



All youth ready for college, work & life.

PRESS RELEASE

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THE FORUM FOR YOUTH INVESTMENT ISSUES READY BY 21™ CHALLENGE TO CHANGE ODDS FOR YOUTH BY CHANGING THE WAY WE DO BUSINESS.

Former Congressman Dick Gephardt and former Governor Tom Ridge join the Forum and national partners to move the Ready by 21 Challenge across the country – reaching communities in all 50 states over the next 5 years.

(Washington, D.C. – February 27) Celebrating its 10th anniversary, the Forum for Youth Investment today announced the national launch of the Ready by 21™ Challenge, aimed at helping state and local leaders change the odds for youth by changing the way they do business. Challenge co-chairs, former Congressman Dick Gephardt and former Governor Tom Ridge, applauded the initiative and pledged their commitment to engage private and corporate donors in building the Ready by 21 Challenge Fund. The launch event also honored Nashville youth activist, Eric Polk, 23, recipient of the first Ready by 21 Change Maker award.

The ultimate goal of the Ready by 21 Challenge is to ensure that all young people have the supports and opportunities they need to be 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 to current programs. The Forum announced the launch of five interconnected strategies to meet these goals:

Products. The Forum unveiled its new Web site, announced a Ready by 21 Webinar series and announced that the Ready by 21 tools are being adapted for on-line use. By 2009, this on-line suite of affordable, customizable tools will include strategic planning and facilitation guides, data analysis tools, and resources and examples for moving on-the-ground work.

Partners. The Forum announced six major national partners committed to tackling the Ready by 21 Challenge, and their plans to enlist up to 20 national partners by 2009.

Places. The Forum announced recent matching grants to seven communities and five states that are currently taking on the Ready by 21 Challenge and announced plans to ensure that by 2011, 200 states and localities with leadership teams are taking on the challenge.

People. The Forum and its partners announced a set of leadership affinity groups and training opportunities including a series of Ready by 21 Institutes, the annual Children’s Cabinets and Councils Network Roundtable in July 2008, and the creation of the Youth Councils Learning Group. They announced their plans to ensure that by 2012, 2,000 leaders will be committed to moving the Ready by 21 Challenge within their own work.

Challenge Fund. The Forum announced the creation of a \$21 million Ready by 21 Challenge Fund by 2013, built by public, private and corporate funders to provide support to people, places and partners ready to manage, make and measure change.

Karen Pittman and Merita Irby, co-founders of the Forum, announced the specifics of the Challenge at a press conference at the Ronald Reagan Building. They were joined by their signature partner, the United Way of America, and the top executives from the Forum’s national partner organizations: 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. Each organization pledged to encourage its members to take on the Challenge by working together in their states and communities. Other national organizations, corporations, government agencies and funders present at the launch were invited to join the movement.

“Trying isn’t good enough anymore,” said Governor Ridge. “If this country is going to be competitive in the 21st century, we have to invest in what works. The Ready by 21 Challenge helps state and local leaders put their own work in the context of the big picture of everything needed to change the overall array of community supports. The goal is that by age 21, young people are not just a bunch of ‘nots’ – not pregnant, not dropouts, not gang members – but are actually ready for college, work and life. The Ready by 21 tools and partnerships give leaders everything they need to take on the Challenge.”

“This Challenge is long overdue,” said Congressman Gephardt. “Incremental approaches don’t work. Improving young lives means changing old strategies. Increasing funding for one program while decreasing funding for another generates political wins but it fails children and youth. We need to challenge our leaders – public and private – to be accountable for the lives they touch directly or indirectly. These goals are ambitious, but doable, because of the groundwork that has already been laid.”

Ready by 21 Challenge grants were made in late January to seven communities and five states committed to improving the quality and reach of community learning opportunities for children and youth. Support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Atlantic Philanthropies is allowing each of these *Ready by 21 Quality Counts* sites to receive training and technical assistance and up to \$100,000 each over two years in matching grants.

“The Ready by 21 Framework and the United Way Community Impact Model fit hand in glove”, said Brian Gallagher, president and CEO of United Way of America. “Ensuring that young people are ready for college, work and life are goals we must all support. Ready by 21 takes the very important step of inspiring our communities to think differently about solutions and to set bold goals.”

United Ways are already actively involved in two-thirds of the Ready by 21 Challenge sites and present in all. The sites provide a natural learning lab for United Way and the other National Partners to work together and to engage their members and affiliates. JC Penney is supporting United Way in its growing partnership with the Forum, including providing support to two additional Challenge sites.

“There is an urgent need to prepare our next generation of workers for the competitive challenges of the 21st century, and we cannot afford to approach this issue as business as usual,” said Donna Klein, president and founder of Corporate Voices for Working Families. “We support the collaborative effort embraced by the Ready for 21 Challenge. Our research indicates there are a high percentage of graduates that are not employable. Both the business and nonprofit communities need to change their behavior, align their goals and resources, and work together.”

Karen Pittman emphasized the need for corporate involvement in the work, noting that support from Philip Morris USA Youth Smoking Prevention has been key in moving the Ready by 21 work forward on the national level. “We know there are champions in all sectors and roles who are passionate in their support of children and youth and frustrated with our collective lack of progress,” she said. “Our goal is to give them the frames and tools they need to bring precision to their passion. By working with organizations like the United Way and our other national partners, we are confident that we can reach our goals.”

ABOUT THE FORUM FOR YOUTH INVESTMENT

The Forum for Youth Investment is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to helping communities and the nation make sure all young people are Ready by 21™: ready for college, work and life. This goal requires that young people have the supports, opportunities and services needed in the first two decades of life so that they are on track and ready to learn, work, thrive, connect and contribute. The Forum provides youth and adult leaders with the information, technical assistance, training, network support and partnership opportunities needed to increase the quality and quantity of youth investment and youth involvement.

UNITED WAY OF AMERICA

United Way is a national network of nearly 1,300 local organizations that advance the common good, creating opportunities for a better life for all by focusing on the three key building blocks of education, income and health. United Way of America is the national organization dedicated to leading the United Way movement to create long lasting community change by addressing the underlying causes of the most significant issues. Common focus areas for local United Ways include helping children and youth achieve their potential, promoting financial stability and independence, and improving people’s health.

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

The American Association of School Administrators, founded in 1865, is the professional organization for more than 13,000 educational leaders across the United States. AASA members range from chief executive officers, superintendents and senior level school administrators to cabinet members, professors and aspiring school system leaders.

AMERICA’S PROMISE ALLIANCE

The America’s Promise Alliance is the nation’s largest multi-sector collaborative dedicated to the well-being of children and youth. With over 150 members, the Alliance leads the way in forging multi-sector partnerships, bringing together businesses, youth-serving organizations, elected officials, educators, faith groups, funders, and individuals of all ages.

CORPORATE VOICES FOR WORKING FAMILIES

Corporate Voices for Working Families (CVWF) is the leading national business membership organization representing the private sector voice in the dialogue on public policy issues related to working families. CVWF is a non-profit and nonpartisan organization that facilitates research and provides public and private policy solutions in three key areas: workforce readiness, including early childhood education, after school care and youth development, family economic stability, and flexibility in the workplace, including issues of the mature workforce.

NATIONAL COLLABORATION FOR YOUTH

The National Collaboration for Youth (NCY) is a coalition of more than forty of the nation's leading youth-serving/youth development agencies. Its members collectively reach in excess of 40 million children and youth annually. NCY is a part of the National Human Services Assembly (NHSA), which is the nonprofit corporate entity for both organizations. NHSA is an association over 70 of the national's leading national non-profits in the fields of health, human and community development and human services that are committed to helping individuals, families and communities thrive.

NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF STATE LEGISLATURES

NCSL is the leading bi-partisan organization supporting legislators and staff of the nation's 50 states, its commonwealth and territories. NCSL provides research, technical assistance and opportunities for policymakers to exchange ideas on the most pressing state issues.

For more information about the Ready by 21™ Challenge, contact Thaddeus Ferber, Program Director at the Forum for Youth Investment at 202-207-3333 or thaddeus@forumfyi.org.

Following are contacts for local Ready by 21 Quality Counts Initiatives whom reporters may notify for further information about the Ready by 21Challenge in communities and states.

IOWA

The Iowa Collaborative for Youth Development (ICYD) is a network of state agencies established in 1999 to align and coordinate youth policies and programs. As a Ready by 21™ Quality Counts site, ICYD will continue this work and build a data-driven quality improvement system that brings common language and metrics to youth-serving agencies in the nonprofit and public sector including juvenile justice, education, child welfare, human services and public health. ICYD will also collect data about the availability, focus and reach of youth programs and about the youth development workforce and expand professional development opportunities for youth workers. All of these efforts are designed to advance key policy goals outlined in the state's strategic plan for youth development. ICYD is combining a statewide strategy with a particular focus on Linn County, Polk County/Des Moines, and 10 North Central counties.

Contact: Amy Croll, Iowa Collaborative for Youth Development
(515) 281-5999 Amy.croll@iowa.org

NEW YORK

The Office of Children and Family Services is leading New York's Ready by 21™ Quality Counts statewide effort, partnering with local departments of social services and county youth bureaus in four specific counties: Broome, Orange, Onondaga and Rockland. By embedding program quality assessment within monitoring functions at the state and local levels, New York hopes to increase cross-system collaboration in service of a shared vision for young people across the state. In addition to building local and state capacity to conduct ongoing quality assessment and improvement activities, OCFS will expand professional development opportunities and incentives for youth workers and develop comprehensive program inventories to inform decision makers and the public about program availability, focus and reach.

Contact: Larry Pasti, NY Office of Children and Family Services
(518) 561-8740 Larry.pasti@ocs.state.ny.us

KENTUCKY

Kentucky Child Now (KCN) was established in 1998 to promote the healthy development of Kentucky's Children and youth through innovation at the state and community levels. With Lexington and Louisville as pilot communities, KCN's Ready by 21™ Quality Counts strategy aims to improve the quality of youth programs in those cities and across the state by strengthening the policy infrastructure, mapping the youth-serving landscape, building assessment capacity, and expanding professional development opportunities. Quality Counts is a key vehicle for carrying out the Kentucky Youth Development Coordinating Council's new strategic plan for young people in the state.

Contact: T.J. Delahanty, Kentucky Child Now
(502) 227-7722 tjdelahanty@kychildnow.org

AUSTIN

Ready by 21™ Austin, a city-wide coalition of youth-service providers, educators, government agencies and youth advisors, is spearheading Austin's Quality Counts initiative, which it sees as an opportunity to bridge institutional and policy differences toward a set of common goals for young people. The Coalition's work includes bringing community leaders together around a common vision and metrics for supporting youth; mapping the youth services landscape to understand program availability, focus and reach and to identify gaps; and improving the quality of youth programs by building a sustainable, data-driven quality improvement system. The Quality Counts initiative will also allow the Coalition to join with the Central Texas Afterschool Network in expanding opportunities for youth worker professional development in Austin.

Contact: Suzanne Hershey, Ready by 21™ Austin
(512) 323-0024 suzanne@communitysync.com

INDIANAPOLIS

The Marion County Commission on Youth (MCCOY) is leading the Indianapolis Ready by 21™ Quality Counts effort and using the initiative as an opportunity to align several related but disconnected initiatives in the city in the areas of youth development, child welfare, educational achievement, crime prevention and juvenile detention reform. As part of its Quality Counts work, MCCOY will engage city leaders in the development of a youth master plan, build an on-line directory of youth-service providers, design and implement a data-driven quality improvement system, and increase local capacity to provide high quality professional development opportunities for youth workers.

Contact: John Brandon, Marion County Commission on Youth
(317) 921-1288 john.brandon@mccoyouth.org

NASHVILLE

For nearly 40 years Oasis Center has been working to improve the individual and community conditions that impact youth wellbeing in Nashville. As the intermediary organization leading Nashville's Ready by 21™ Quality Counts work, Oasis Center will collaborate with other agencies across the city to strengthen youth policies and programs, with an emphasis on improving staff practice across public and private agencies serving youth. By creating common standards and working with local funders to provide the resources and supports necessary for programs to respond to those standards, Oasis Center plans to strengthen quality and improve coordination across the youth-serving field.

Contact: Michael McSurdy, Oasis Center
(615) 327-4455 mmcsurdy@oasiscenter.org