

# GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR

AMERICA'S PROMISE ALLIANCE



# SUMMIT

# Planning Guide



All youth ready for  
college, work & life.

**the  
forum**  
FOR YOUTH INVESTMENT

The Forum for Youth Investment with the Ready by 21® Partners  
May 2008

## About the Forum for Youth Investment

The Forum for Youth Investment is a nonprofit, nonpartisan “action tank” dedicated to helping communities and the nation make sure all young people are Ready by 21® – ready for college, work and life. Informed by rigorous research and practical experience, the Forum forges innovative ideas, strategies and partnerships to strengthen solutions for young people and those who care about them. A trusted resource for policy makers, advocates, researchers and practitioners, the Forum provides youth and adult leaders with the information, connections and tools they need to create greater opportunities and outcomes for young people.

The Forum was founded in 1998 by Karen Pittman and Merita Irby, two of the country’s top leaders on youth issues and youth policy. The Forum’s 25-person staff is headquartered in Washington D.C. in the historic Cady-Lee House with a satellite office in Michigan and staff in Missouri, New Mexico and Virginia.

## About Ready by 21®

The Ready by 21 Challenge calls on states and communities to change the odds for children and youth by changing the way they do business. This requires broadening definitions of what it means for youth to be ready, for schools and communities to be supportive and for all leaders to be engaged. Working in partnership with the business, government, education and nonprofit sectors, the Forum for Youth Investment provides frameworks, coaching and tools to help leaders think differently, act differently and act together. The Ready by 21 Big Picture Approach helps leaders – from young people to parents, program directors to policy makers – bring precision to their passion, ensuring that all young people are ready by 21 – ready for college, work and life.

The five year goal is to have a critical mass of leaders in every state across the country who have learned to focus and prioritize differently so that they can set bigger goals, use bolder strategies, be better partners, and work together to ensure that their individual efforts add up rather than simply add on.

For more information on Ready by 21, please contact Andrea Felix, Special Assistant to the Executive Director, at 202-207-3328 or [andrea@forumfyi.org](mailto:andrea@forumfyi.org).

## About the Ready by 21® National Partners

This goal is impossible to achieve without national partners in the business, government, education and nonprofit sectors. Six partners have made formal commitments to work with the Forum to advance the Challenge: United Way of America, the American Association of School Administrators, America’s Promise Alliance, Corporate Voices for Working Families, the National Collaboration for Youth and the National Conference of State Legislatures. Combined, these partners have the capacity to inform, support and champion the state and local leaders whose commitments are critical to any major change effort.

## About the America's Promise Alliance

America's Promise Alliance is the largest multi-sector collaborative dedicated to children and youth. The Ready by 21 Partners all count among the more than 195 Alliance partners. In the next five years, the partners in the America's Promise Alliance strive to deliver more Promises to 15 million of our nation's most disadvantaged young people – more caring adults, safe places, healthy starts, effective education and opportunities to help others – to ensure their smooth transition to adulthood. Alliance partners selected high school completion rates as the benchmark against which to measure success and the focal point of its mobilization efforts.

## About the Dropout Prevention Summits

To activate this commitment, the Alliance will support 50 state and at least 50 city Dropout Prevention Summits to be held by 2010 with support from State Farm Insurance, the Gates Foundation and other investors. The purposes of the Dropout Prevention Summits, according to the Alliance, are to:

- Increase public awareness of the dropout and college-readiness crisis,
- Secure commitment for integrated collaboration between the corporate, nonprofit, public and education sectors,
- Engage schools and provide exposure to strengthen and support their efforts to help disadvantaged youth,
- Identify and inspire local leaders to get involved in community-school initiatives, and
- Mobilize leaders around the Alliance's three National Action Strategies designed to increase health care coverage, integrate school and community services for at-risk children, and engage every middle-school-aged youth in service learning and career exploration.



## DROPOUT PREVENTION SUMMIT CITIES

Akron, OH	Milwaukee, WI
Albuquerque, NM	Minneapolis, MN
Arlington, TX	Nashville, TN
Atlanta, GA	Newark, NJ
Augusta, GA	New Orleans, LA
Austin, TX	New York, NY
Baltimore, MD	Norfolk, VA
Chicago, IL	Oakland, CA
Cincinnati, OH	Oklahoma City, OK
Cleveland, OH	Philadelphia, PA
Columbus, OH	Phoenix, AZ
Corpus Christi, TX	Pittsburgh, PA
Dallas, TX	Richmond, VA
Denver, CO	Rochester, NY
Detroit, MI	San Antonio, TX
El Paso, TX	Santa Ana, CA
Fort Worth, TX	Shreveport, LA
Fresno, CA	Stockton, CA
Houston, TX	St. Louis, MO
Indianapolis, IN	St. Petersburg, FL
Jackson, MS	Tacoma, WA
Jacksonville, FL	Tampa, FL
Jersey City, NJ	Toledo, OH
Kansas City, MO	Tulsa, OK
Los Angeles, CA	Tucson, AZ
Louisville, KY	Washington, D.C.
Memphis, TN	Yonkers, NY
Miami, FL	

# About This Guide

The Forum for Youth Investment and our Ready by 21 national partners believe that these summits, *if positioned correctly*, can garner national attention *and* galvanize state and local action toward the achievement of the ultimate goal – young people ready for and successful in college, work and life.

This brief guide was prepared by the Forum, with input from United Way of America, America’s Promise Alliance and our other national partners, in response to questions raised by child and youth champions across the country that were looking for clarity about how the messages associated with convening the Dropout Prevention Summits aligned with the Ready by 21 Challenge principles.

These multiple questions can be summarized into three:

- The Ready by 21 Challenge urges leaders to see the end goal as adult success in college, work and life with interim goals that span the developmental stages from pre-school to young adulthood. Does focusing on high school graduation truncate and narrow the goals?
- The Ready by 21 Challenge argues that change requires sustained effort, data-driven planning, and strategic partnerships. Is a one-day summit that may create quick-fix action plans with a focus on school versus broader community solutions a comprehensive and long-term solution?
- The Ready by 21 Challenge argues that fragmented change efforts can dissipate energy, undermine partnerships and weaken overall impact on child and youth outcomes. How can we make sure that the action plans developed after the summits are integrated with other efforts? Does selecting high school graduation as a goal put too much emphasis on school reform as a solution and take attention away from the roles that other systems and sectors can play?

This guide is not intended to be a complete resource, but a way to help those thinking about planning or participating in the America’s Promise Alliance Dropout Prevention Summits find their footing as they work to set Big Picture Goals, be Big Tent Partners and implement Big Impact Strategies to ensure that all young people are ready for college, work and life. We encourage you to learn more about these efforts.

Why focus on high school graduation?

Why focus on summits?

Why create a specific action plan to reduce the dropout rate?

## Q: Why Focus on High School Graduation?

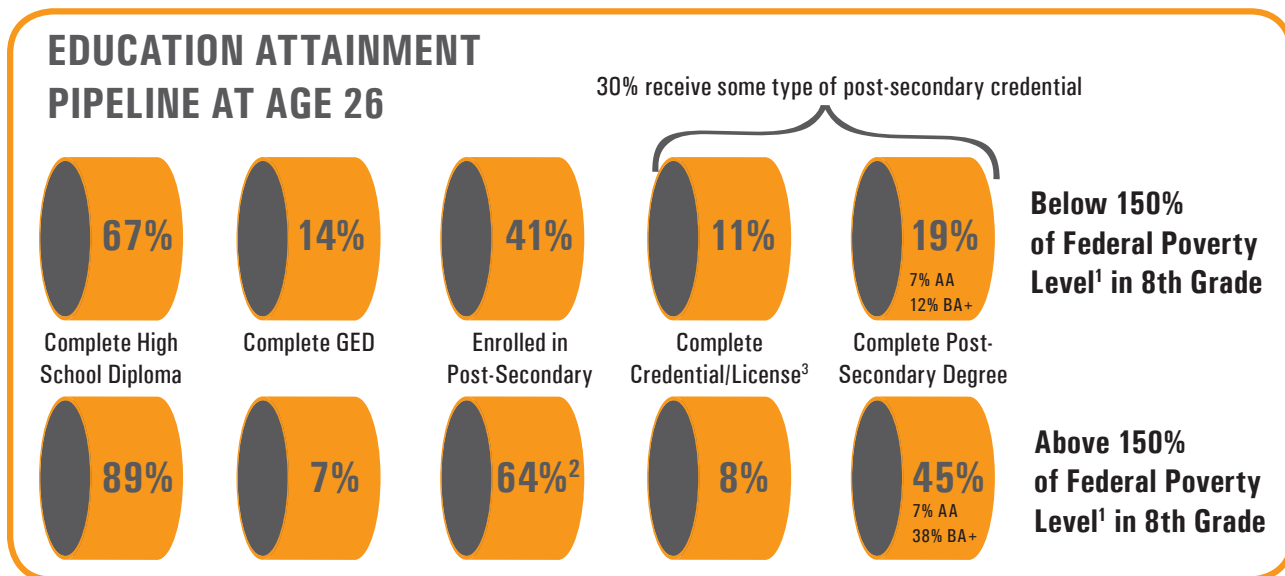
**A: BECAUSE HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION IS AN IMPORTANT *INDICATOR* OF COMMUNITY SUPPORTS, STUDENT READINESS AND ADULT SUCCESS.**

Every 26 seconds, a student in this country drops out of school. That adds up to more than 1.1 million students per year whose future prospects are dim. High school dropouts are twice as likely to continue the cycle of poverty; three times as likely to be unemployed; and eight times as likely to go to prison.

Ready by 21 urges community and state leaders to put very real commitments to tackling specific problems (e.g. achievement gap, dropout rate, pregnancy rates, violence rates) within the context of the bigger goal of ensuring young people are ready for college, work and life by age 21 and firmly connected by age 25.

**Ready by 21 urges state and community leaders to focus time and energy on this problem.** High school graduation is a strong indicator that a young person is on the road to success and a compelling indicator of a community's capacity to support its children and youth. Low graduation rates signal problems up and down the developmental continuum – from birth to young adulthood. These problems almost always include the schools but go far beyond the capacity of schools to fix. They are problems that are almost always correlated with childhood poverty but quickly become predictors of adult poverty.

Only 30 percent of young people who were below 150% of the federal poverty level in 8th grade ever earn some type of post-secondary credential, compared to more than half of those who are 150% above the poverty line.



<sup>1</sup> Federal Poverty Level (FPL) varies by household size. When the subjects of this data sample were in 8th grade in 1987, 150% of the FPL for a family of four was \$17,415 in 1987 dollars. Now, 150% of the FPL is \$30,975 for a family of four.

<sup>2</sup> This data point has the greatest divergence among the three data sources used for this analysis. This represents a conservative number with some datasets reporting up to 85%.

<sup>3</sup> The value of a "Credential/License" varies dramatically so additional analysis will be required to disaggregate the different types. However, recent research does show that obtaining a 1-year post-secondary credential is the first major step function improvement in earnings over high school grads.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88/2000)

Focusing on the high school dropout rate is a way to draw sharp attention to a crisis that goes beyond education, which threatens the economic and democratic foundation of our country. In making the case for aligning around this issue, it is important to note it is a necessary, though not sufficient, milestone for youth on their way to a successful future.

1. **High school graduation is no longer an adequate end goal for youth.** It is the bare minimum standard for a young person. Additionally, young people should be expected to attain some type of post-secondary credential in their third decade of life. Education is the single greatest predictor of intergenerational socioeconomic mobility and has a powerful impact on individual earnings and employment.

The average annual income of adults (25 and older) without high school diplomas is only \$25,000 compared to \$31,500 for high school graduates. Adults with any type of post-secondary degree, however, earn considerably more. The average income of adults with associate degrees is \$40,600, 30% more than the annual income of high school graduates. The attainment gap begins in high school but is present at every point in the pipeline. Getting young people out of high school is a first step but not the end goal.

2. **High school graduation is no longer an adequate predictor of workforce or college readiness.** The diploma has lost value even among employers who are prepared to hire high school graduates. The educational requirements necessary to obtain a diploma have not kept up with the skills and standards required for youth today when they get out into the real world. In a recent Corporate Voices for Working Families survey of over 400 employers, *“Are They Really Ready to Work? Employers’ Perspectives on the Basic Knowledge and Applied Skills of New Entrants to the 21st Century U.S. Workforce,”* 4 in 10 employers reported that their entry level workers with high school diplomas were deficient in the skill areas they felt were critical to job success.
3. **Increasing high school graduation rates without addressing the educational needs of high school dropouts is only a partial solution.** This is especially true in communities and among populations with very high dropout rates.



All youth ready for college, work & life.

# ALL YOUTH READY FOR AND SUCCEEDING IN COLLEGE. WORK. LIFE.

## READINESS SUCCESS INDICATORS

Young people who graduate from high school well-prepared are more likely to be ready for college, work and life.

### Individual Success Indicators:

- % Productive**  
(on track in school/employed)
- % Healthy**  
(physically & emotionally healthy, strong relationships, managing risky behaviors)
- % Connected**  
(to positive community & civic endeavors, avoiding crime)

### Overall Success Index:

- % Doing Well**  
(high in 2-3 indicators, okay in 3rd)
- % Doing OK**  
(doing okay in most)
- % In Trouble**  
(low in 2-3, well in none)

Gambone/Connell/Klem, 2002

## PROGRESS INDICATORS

Other indicators of risk & disengagement throughout the developmental years

**HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION**

Other indicators of preparation & engagement throughout the developmental years

High School Graduation is a strong predictor of young adult success and a strong indicator of the strength of family, school and community supports. But it is not an end goal, and it does not guarantee readiness for after-high-school challenges.

## SUPPORTS INDICATORS

Young people are more likely to graduate from high school when they get the supports they need throughout their developmental years.

### Individual Supports Indicators:

% of children/youth with steady access to the Five Promises:

- Caring family adults & mentors
- Safe places
- Health services access
- Educational opportunities
- Opportunities to contribute

### Overall Support Index:

% of children/youth with:

- 4 – 5 promises
- 2 – 3 promises
- 0 – 1 promises

America's Promise Alliance, 2007

## Q: Why Put Energy into a Dropout Prevention Summit?

**A: BECAUSE THESE SUMMITS OFFER AN EFFECTIVE, EFFICIENT WAY TO GARNER NATIONAL ATTENTION AND GALVANIZE STATE AND LOCAL COMMITMENT TO ACTION.**

**THESE ARE THE KIND OF COMMENTS YOU *DON'T* WANT TO HEAR ABOUT YOUR SUMMIT:**

### Talk. Talk. Talk.

I'm ready to focus on solutions. Summits generate big recommendations but it's never clear whose responsibility it is to act or where the resources are coming from.

We work hard to employ high school graduates from the community. I know some kids are dropping out *but I'm concerned about the kids who graduate but come to me unprepared for work.*

It's hard to hear state leaders talk about increasing the graduation rate when they just voted NO to the proposal to increase taxes to pay for the needed reforms.

We just completed a community needs assessment and created work groups. It would have been great if we could have held off on this event so that the research and recommendations of the youth work group could have been used as a jumping off point.

We've been working on this issue forever in our state and we didn't know about the summit until we received an invitation!

The dropout crisis has received significant media attention. No Child Left Behind requires districts to track graduation progress and make improvement plans. Chances are there is probably a national, state or local convening on the topic occurring somewhere in the country on any given day. What is the added value of these summits?

Communications gurus suggest that the best way to generate interest in an issue is to show that it has national relevance and local uptake. By announcing that it will support at least 100 Summits over the next two years – one in every state, one in multiple cities in crisis – America's Promise Alliance has created over 100 opportunities to bring state and local stories into the national spotlight to create a drumbeat for change.

In addition, these Dropout Prevention Summits can bring attention to high-need populations and create a place for information sharing and strategic discussions. The summits can jumpstart the development of an action plan that builds on existing state and local education reform efforts and links them to other efforts focused on improving supports for children and youth.

It is important at this point in time that the process not continue as "business as usual." The Ready by 21 Challenge is a challenge to leaders to do business differently. The Challenge asks leaders 1) to learn to think differently so that, together, we can act differently, and 2) to create shared accountability for data-driven blueprints for action that have the promise of creating significant change in community supports and youth outcomes. Public convenings can play a role in achieving both of these goals.

States and communities that take on the Ready by 21 Challenge rarely start by holding a summit or public meeting. But events such as these are almost always a part of a long-term plan. Positioned correctly, public convenings like these can significantly increase awareness, galvanize commitment or even affirm a proposed action agenda. They can be a springboard for state and local action and accountability. Connecting your event to a visible national campaign provides an additional boost.

Positioned or executed incorrectly, however, these kind of visible convenings can have little lasting impact and could potentially do harm.

By using the recommendations outlined in this guide, you and your planning team can hopefully avoid these kinds of comments. And, at the same time, be building a process that will last and have sustainable impact on dropout rates in your community or state and make other significant shifts for youth along the way.

I run an adolescent health center, I know that health issues affect teens' attendance and performance, but I got a sense that the summit was focused on high school reform, so I didn't attend.

I dropped out of high school two years ago. Is this meeting going to talk about ways to help me achieve my goals? I don't need to go back to high school, I need to get on with my life.



# Q: Should We Create a Specific Dropout Prevention Plan?

**A: YES... BUT TAKE A STEP BACK AND LOOK AT THE BIG PICTURE.**

## REDUCE THE DROPOUT RATE

### The 10-Point Plan for Graduation Success

1. Support accurate graduation and dropout data.
2. Establish early warning systems to support struggling students.
3. Provide adult advocates and student supports.
4. Support parent engagement and individualized graduation plans.
5. Establish a rigorous college and work preparatory curriculum for high school graduation.
6. Provide supportive options for struggling students to meet rigorous expectations.
7. Raise compulsory school age requirements under state laws.
8. Expand college level learning opportunities in high school.
9. Focus the research and disseminate best practices.
10. Make increasing high school graduation and college and workforce readiness a national priority.

SOURCE: [www.silentepidemic.org/solutions/index.htm](http://www.silentepidemic.org/solutions/index.htm)

To reduce the dropout rate and help more young people graduate from high school ready for college, work and life, the America's Promise Alliance and others believe that it will take change on three fronts:

- school curricula will need to grow more rigorous and relevant,
- data and systems will need to grow more robust to keep a focus on those most at-risk of dropping out, and
- student supports will need to become more comprehensive and integrated across schools, communities, and families.

As part of its agreement with the states and communities it is supporting to hold a summit, the Alliance requires summit teams to develop a post-summit plan that identifies and prioritizes needed improvements on all three levels. Recommended action steps are to be based upon three affirmed agendas: the Alliance's three National Action Strategies, the Silent Epidemic's 10-Point Plan for Graduation Success, and Achieve's four standards within the American Diploma Project. (A separate workbook and toolkit will be available in summer 2008 to help communities and states develop their action plans.)

The 10-Point Plan for Graduation Success is a good starting point for identifying options for addressing the specific barriers to high school graduation identified through an analysis of the data. More than 100 organizations representing a full range of education and community stakeholders believe that these strategies make a difference. There is no need to reinvent the wheel. These are an excellent set of recommendations for improving high schools' capacity to help currently enrolled high school students to complete high school. There are many, many reasons to start with this list of direct, immediate responses to the crisis.

It is important, however, to put this list in the context of other "lists" and other efforts that may be underway in your community or state. As you focus your efforts on implementing specific elements of the 10-Point Plan for Graduation Success, it is important to consider strategies to:

- ensure that children enter school ready to succeed and stay on track,
- create community supports for learning and work that complement or compensate for school,
- address the needs of those who have already dropped out,
- create solid pathways to post-secondary education and work,
- ensure all children and youth are healthy and safe.

## PUTTING DROPOUT REDUCTION STRATEGIES IN CONTEXT

Increase Opportunities, Supports and Incentives for Post-Secondary Education and Work

Identify and Leverage Community Supports for Learning and Work Preparation

Identify Strategies for Keeping Students in High School

Address the Needs of Those Who Have Already Dropped Out

Consider Strategies That Help Young People Arrive in High School Healthy, Safe and Ready To Succeed – Starting with Early Childhood

## Q: What's the Best Way to Ensure that the Summit Leads to Integrated Planning and Action?

**A: FOCUS ON THE END FROM THE BEGINNING. THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU NEED TO CREATE A LONG-TERM PLAN BEFORE YOU PLAN THE DAY.**



The drop-out problem wasn't created overnight. It has persisted because it is a complex problem that has been bombarded with single-focused programs. Good summits will spark action, but a great summit will spark reflection. Hitting the bull's eye with your summit requires taking extra steps along the way to make sure that your decisions have been made in the context of current efforts and with an eye toward the long-term goal of creating strong, feasible action plans.

**Understand and acknowledge the context.** The more your summit is connected to and reflects what's going on in your state or community – current initiatives, pressing issues, promising strategies, potential opportunities for action and alignment (including upcoming events, reports, leadership changes) – the more likely it will be that the summit will generate commitment to change. Take the time to learn about all the work that is going on to improve student success and ultimately ensure that young people are ready for college, work and life. Think about how to incorporate these efforts and actors into the summit by acknowledging recent or upcoming reports, events and decisions.

It's important to ensure that your planning efforts fit into overarching planning and engagement efforts. Engaging community leaders intentionally and in alignment with a conscious planning effort will help to ensure that you are connected with what else is going on in your community and where summit activities can be leveraged for greater outcomes.

**Set the stage for careful planning.** One of the challenges of hosting a one-day event is getting the balance right between awareness-raising and action-planning. There is often an inverse relationship between the two. The more people feel the urgency of the problem, the more, without guidance, they are inclined to grab on to silver bullet solutions that are easy to mobilize around but may not net real change. Given a list, even a well-honed list like the 10-Point Plan for Graduation Success, there will be a tendency to pick one or two things to do, especially if it isn't clear that there is funding available to implement plans. You want participants to leave with a sense that there are solutions; not just one more overwhelming problem.

Make sure you have gathered the research you need to understand everything you need to about addressing the dropout issue and what works in preventing youth from dropping out of school. Research is an important input into the planning process and helps everyone involved understand the breadth and the depth of the problem in your city or state.

The diverse group of leaders brought together need to be challenged to think differently so that, together, they can act differently to discuss and prioritize the full complement of strategies needed to a) help those in high school graduate and connect successfully to college, work and life, b) help those who have already left high school find alternative pathways to success, c) help those in the earlier grades come to high school fully prepared and motivated.

The more your summit prepares participants for the long-term work needed to act fully and achieve the goal – the more likely it will lead to measurable community impact.

**Offer strategies for generating a plan.** If your summit is a state summit or a multi-district city summit, teams should be created to take the plan and actions steps "back home." It is important to send teams back with a clear game plan for next steps and a timeline.

You need to make sure the teams have the supports they need to implement their plans. Is there a point person? Do they have access to leaders? Do they have a clear, action template? Is there any form of ongoing support? What kinds of tools and resources are you providing? Will you be reconvening them in a month or two? Within your timeline, select key milestones and dates that each team is driving towards and when everyone will reconvene to discuss the comprehensive plans.

Finally, encourage teams to repeat the planning process at home. It is an important process and provides consistency by going right back to the beginning of the planning process and starting the whole thing over again at the local level.

# Strategies for Getting the Most Out of Your Summit

## QUICK TIPS

Use these basic “reporters” questions to help you get started:

### Who?

Be intentional about who you involve.

### What?

Be specific about what you are asking them to get involved in.

### Why?

Be clear about the challenge you are asking the group to address.

### How?

Be smart about finding ways to engage people personally in the challenge.

### When?

Be upfront about the time commitments – how many, how long, over what time period.

### Where?

Be sensitive to location – make it send the message you want to send.

Once you have a list of the right people, what are you going to do with them?

### Before

Reach out to participants and share information prior to the meeting.

### During

Engage participants in active learning and problem-solving. Make sure they leave with clarity about roles, structure, tasks and next steps.

### After

Set the stage for continued engagement. Create notes, timelines and deliverables.

The America’s Promise Alliance offers a very useful set of recommendations for planning your summit. ([www.americaspromise.org/APAPage.aspx?id=9172](http://www.americaspromise.org/APAPage.aspx?id=9172)) We’ve expanded upon these recommendations, incorporating others from the Forum for Youth Investment and the United Way of America’s impact planning guides to help you look ahead toward the end goal (a successfully implemented action plan) and helping you to be sure you’ve leveraged and linked to as many related efforts as possible.

It’s critical that you outline the process ahead of time as best you can. It’s important to know where the summit fits into your long-term planning and engagement process. If your summit is coming up fast, is it the kick-off to the planning process? If your summit is not scheduled for another year, is it one of the key milestones toward which your plan is driving? Setting up the process ahead of time assists you in engaging the right people, determining your goals and objectives early and building a plan for how you are going to accomplish these goals – all within the context of the bigger picture. A well-done planning process and quality implementation takes time. It is not uncommon for the planning alone to take up to 6 months or more.

## STEP 1: ENGAGE THE RIGHT PEOPLE

Getting the right people in the room is one of the most important things you need to do whether you are creating a planning committee, reaching out to potential donors or compiling the invitation list for the summit. There are multiple individuals who need to be engaged as you assemble an organizing committee, identify champions to herald the cause, create the invitation list, and decide who will do the real work post-summit. Across the board, however, your efforts will yield better results if you follow a few basic rules.

- **Assemble an organizing committee.** Pull together a diverse group of committed leaders that represent schools, PTAs, businesses, government, youth serving organizations and elected officials. Also include health and human services, juvenile justice and the faith community. Select individuals who have the capacity, motivation and authority to move resources and mobilize people. **Think ahead.** Invite individuals who are involved in related initiatives that are already underway to maximize the links to programs, projects or policy agendas that already have momentum.
- **Find a few champions.** Recruit two or three trusted, respected, visible individuals to be the “voice” of your summit and help bridge gaps between sectors and individuals. Make sure these individuals are willing to stay with you for the long haul and are willing to tailor their messages as they learn about the issues and the solutions.
- **Decide who will complete the work.** The summit at best creates a call for action and sets clear direction. It takes much more to develop and deliver on commitments. Is there a group already in place that has the capacity to sustain the work that can be approached? Expanded?
- **Seek support from community partners.** Identify partners that can provide financial and in-kind support for preparation, the event and the follow-up. Business, foundation and media partners are fine, but don’t forget to engage grassroots organizations who can mobilize youth and families. They are a part of the solution.

## 10 TIPS FOR ENGAGING BUSINESS IN INCREASING HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES

- Make the Business Case
- Have Clear Vision, Goals and Strategies
- Know Exactly What to Ask For
- Understand Business Culture and Avoid Jargon
- Find the Right Champions
- Get Business Peers to Help Recruit Others
- Measure and Report on Results
- Keep in Touch and Keep it Brief
- Encourage Business to Draw from Multiple Resources
- Publicly Recognize Business Contributions

SOURCE: Corporate Voices for Working Families

- **Develop a balanced invitation list.** Invite people who bring access to the expertise, programs, resources and young people you need to move an agenda and who represent the groups suggested by your organizing committee. Be clear that you expect them to continue to work on this problem after the summit.
- **Engage business leaders in your community and state.** Business leaders are often left off of the invitation list because it is sometimes perceived that they are not interested in youth-related issues. Nothing could be further from the truth. Business leaders are also members of the community who have children and care very deeply about how youth are developing. They also care about how youth will contribute to the workforce. They are more than “check-writers” and have proven to be excellent thought partners for long-term strategic action planning.

## STEP 2: PREPARE FOR LONG-TERM ACTION PLANNING

The Forum for Youth Investment’s Blueprint for Action (back page) spells out 10 steps for setting Big Picture Goals, creating Big Tent Partnerships and, most importantly, selecting Big Impact Strategies. The suggestions below build on these action steps but tailor them to the specific task of creating a Dropout Prevention Summit and Action Plan.

- **Compile the facts.** Make sure you have accurate information about graduation rates, existing programs, policies and services. Have this data broken down in ways that are relevant for your community (e.g. by race/ethnicity or poverty levels). Push beyond the top level data on graduation rates to help identify causes of the dropout crisis. Chronic absences? Truancy? 9th grade reading scores? 3rd grade reading scores? College access? Family poverty and mobility? Again, build on what exists. Did a relevant department recently issue a report? Also include data-driven information about strategies that work to prevent dropout.
- **Be very clear about your target outcome and determine who you want to benefit.** Name the exact youth (student) population(s) you intend to benefit – number of people/percent of total population, demographic characteristics, and geographic location/dispersion; including populations that need notably different strategies (e.g. Urban and rural; English-speaking and non-English speaking).
- **Describe the specific benefit you intend for each population.** Clearly define what you mean by “graduate.” Also be extremely clear and specific, such as: is it “access” or “use” or “awareness” or a specific behavior, any increase or a specific amount of percentage increase. Translate the buzz words, for example – “financially stable,” or “adequate income.”
- **Pinpoint the conditions that keep the target outcome from being achieved.** Ask students, parents and others in your community about the underlying issues related to dropout. Are they the knowledge, skills, behaviors of the population itself? Are they the policies, practices, messages, etc., of organizations such as businesses, service providers, schools, faith groups or others. Are there larger issues with systems? Physical or economic challenges in neighborhoods? Look at them all across the board for the full story.

## WAYS TO LEARN MORE

### Forum for Youth Investment

- Ready by 21 Challenge overview, tools and resources: [www.forumfyi.org/readyby21](http://www.forumfyi.org/readyby21)
- *Building Effective Youth Councils: A Practical Guide to Engaging Youth in Policy Making*: [www.forumfyi.org/node/127](http://www.forumfyi.org/node/127)
- *Core Principles for Engaging Youth People in Community Change*: [www.forumfyi.org/node/60](http://www.forumfyi.org/node/60)

### America's Promise Alliance

- A variety of summit and dropout prevention resources: [www.americaspromise.org/APAPage.aspx?id=9172](http://www.americaspromise.org/APAPage.aspx?id=9172)
- Youth Engagement Handbook: <http://15in5.americaspromise.org/Pages/SummitContent.aspx?id=1204>

### United Way of America

- Advancing the Common Good: [www.liveunited.org/ourwork/](http://www.liveunited.org/ourwork/)

### Corporate Voices for Working Families

- Publications about business roles in youth development, including exclusive workforce readiness research (see Afterschool & Early Childhood Education and Youth Transitions): [www.cvworkingfamilies.org/issues/publications.shtml](http://www.cvworkingfamilies.org/issues/publications.shtml)
- *The Art of Effective Business & Nonprofit Partnerships: Finding the Intersections of Business Need and Social Good*: [www.cvworkingfamilies.org/downloads/Art%20of%20Effective%20Partnerships.pdf?CFID=38643150&CFTOKEN=29586098](http://www.cvworkingfamilies.org/downloads/Art%20of%20Effective%20Partnerships.pdf?CFID=38643150&CFTOKEN=29586098)

- **Build strategies for truly changing community conditions.** Once you know what the issues are at the root of the problem, target lasting changes that will overcome the obstacles and ensure that high school students will graduate in your community for years to come and be prepared for college, work and life. Aim to change organizations, associations, neighborhoods, and networks, as well as formal systems and services for greater impact. For example:
  - **In organizations.** Faith communities recruit and train mentors to help chronically truant youth increase their school performance.
  - **In systems.** The school district tracks student absences closely and follows up with every student who drops out to offer alternative educational opportunities.
  - **In neighborhoods.** Neighborhood businesses offer part-time employment for students who show improved school performance.
  - **In personal networks.** Parents take an active role in increasing students' school attendance and performance.
- **Decide how you will communicate the goal.** Language matters. Decide how you want to frame the summit. Reducing dropout rates is one step towards a bigger goal – ensuring that young people are ready for and successful in college, work, and life. Reducing dropout rates doesn't help those who have already dropped out achieve this goal. Acknowledge the bigger picture even if you choose to focus on one piece. Build on, or at least acknowledge related goals that have already been set.
- **Decide how you will track progress.** It's one thing to present the facts. It's another thing to decide what indicators you are going to hang your hat on. Determining when, where and how you are selecting the key indicators to track, and how you are going to measure success (Is turning the curve enough? Is there a specific mark you want to hit?) is critical. Are there targets that have already been set? Are milestones identified? The decision doesn't have to be made before the summit, but there should be a plan. This is especially important if you are hosting a state summit and asking local teams to generate plans.
- **Anticipate how and when you will share the findings with the community.** Think about the format of the report before the meeting. Plan to release the recommendations from the summit within two months after the convening. Be sure to communicate with all summit participants. Link the report to other newsworthy announcements if possible. If you're planning a state summit, think even farther ahead. When and how do you want local communities to release reports?
- **Decide how to present concrete options for action.** Consider ways to solicit or introduce options addressing the problem, including the implementation of nationally-tested strategies. Press to ensure that the action steps selected are specific, measurable, achievable and timely. Carefully select materials you will distribute before or at the summit. Presenting options makes progress seem possible, but options selected too quickly, or before local data has been analyzed to help pinpoint problems and opportunities can produce disappointing results. It is highly likely that you will see positive progress within your community in various ways before you will see actual changes in your dropout rate. This is good of course because any positive change in communities is welcome and serves to buoy other change efforts.

## MORE WAYS TO LEARN MORE

### National Collaboration for Youth

- NCY's member website:  
[www.collab4youth.org](http://www.collab4youth.org)

### National Conference of State Legislatures

- Information about high school reform and similar relevant links:  
<http://ncsl.org/programs/educ/HSReform.htm>

### American Association of School Administrators

- President's Corner – "Sharpening Our Focus to Save Students":  
[www.aasa.org/publications/prescornercurrent.cfm](http://www.aasa.org/publications/prescornercurrent.cfm)
- 2007 State Superintendents of the Year look at the challenges facing today's superintendents and discuss practical solutions for improving learning outcomes for all students: [www.aasa.org/files/PDFs/Awards/SOY/2007SoyForum.pdf](http://www.aasa.org/files/PDFs/Awards/SOY/2007SoyForum.pdf)

## STEP 3: PLAN THE SUMMIT DAY WELL

- **Decide on the purpose and format.** Decide whether you are unveiling an action plan or creating one. This will determine whether you focus on presenting information or on creating interactive tasks for participants. If you are hosting a state summit, think through options for inviting teams and providing structured opportunities for team planning.
- **Consider linking the summit to another event.** Place the summit on a one-year continuum of public events and report releases that have happened or will happen. Time it for leverage. Link it with another event if useful.
- **Pick a date and venue that works for participants.** Avoid major conflicts such as holidays and elections. Identify an easily accessible location that accommodates the physically challenged and allows for break out sessions for the numbers you expect.
- **Think carefully about the agenda and presenters.** Think about how to organize the day. Consider starting with a high level speaker, inviting local experts who can speak to the data and including young people themselves, especially those who dropped out of school. Balance inspiration with content. Consider having youth and adult panelists who can speak to real data and real options presented from a variety of perspectives. Be sure to leave time to introduce the information and assignments participants will need to continue the work when they leave. Build in time for small group discussions (or team meetings) to be sure that everyone is engaged. Use trained facilitators if possible.
- **Include youth in your summit.** Youth are the reason you are hosting this summit in the first place. Why not include them in your program? Coordinate a youth panel. Listen and learn from youth themselves about what is happening and what is working. Enlist them as volunteers throughout the day. They need to see the work that the adults in their communities are doing to help make sure that they stay in school and grow up to lead healthy, productive and satisfying lives.

## STEP 4: HAVE A FOLLOW-UP PLAN IN MIND

We can't say it too many times. The summit sets the stage for planning. The real work happens after the lights go out. Everything that you did to prepare for the summit (Step 2) has to flow through the summit and continue long after. If you are planning a state summit, this means that the teams that go back to their jurisdictions need very clear timelines and instructions. It means that you have to create avenues for communication about questions and progress.

The Forum for Youth Investment, United Way of America, America's Promise Alliance and the other Ready by 21 national partners are prepared to support you in a variety of ways as you move forward with planning your summit, building an action plan and implementing your strategies. Keep an eye on the Forum and the Alliance's web site as we continue to build tools and resources to support your efforts.

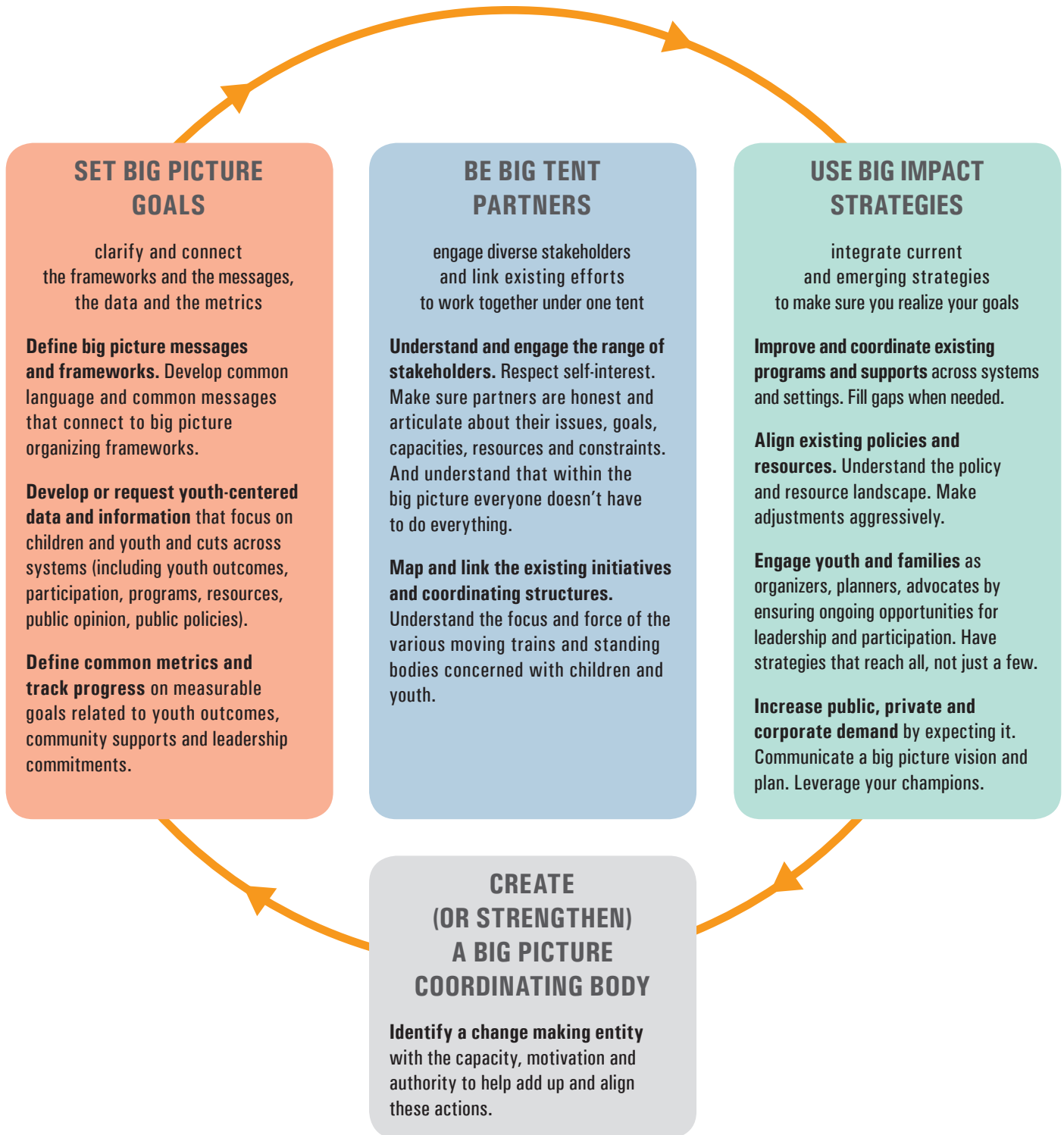
Working together we have more opportunities than ever to make a difference in our communities and our states. But in order to do that, we have to think differently, act differently and act together. Together... we can.

# The Blueprint for Action:

## LEARNING TO ACT DIFFERENTLY

Leaders need to use the Big Picture Approach – sharpening the focus of the whole picture while setting priorities within it – to plan for and tackle each of the following 10 action steps that make up the...

### BLUEPRINT FOR ACTION



**FOCUS DIFFERENTLY SO THAT TOGETHER WE CAN ACT DIFFERENTLY**

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