

A New Challenge Helps Leaders  
Do Business Differently  
to Change the Odds for Youth



All youth ready for  
college, work & life.

“Our county’s core leadership group reviewed other planning processes and selected Ready by 21 because of its focus on Big Picture planning, developmental approach, and broad community stakeholder engagement. The Forum’s coaching has been wonderful. This is not cookie cutter training and technical assistance. They engage us in the principles, listen to our needs and then assist us in creating the tools to achieve success.”

- Jacque Douglas  
Director of Bartholomew County’s  
Council for Youth Development

## The Ready by 21™ Learning Group Challenge and Responses



***“Moving the small gear  
makes a big difference.”***

- Karen Pittman, Executive Director,  
The Forum for Youth Investment

Ready by 21™ Change Makers in Action Series: Introduction  
Download the case studies: [www.forumfyi.org](http://www.forumfyi.org)

## Articulating the Challenge:

*“Every community has innovators committed to ensuring that young people are ready for college, work and life. Each has a commitment to improving youth outcomes... and an intuitive hunch that things could be done differently... Ready by 21 is an attempt to help these change makers bring precision to their passion.”*

- Karen Pittman, *The Forum for Youth Investment*

Research suggests that it takes five to ten years for changes in community supports to make a real difference in improved outcomes for youth, such as decreased teen pregnancy or increased graduation rates. It is possible within a few years, however, to see significant changes in the capacity of those who are taking the lead in strengthening policies, programs and public demand. Those taking the lead can start from multiple places — whether they are collaborative groups (e.g., advocacy coalitions, community task forces, children’s cabinets), change initiatives (e.g., school redesign, youth master plan implementations), or individual champions (e.g., mayors, business leaders, educational leaders, advocates). As we see it, no matter where they sit, **moving the small gear makes a big difference.**

### The Ready by 21™ Approach

In most states and communities, the status of young people is poor enough that improving outcomes for young people cannot be accomplished through piecemeal, incremental approaches. Creating a seamless web of community supports requires sustained, coordinated planning and decision-making. Progress simply cannot be made by tackling one program, age group or outcome at a time.

The Forum for Youth Investment believes that only Big Tent Partnerships that accept shared accountability for Big Picture Goals can drive the change strategies needed to achieve Big Impact Results (capitalization intentional).

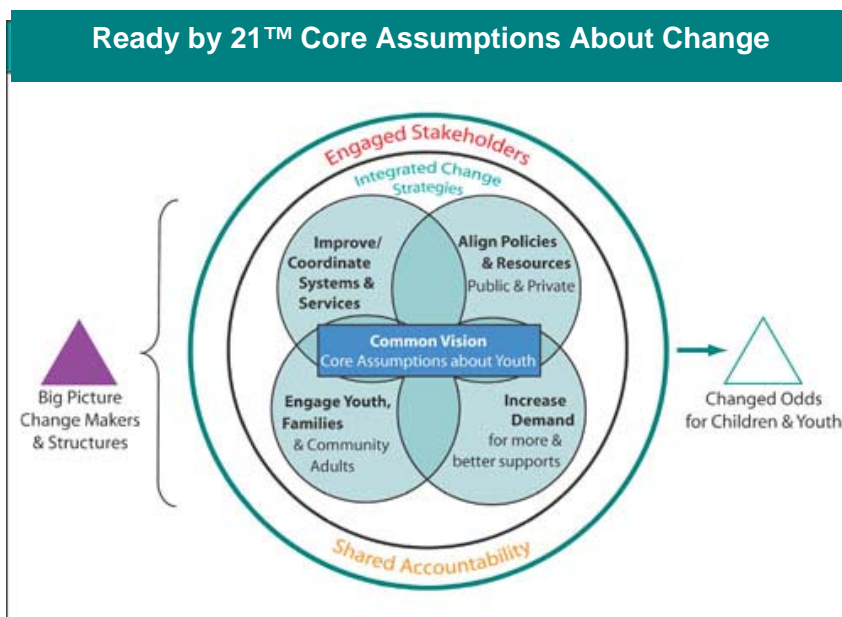
The Ready by 21™ Challenge was designed to help states and communities accomplish these tasks by providing change makers — from parents to program directors to policy makers — with powerful frameworks, coaching and tools to help them change the way they do business. The expected result is not a new program or policy, but increased motivation and capacity for change.

By thinking differently, acting differently and acting together, state and local leaders who use the approach are able to take bolder, quicker steps to optimize resources and streamline strategies so that they can see the increased return on their investments.

The Challenge is based on a set of core assumptions about change, guided by the formula created by the Harvard Business School,  $C = D \times V \times P$ . The amount of change achieved is equal to the amount of dissatisfaction or demand for change multiplied by the

clarity of the vision of what should be multiplied by the adequacy of the plan for getting there. In most communities, each of these core variables is fragmented to the point of inefficiency. Behind general sense of dissatisfaction and even disengagement are competing demands, overlapping visions and contradictory plans. Ready by 21™ helps leaders with differing mandates, resources and agendas stitch their pieces together by:

- defining a shared vision, language and goals;
- building strong, broad outcomes-focused partnerships,
- setting data-driven improvement goals,
- activating coordinated strategies for improving services, policies, and youth and public engagement, and
- ensuring that they have coordinating structures that are up for the task.



## The 1<sup>st</sup> Ready by 21 Learning Group

In October 2005, with funding from Atlantic Philanthropies and the Daniels Fund, teams from 17 states and communities came to Washington, D.C., to learn more the Ready by 21™ Approach and decide whether it could help them mobilize their states and communities to ensure that young people are ready for college, work and life.

The first cohort of innovators was an intentionally diverse group. Their “day jobs” are in planning agencies, chambers of commerce, school districts, United Ways, policy commissions, service provider networks. They work at varying levels and with vastly different populations.

Each came with a commitment to improving youth outcomes, a belief that the quality and quantity of supports for young people in their state or community can and must be improved, and an intuitive hunch that things could be done differently if leaders took initiative.

Each left with an initial assessment of their “change horsepower” and a preliminary set of things they (and their networks, coalitions, partners) could undertake to increase the overall capacity of their community or state to change the odds for children and youth. They chose different starting points and different strategies depending on where they and their states/communities were (e.g., just starting to develop a youth plan, just recovering from an only partially successful initiative). Some went home to start Ready by 21 Coalitions and undertake a goal-setting process. Others took the lessons home to a few influential leaders and found ways to infuse the ideas without labeling their efforts.

A year later, most, but not all, report success. Many have tangible short term accomplishments to report (new programs, new policies, new partners, new funding). Their optimism, however, stems from the fact that they have taken concrete steps to think differently, act differently and act together.

*“We’re working differently and together in a way that we were not before Ready by 21. The strategy of bringing our leadership teams together has created an alignment that will be strong as we plan for the future.”*

*- David Rattray, Unite LA  
Masen Davis, United Way of Greater LA*

### Core Components Needed to Sustain Long Term Change

**Vision:** strong, positive vision for youth; components of the vision youth-centered, specific, & action-oriented

**Language:** common language used across systems & stakeholder groups

**Goal:** clearly communicated; big picture focus

**Stakeholders:** broad stakeholder base (public/private; local/national) with capacity, motivation & resources to affect change

**Partnerships:** stakeholders have come together to call for shared accountability and/or coordinated change efforts

**Change Structures:** presence of organizations/entities that work across settings; charged with the task of “adding it up”

**Service Improvement:** presence of significant efforts to improve alignment & coordination of services

**Policy/Resource Alignment:** presence of efforts to improve/align policies & reassign resources

**Demand:** strong demand for change from young people, families, business, funders, external authorities

**Engagement:** participation of young people and families in meaningful ways

**Improvement Goals:** clear improvement goals set across outcome/support areas or across specific youth populations

**Data:** consistent data collection and analysis strategies allowing for comparison across systems, issues and data types

**Communication:** presence of a multi-faceted communication strategy; an informed and engaged public

## The Change Makers in Action

### “Quick Read” Case Study Series

Over the course of the next year, the Forum will generate at least a dozen “caselets” - short, 4-page write ups of how one of our Learning Partners built muscle in one or more of the core components and what they were able to accomplish because of it.

We kick off this series with short cases from five state and local change maker teams from 70 member coalitions to two organization partnerships that started in different places and used different strategies, but have been able to bring about a substantial change in the overall climate for change in their community or state. They also represent very different places. Included are:

- Case Study #1: Georgetown Divide (Black Oak), California
- Case Study #2: Bartholomew County/Columbus, Indiana
- Case Study #3: Iowa (the state)
- Case Study #4: Los Angeles, California
- Case Study #5: Sacramento, California

For those interested in the 2-minute overview, we include a chart that shows which change components each partner tackled.

- **BARTHOLOMEW COUNTY/ COLUMBUS, INDIANA** responded to the Ready by 21™ Challenge by focusing on broad community engagement to collect and interpret data on the opportunities and supports for youth and create a blueprint for action. A brand-new intermediary organization, the Council for Youth Development, was established to “be the glue” -- coordinate activities, including fine-tuning the mission and vision; strengthening local youth engagement capacity; developing an annual progress report based on the data collection effort; and launching a fund development drive. Their efforts have garnered public attention, generated new partnerships and gotten a seal of approval from community participants who were used to top-down plans that don’t deliver. The Council was also recognized by America’s Promise as one of the 100 Best Communities for Youth.
- **GEORGETOWN DIVIDE/ BLACK OAK MINE** school district decided to use the Ready by 21 Approach to identify non-traditional partners and leverage more resources. Nearly 100 individuals in this small, former mining community participated in an intensive two-day strategic planning session, using Ready by 21 ideas and tools. The Ready by 21 Coalition that emerged has divided into age-focused working groups that have taken on critical issues, including engaging parents and youth, attracting new resources while leveraging existing ones, and bringing in more capacity to address out-of-school time. These working groups are intentionally cross-sector, and are netting real gains for children and youth. The Ready by 21 Coalition is another finalist in America’s Promise 100 Best Communities for Youth
- **IOWA** responded to the Ready by 21 call to improve not only the quantity but quality by taking advantage of an opportunity to work with High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, one of the Forum’s national

Ready by 21™ partners. The state is undertaking an ambitious effort to use quality assessment to take a closer look inside of its state-funded programs that serve children and youth, and support improvement planning and implementation at the site level. Iowa’s launch of a broad-based quality assessment effort is really a strategy to use data to get providers, advocates and policy makers on the same page about quality and drive policy change that is more inclusive of quality issues. Advocates are hopeful that the quality question can be seeded more directly into policy discussions and decision making in the future.

- **LOS ANGELES** team members recognized their joint desire to “launch a countywide movement for quality youth supports,” but knew that publicly launching a regional effort would be a mammoth undertaking. Instead, Unite LA and the United Way took a different approach, looking internally to see where they could better align their own agendas and play upon their individual strengths as leaders in workforce development and youth development. Their decision to cross-pollenate their leadership teams and align their agendas has netted them increased effectiveness in influencing public campaigns and garnering resource commitments from public and corporate leaders.
- **SACRAMENTO** has already garnered national attention and support for its systems reform work in the area of high school redesign as part of the Carnegie Foundation’s *Schools for a New Society* initiative. Seeking to build on its investments in young people and ensure that its youth-focused institutions and programs were youth-centered, Sacramento responded to the Ready by 21™ Challenge by creating a coalition of service providers and advocates from the full range of sectors that has been working to articulate and develop priorities based on the four Ready by 21 change strategies. They are using their cross-cutting assessments of their collective capacity for change to drive a range of new efforts.

On the Ground: Ready by 21 Core Components Across Learning Group Communities					
	Bartholomew Cnty	Georgetown Divide,	Iowa	Los Angeles	Sacramento
Vision	√	√	√	√	√
Language					√
Goal					
Stakeholders	√	√			√
Partnerships		√		√	
Change Structures	√				√
Service Improvement		√	√		√
Resource Alignment			√	√	√
Demand			√		√
Engagement	√	√			√
Improvement Goals			√		
Data	√		√		
Communication					√