness-building and outreach strategy that utilizes data to create urgency for key stakeholders • Establish re-engagement centers or hubs where Opportunity Youth's needs, capabilities, and goals can be determined, and where they can be connected to educational pathways and customized supports	• Develop dropout recovery programs, transfer schools, alternative schools, or recuperative schools that enable dropouts to complete a high school diploma or GED, connect to PSE pathways, earn PSE credit, and build job skills • Advocate for local or state policies to enable funding across systems to be blended and provide wraparound support, or that increase age of eligibility for and flexibility of ADA funding	• Develop clear career pathways in collaboration between local colleges, Workforce Investment Boards, local businesses, nonprofits, and other stakeholders that align with local labor market needs • Create internship, apprenticeship or job opportunities; this effort might include strategic outreach to business leaders to change perceptions of hiring Opportunity Youth	• Connect youth to programs that provide long-term supportive relationships that build self-confidence, provide leadership opportunities, and include relevant, tangible experiences (e.g., community service opportunities) • Advocate for policies that allow for blending or designation of funding for youth development and wraparound support

Source: Corcoran, M., Hanleybrown, F., Steinberg, A., and Tallant, K. (2012) *Collective Impact for Opportunity Youth,* FSG.

In Order to Provide These Components, the Systems that Touch Opportunity Youth Will Need to Work Together



Source: Corcoran, M., Hanleybrown, F., Steinberg, A., and Tallant, K. (2012) *Collective Impact for Opportunity Youth,* FSG.

There Are Five Conditions For Achieving Collective Impact

Common Agenda	All participants have a **shared vision** for change including a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions
Shared measurement	Collecting data and **measuring results consistently** across all participants ensures efforts remain aligned and participants hold each other accountable
Mutually reinforcing activities	Participant activities must be **differentiated** while still being **coordinated** through a mutually reinforcing plan of action
Continuous communication	**Consistent and open communication** is needed across the many players to build trust, assure mutual objectives, and appreciate common motivation
Backbone support organizations	Creating and managing collective impact requires a **separate organization with staff** and a specific set of skills to serve as the backbone for the entire initiative and coordinate participating organizations

Questions for Consideration by Local Communities:

- What are the **unique characteristics** of your local Opportunity Youth population (i.e. disaggregated by race, ethnicity, age, gender, background)?
- What are the **challenges** that Opportunity Youth in your community face?
- What do the **education and career outcomes** look like for Opportunity Youth in your community?
- Who are the **key stakeholders and influential champions** who should be at the table when planning a Collective Impact project for Opportunity Youth?
- How do you **plan to engage youth** themselves in this process?

Appendix C: List of Interviewees

- Lili Allen, Jobs for the Future
- Cheryl Almeida, Jobs for the Future
- Laticia Barajas, Los Angeles Trade and Technical College
- Sarah Beaulieu, Be the Change
- Jenny Bogoni, Project U-Turn and Philadelphia Youth Network
- John Bridgeland, Civic Enterprises
- Liz Clay, Be the Change
- Marcy Drummond, Los Angeles Trade Technical College
- Scott Emerick, YouthBuild USA
- Elizabeth Gaines, Forum for Youth Investment and Ready by 21
- Kathy Hamilton, Boston Private Industry Council
- Ann Higdon, Improved Solutions for Urban Systems
- Stacey Holland, Project U-Turn and Philadelphia Youth Network
- Dr. Daniel King, Pharr–San Juan–Alamo Independent School District
- Stanley Litow, IBM
- Sr. Paulette LoMonaco, Good Shepherd Services
- Bruno Manno, the Walton Family Foundation
- Tess Mason-Elder, Civic Enterprises
- Monique Miles, the National Youth Employment Coalition
- Dr. Lucretia Murphy, See Forever Foundation and Maya Angelou Charter Schools
- Karen Pittman, Forum for Youth Investment and Ready by 21
- Sally Prouty, formerly with the Corps Network
- Dan Ryan, All Hands Raised
- Catie Smith, Year Up
- Neil Sullivan, Boston Private Industry Council
- Kimberly Wicoff, the Strive Network
- Michelle Yanche, Good Shepherd Services
- Nicole Yohalem, Forum for Youth Investment and Ready by 21

Appendix D: Key Resources and Initiatives

Key Reports and Toolkits Focused on Opportunity Youth or Collective Impact:

- *The Best of Two Worlds: Lessons from a Community College – Community Organization Collaboration to Increase Student Success* (2012) prepared by Ellen Wahl, Peter Kleinbard, and Michael Chavez Reilly with Justine Beaton and Vivian Vazquez of the Youth Development Institute for Jobs for the Future
- *Channeling Change: Making Collective Impact Work* (2012) by Fay Hanleybrown, John Kania, and Mark Kramer
- *Collective Impact* (2011) by John Kania and Mark Kramer
- *Connected by 25: Effective Policy Solutions for Vulnerable Youth* (2010) by the Youth Transition Funders Group
- *Courses to Employment: Partnering to Create Paths to Education and Careers* by Maureen Conway, Amy Blair, and Matt Helmer of the Aspen Institute's Workforce Strategies Initiative
- *Disconnected Youth: A Look at 16- to 24-Year Olds Who Are Not Working or in School* (2009) by Adrienne L. Fernandes and Thomas Gabe of the Congressional Research Service
- *The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth* (2012) by Clive Belfield, Henry Levin, and Rachel Rosen
- *The Economics of Investing in Opportunity Youth* (2012) by Clive Belfield and Henry Levin (forthcoming)
- The Forum for Youth Investment's Ready by 21 toolkits and reports, including their *Credentialed by 26* issue brief and tool series
- FSG Collective Impact blog, webinars, and other online resources
- *An Invitation to the Big Picture: Implementing a Local Collaboration for Youth (LCY) in Your Community* (2011) developed by the National Collaboration for Youth
- Jobs for the Future's Back on Track Designs and Counseling to Careers Initiative, as well as online resources and reports
- *Launching Early College Districtwide: Pharr–San Juan–Alamo's "College for All" Strategy* (2012) by Cecilia Le for Jobs for the Future
- *Mobilizing a Cross-Sector Collaborative or Systemic Change: Lessons from Project U-Turn, Philadelphia's Campaign to Reduce the Dropout Rate* (2010) by Lili Allen for Jobs for the Future
- *National Roadmap for Opportunity Youth* (2012) by John Bridgeland and Tess Mason-Elder (forthcoming)
- Opportunity Nation's Toolkit for Employers: Connecting Youth and Business

- *Opportunity Road: The Promise and Challenge of America's Forgotten Youth* (2012) by John Bridgeland and Jessica Milano
- *Pathway to Recovery: Implementing a Back on Track through College Model* (2012) by Adria Steinberg and Cheryl Almeida of Jobs for the Future
- *Pathways to Prosperity: Meeting the Challenge of Preparing Young Americans for the 21st Century* (2011) prepared by the Pathways to Prosperity Project at the Harvard Graduate School of Education
- *Steering a Course Toward Effective Youth Policies: Dashboards for Youth* by Thaddeus Ferber and Karen Pittman with Tara Marshall
- *Supporting the Education Pipeline: A Business Engagement Toolkit for Community-Based Organizations* developed by Ready by 21, Corporate Voice for Working Families, the Workforce Strategy Center, and United Way Worldwide
- The White House Council for Community Solutions Community Collaboratives Toolkit
- *Youth at High Risk of Disconnection* (2008) prepared by Jacob Rosch, Dana Brinson, and Bryan Hassel of Public Impact on behalf of the Annie E. Casey Foundation

National and Local Initiatives Targeting Opportunity Youth

Back on Track through College Model

The Back on Track through College model aims to help youth that otherwise may be disconnected connect with, pursue, and attain postsecondary credits and credentials. The three key components of the model are enriched and accelerated academic material, bridging support through transition to postsecondary education, and dedicated support through the first year of postsecondary education. The model also aims to connect youth to career pathways that are aligned with local needs. Elements of this model are evident in many of the successful initiatives targeting Opportunity Youth around the country, including some listed in this report (e.g., Improved Solutions for Urban Systems, Pharr–San Juan–Alamo Independent School District).

http://www.jff.org/projects/current/education/back-track/1354

Coalition for Responsible Community Development (Los Angeles, CA)

Founded in 2005, the CRCD seeks to coordinate and improve local development and service efforts in the Vernon Central area of Los Angeles by partnering with residents, businesses, the Los Angeles Conservation Corps, other community-based organizations, civic leaders, and the Los Angeles Trade Technical College. The initiative has a specific focus on Opportunity Youth and preparing them for a long-term career. Efforts have led to the creation of a charter school on the college's campus to enable dropouts to finish their high school diploma and immediately link to Postsecondary Education, and the development of in-depth mentoring and counseling services.

www.coalitionrcd.org/departments.html

College[3] Initiative, Countdown to Zero Dropout Recovery Initiative and College, Career, and Technology Academy (Pharr–San Juan–Alamo Independent School District, TX)

The Pharr–San Juan–Alamo Independent School District, which is comprised mainly of students from underprivileged backgrounds, has launched initiatives supporting graduation and postsecondary attainment among youth in its community. The College[3] initiative includes exposure to college classes while youth are still in high school, connection of youth to high-growth and high-wage careers in areas of local need, supportive counseling that assists youth in transitioning to postsecondary education, and rigorous instruction for all students. The Countdown to Zero Dropout Recovery Initiative is an intensive effort to re-engage dropouts, while the College, Career, and Technology Academy was specially created to enable youth to finish their high school degree while earning postsecondary credit and engaging in career-focused skills training.

http://www.psjaisd.us/index.jsp

Communities Collaborating to Reconnect Youth (CCRY) Network

The CCRY Network is a group of workforce and youth development professionals, working in communities across the country, who have joined forces to improve young people's opportunities and well-being by establishing innovative partnerships among local youth-serving systems and are creating effective cross-system collaboration in communities. CCRY Network member communities share ideas, challenges, lessons, and best practices for reconnecting youth. The Network also seeks to raise awareness of issues affecting disconnected youth at local, state, and federal levels and provide recommendations to policymakers on how to best serve these young people. Moreover, CCRY Network communities have invested in considerable capacity-building efforts and innovative approaches that include 1) Building an Effective Youth Delivery System, 2) Creating Postsecondary education pathways and collaborations, 3) Making the Juvenile Justice/Workforce Connection, 4) Building an Employer Engagement Pipeline, and 5) Benchmarking Progress on the Path to Labor Market Success.

www.ccrynetwork.org/

Counseling to Careers

Counseling to Careers provides community colleges and schools with the tools to better connect students with programs of study that align with their interests and regional employment needs. The CTC program guides the use of labor market information to identify high-demand career pathways and associated postsecondary programs—or “best bets.” It features a training with customized tools and resources for supporting teams of senior staff and counselors through a process to identify and package information about best bets for use by students. By making information about college and careers transparent and accessible, Counseling to Careers: 1) streamlines the counseling process; 2) empowers students to become informed consumers; 3) strengthens relationships between colleges and their community partners; and 4) informs planning and revision of college pathways and programs of study.

http://www.jff.org/projects/current/education/counseling-careers/1365

Edna McConnell Clark Foundation – True North Fund

The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation's True North Fund seeks to leverage public money from the Social Innovation Fund (SIF) and private money from the Foundation and other institutional and individual philanthropic co-investors to capitalize and expand evidence-based programs so they can serve more low-income young people. The name of this fund reflects the inspiration and example EMCF believes these grantees, and this funding model, can provide for helping our nation's most economically disadvantaged young people overcome the obstacles that confront them, discover a sense of direction and purpose in their lives, and steer a course to productive, independent, successful adulthood. Grantees include: BELL (Building Educated Leaders for Life), Center for Employment Opportunities, Children's Aid Society, Children's Home Society of North Carolina, Children's Institute, Inc., Communities in Schools, Gateway to College National Network, Reading Partners, and The SEED Foundation.

www.emcf.org/partnerscapital-aggregation/the-true-north-fund

Forum for Youth Investment

The Forum for Youth Investment is dedicated to helping communities and the nation make sure all young people are ready for college, work, and life. Informed by rigorous research and practical experience, the Forum forges innovative ideas, strategies, and partners to strengthen solutions for young people and those who care about them. The Forum is currently working with four states—Colorado, Florida, Iowa, and Nevada—to identify policy barriers and to develop performance pilots to serve disconnected youth. While each site is slightly different in its target disconnected youth population or the funding streams it hopes to gain flexibility from, the commonalities include the ability to blend funds from different funding streams while streamlining application and intake processes, as well as reporting requirements across different funding streams. All of them represent strong state/local partnerships with both state and local government working together to align policies to serve disconnected youth.

http://www.forumfyi.org/about

Gateway to College Model

The Gateway to College model enables youth that have dropped out of high school or that are far behind pace in earning their diploma to complete their high school diploma requirements at a local college while also earning postsecondary credit. Consisting of partnerships with 35 colleges and over 125 school districts, the initiative served some 3,400 youth in the 2010-2011 school year. The Gateway to College Network has also established Project DEgree, which provides developmental education to students that have a diploma or GED but need additional preparation to be ready for college.

www.gatewaytocollege.org

Improved Solutions for Urban Systems (Dayton, OH)

ISUS is a nonprofit organization that partners with local government leaders, community colleges, employers, and other government systems (e.g., juvenile justice) to create and provide more effective ways to educate and train dropouts and other Opportunity Youth. The program model incorporates skills-based training and work experience in construction, healthcare, or manufacturing into a charter school education that enables completion of a high school diploma and earning of postsecondary credits. ISUS' three charter schools are rated as some of the highest-performing schools in Dayton.

www.isusinc.com

Jobs for the Future

Jobs for the Future works with communities, districts, states, intermediaries, national youth-serving networks, and community colleges to re-engage youth and young adults who are off track to graduation or disconnected from school and work and put them on a path to postsecondary success. To assist its partners in this work, JFF offers a comprehensive range of services, tools, and resources, including its Back on Track Designs and Counseling to Careers (listed above).

http://www.jff.org/

Multiple Pathways to Graduation initiative and Community Education Pathways to Success (New York, NY)

The New York City Department of Education's Multiple Pathways to Graduation initiative has developed several models of programs that enable Opportunity Youth to complete their high school diploma or GED; many of these models also include additional support and linkages to work training through the Learning to Work model. Program offerings include Transfer Schools, Young Adult Borough Centers that offer high school diploma completion for older youth, and other GED programs. The initiative includes partnerships with the Youth Development Institute, Good Shepherd Services, and other organizations and community stakeholders. The Youth Development Institute is also involved with the Community Education Pathways to Success Initiative, which supports organizations that work with low-performing and marginalized youth and enable these youth to progress through high school or GED completion to postsecondary education.

www.ydinstitute.org/initiatives/pathways/index.html

National Youth Employment Coalition

The National Youth Employment Coalition (NYEC) is a national membership network that improves the effectiveness of organizations that seek to help youth become productive citizens. Toward this end, NYEC sets and promotes quality standards; tracks, crafts, and influences policy; provides and supports professional development; and builds the capacity of organizations and programs.

www.nyec.org

New Profit, Inc. – Pathways Fund

New Profit's Pathways Fund is a bold approach to funding and growing nonprofit organizations. It takes the idea of partnerships seriously, working from the belief that the problems New Profit seeks to address are so complex that no individual organization can tackle them alone. In creating the Pathways Fund, New Profit was compelled by the aspiration of the Social Innovation Fund (SIF), believing in its power to demonstrate new ways that our country can accelerate problem solving by investing in innovation. New Profit was also inspired by a vision, co-created with their organizations and funding partners, for changing the trajectory of low-income youth across our country since a significant number of young Americans fail to emerge from high school prepared for a successful future. New Profit believes that only by working in partnership with the Federal Government, philanthropic funders, and nonprofit organizations can real progress be made for communities and youth. Grantees include: National College Advising Corps, Single Stop USA, YouthBuild USA, College Summit, iMentor, and Year Up.

http://www.newprofit.com/cgi-bin/iowa/do/87.html

Performance Partnership Pilots

President Obama's 2013 budget includes provision of funding for innovative approaches to coordinate resources across federal, state, and local levels to effectively reach and improve outcomes for Opportunity Youth. Communities and organizations were able to nominate themselves as potential "Performance Partnership Pilot" sites by responding to an RFI in July. These responses will inform the Interagency Forum on Disconnected Youth's decisions and strategy regarding the Performance Partnership Pilots, pending enactment of the legislation.

https://www.federalregister.gov/articles/2012/06/04/2012-13473/request-for-information-on-strategies-for-improving-outcomes-for-disconnected-youth

Project U-Turn (Philadelphia, PA)

Project U-Turn is a strong example of a collective impact initiative targeting Opportunity Youth. The initiative is a cross-sector collaboration that aims to reduce the dropout rate and improve postsecondary education and career outcomes among youth in Philadelphia. The initiative has led to the establishment of Accelerated Schools and other supportive programs for dropouts and other Opportunity Youth, and has seen measurable improvement in the graduation rate in the city.

http://www.pyninc.org/projectuturn/index.php

The Strive Network

The Strive Network connects and supports communities that are using the Strive Framework to develop a cradle-to-career initiative for youth. The Strive Framework includes four key pillars: Shared Community Vision, Evidence-Based Decision Making, Collaborative Action, and Investment and Sustainability. Currently, four sites in the Strive Network are initiating a collective impact approach to explicitly target outcomes for Opportunity Youth in their communities:

- All Hands Raised (Portland, OR)

  http://allhandsraised.org/
- The Road Map Project (Seattle, WA)

  www.roadmapproject.org
- Raise DC (Washington, DC)

  http://dme.dc.gov/DC/DME/Programs/Raise%20DC%20-%20Partnership%20Summary%20FINAL.pdf
- Strive Partnership (Cincinnati, OH)

  www.strivetogether.org

These initiatives are in various stages of development in their efforts around Opportunity Youth, and are also focused on the entire education to career pipeline. While the Community Center for Education Results and Strive Partnership efforts are further along in implementing activities and gathering and analyzing data, All Hands Raised and Raise DC are still fleshing out their initiatives.

Year Up

Founded in Boston in 2000, Year Up is a one-year intensive program that enables youth aged 18 to 24 to obtain hands-on skill development, postsecondary credits, and corporate internship opportunities. The program encourages academic and professional rigor, and sets high expectations for participants around the quality of their work and behavior. The first six months of the program are heavily focused on training and preparation, while during the second six months youth use what they have learned at an internship with one of Year Up's hundreds of corporate partners. Participants earn a weekly stipend and are supported by staff, advisors, and mentors. 95% of Year Up graduates meet or exceed expectations of their manager during the internship, and participants also have a strong record of placement in work or college after completing the program. Year Up programs are currently present in ten U.S. cities; the program has served more than 5,700 students since its establishment.

www.yearup.org

YouthBuild USA

The national network (YouthBuild USA) supports 273 local YouthBuild programs in 46 states, Washington D.C., and the Virgin Islands. In these 6- to 24-month programs, low-income youth aged 16–24 work toward their high school diploma or GED while participating in leadership development activities and skills-based training or apprenticeship programs. The model places a heavy emphasis on creating an atmosphere of respect, encouragement, and high expectations, and offers mentoring throughout the program. YouthBuild programs are sponsored by local community- or faith-based organizations, which must be approved and selected by the Department of Labor. Primary funding comes from this Department's federal YouthBuild program, and is administrated through competitive grants by the Employment and Training Administration.

www.youthbuild.org

Youth Transitions Task Force, convened by the Boston Private Industry Council (Boston, MA)

The Youth Transitions Task Force is a cross-sector initiative targeting Opportunity Youth that is convened by the Boston Private Industry Council. The effort stems from a strong history of collaborative work in Boston, and includes Boston Public Schools, city departments, state agencies, and community-based organizations. Along with raising public awareness of the scale of the challenge, the collaboration has helped shape the development of numerous initiatives and programs for Opportunity Youth. The Boston Private Industry Council has also developed several programs benefitting Opportunity Youth, including College-to-Career Counseling services, efforts to reconnect dropouts, and programming that combines education with work experience.

www.bostonpic.org/policy/youth-transitions

Venture Philanthropy Partners - youthCONNECT

Venture Philanthropy Partners (VPP)'s youthCONNECT is a pioneering collaboration of government, private philanthropy, nonprofit organizations, and evaluators to dramatically improve opportunities for low-income youth, ages 14-24, in the National Capital Region. The Social Innovation Fund (SIF), administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service, awarded VPP $4 million over two years for youthCONNECT. The new initiative is a new way of doing business for the federal government that better targets public-private resources toward solving social challenges. The SIF grants will expand the impact of high-performing organizations and innovative solutions to issues in three key areas: economic opportunity, youth development/school support, and healthy futures. youthCONNECT will support the collaboration of up to eight nonprofits in the National Capital Region providing education, social services, and job training to low-income youth, including: College Summit-National Capital Region (NCR), KIPP DC, Latin American Youth Center (LAYC), Metro TeenAIDS, Urban Alliance (UA), and Year Up-NCR.

www.vppartners.org/portfolio/youthconnect/

All statements and conclusions, unless specifically attributed to another source, are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the other organizations or references noted in this report.

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