



WORKING DRAFT

Ready by 21: Taking Aim on the Big Picture

Over the past two years, the Forum for Youth Investment has deliberately looked for opportunities to work with states and cities interested in seeing the forest (the overarching vision) and the trees (the specific policies and programs). We have found that the more decision-makers take time to define the total set of child and youth outcomes the more it becomes clear that these outcomes are interlinked and cannot be achieved without coordination across systems, across policies, across programs.

Coordination is an elusive goal – easy to approach, hard to reach. Decades of work with policy makers, program providers, advocates and funders have led the Forum to conclude that coordination – of programs, policies, people or ideas – is impossible without frames. Not models of how things should be done, but frames for organizing what exists in ways that allow all parties to see what needs to be done. Public policy needs closet organizers.

The Forum has found that the quickest way to get these ideas across is to ask a few questions, state a few truths and draw a few pictures. The exercise takes about 2 minutes to explain. It works.

Question #1: *What do we really know about children's and teens' development?*

Answer: We know enough to act more decisively.

We know three basic things from research:

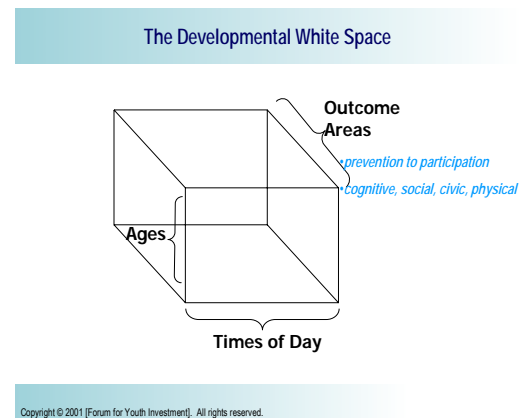
- Young people need and deserve our support throughout their waking hours.
- Young people need and deserve early and sustained investments throughout at least the first two decades of life.
- To be successful in school, work and life, young people need to develop across a broad range of outcome areas. They do not have to excel in all outcome areas, but serious trouble in any hampers success.

We also know that:

- The progress young people make is directly correlated with the quality and quantity of supports, services and opportunities they are offered.
- These supports are provided not just in families and schools but by the full range of organizations and individuals that touch children and youth's lives.

Picture: Take the first three statements about Time, Age, and Outcomes. Make them the axes of a cube.

The space inside the cube is what we call “developmental space.” Every day, they will find people to talk to, places to go, and things to do that help them feel safe and wanted, help them learn, and help them feel that they matter. The more we are intentional about providing supports and opportunities and monitoring their progress, the stronger they will be.



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Coordination Opportunity: Filling the space.

The picture achieves what months of meetings often do not. It conveys the urgency of adding up individual efforts before we create more new ones. It suggests the distinct possibility that there are serious gaps where progress is not being monitored and effort is not being made.

Most important, it makes clear, in human terms, that schools, while critically important, do not fill all or even most of developmental space whether the measure is time, age, or outcome area. It forces the question: who fills the rest?

Question #2: *How can this “ah hah” be translated into a process that can help funders, program leaders, government agencies, and youth and families understand the goals, assess the responses, and work together to achieve them?*

Answer: Through a series of facilitated fill-in-the-blank tools that can guide inquiry, increase demand, and facilitate data collection and analysis.

The quickest way to see if everyone is on the same page is to structure a series of time-limited processes that literally force all stakeholders to fill in the pages. The Forum always recommends that groups start by specifying the results we want for children and youth before specifying the specific programs or policies we want to implement.

Pictures: A linked series of blank grids that help stakeholders engage with the things we know about children and youth and about the institutions that support them.

How would the different groups of stakeholders color in this grid when asked to distribute 100 “resource dots” across the grid in the way they feel best uses these resources to achieve the goal of ensuring that all young people are Ready by 21: ready for college, ready for work, ready for life? (see attachment for a sample completed grid)

		Early Childhood (0-5)	Elementary Age (6-10)	Middle School (11-14)	High School (15-19)	Young Adults (20-24)
Developmental Areas	Ready for College (Formal Learning)					
	Ready for Work (Vocational/career experience)					
	Ready for Life					
	Thriving (Physical Health)					
	Connecting (Social/Emotional Well-Being)					
	Contributing (Civic and Community Engagement)					

How different is the distribution when stakeholders are asked to distribute the dots to reflect their perceptions of where resources are currently deployed? Where the need is greatest? Where public support is greatest?

How different is the distribution when stakeholders are asked to refine their pictures further by describing how the resources within each developmental outcome area (the “ready” areas) are distributed by goal? For example, how much of their state or community’s investment in 16-19 year olds college readiness is devoted to addressing serious problems (e.g. re-engaging dropouts, offering remediation to students two or more grades behind), preventing problems (e.g. preventing truancy) versus preparing students (e.g. increasing academic rigor of classes) and engaging them (e.g. increasing participation in internships, work-study programs)? How much do these more detailed pictures differ by age group?

Coordination Opportunity: This “perspective dumping” process is a quick way to get everything on the table. These are simple but powerful exercises that, if well-documented and well-facilitated, can be used to quickly increase awareness that goals, resources, need, and demand are significantly out of alignment. They can also uncover deep differences of opinion about where investments are being or should be made that could hamper coordination efforts. They are definitely an effective way to frame and organize data and to create stakeholder demand for data – about funding, child and youth outcomes, program slots, race/ethnicity/income or neighborhood differences, policy mandates.

Question #3: *How does this process help individual systems and organizations assess the adequacy of their missions and their performance?*

Answer: By asking each provider to start with the same assumptions about what young people need and to respond to the same questions about the specific services, supports and opportunities they provide.

The “ah hah” experience generated at the community level among broad groups of stakeholders has to be recreated within each organization or system. The Education system is accountable for preparing children for post-secondary education and work. That is its primary mission. Achieving that mission, however, has led that system to offer services and supports at almost every level (from problem reduction to participation) in almost every developmental outcome area for almost every age group. Communities cannot assess their resource alignment adequately without asking how education resources are distributed across the grids. Communities cannot make sense of the answers if the questions asked are not the same across systems and organizations.

Picture: This is a sample picture showing the supports and services that are probably provided by most school systems. The message is not that schools should only focus on academic preparation (i.e. that the majority of the cells should be blank). The message is that schools and other organizations should know how their resources are being allocated and be accountable for results in areas where they are allocating significant resources. This is true for every department and organization.

SAMPLE EDUCATION SERVICES, SUPPORTS ACROSS THE GRID				
	Problem Reduction	Prevention	Preparation	Participation
Ready for College (Formal Learning)	Dropout Recovery, Adult Education, Alternative Schools	Progress Assessment, Remedial Education	Rigorous Academic Courses, Course Selection Assistance	Pre-college Classes, Access Programs, SAT Prep Classes
Ready for Work (Voc/career experience)	Workers Rights Classes, Work Skills Training	Vocationally-focused Remedial Education	Vocational Education, Career Awareness	Community Internships, School-To-Career
Ready for Life				
Thriving (Physical Health)	Reporting Suspected Abuse	Sexual, Substance Abuse Ed, School Clinic Services	Physical Education	Team Captains, Peer Counselors
Connecting (Soc/Em Well-Being)	Reporting Suspected Neglect	Counseling	Student Clubs	Peer Tutors
Contributing (Civic/Community Engagement)	Expulsion Policies for Dangerous Youth	Conflict Management Training	Civics Education	Student Council, Service Learning

The grid has to be filled out by each department or organization charged with addressing *any* goal – from child protection to academic achievement. It is a fact that every organization, no matter how small, provides services and supports in areas outside of its mandate in order to achieve its mandate

Coordination Opportunity: Developing a common language for describing program goals (e.g. increasing problem-solving skills) or outputs (e.g. child care slots, job training, health check-ups) allows individual programs and coordinating bodies to take stock of what they are doing and take action to maximize efforts and resources. Finally, the grids can be used to track resources – financial and human.

Question #4: *How can this framework and process be used in communities that already have major initiatives underway? (e.g. expanding after-school or early childhood education, high school reform)*

Answer: The challenge is not just to align programs, it is to align initiatives. Fragmented services stem from fragmented visions of what needs to be done.

Ensuring that every young person is **Ready by 21** requires fundamental changes in the way we do business as funders (public and private), providers (public and private), and advocates. It requires, more than ever, engaging young people and their families, who have a vested interest in success and unique insights about solutions, and engaging the public as key stakeholders prepared, with other stakeholders to

- Take Aim (set results-based goals),
- Take Stock (assess the current state of commitments and need), and
- Take Action (make the changes needed to improve outcomes).

Meeting this goal will not be easy, but it is possible. We believe that communities and states stepping up to the challenge can be **Set by 2010** – having created the accountability systems, the program capacity and the demand needed to make, measure and sustain change. Equally important, we believe that communities and states stepping up to this challenge can name, with confidence, tough goals that they can promise to have **Done by 2015**.

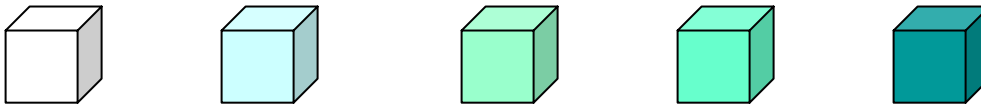
Picture: The Forum advocates for states and communities to take a child- and youth-centered approach to aligning public and private investments, programs, assessments, demand. The first measures that this approach is paying off, however, will not be measures of changes in the status of children and youth, but measures of change in the alignment of the sectors and systems. A sample of tasks and measures is provided below.

Coordination Opportunity: Paul Hill, co-author of *It Takes A City*, talks about the need for Community Partnerships for improving educational opportunities in cities that “acknowledge that the traditional boundaries between the public school system’s responsibilities and those of other community agencies are themselves part of the educational problem” and creates “a genuine community-wide system in that all the community’s resources, not simply its schools, would be available in an organized way to meet children’s educational needs and their general well-being.”

Recognizing that this community-wide system has to be intentionally created to engage providers, funders, advocates, and young people and their families as real and equal stakeholders means recognizing that opportunities to work differently have to be created, monitored, and maintained on almost every level. Creating a **Set by 2010** plan gives communities an opportunity to acknowledge the breadth and depth of the commitment needed to retool relationships in order to achieve results.

Set by 2010 Tasks

	Accountability	Capacity	Clout
Take Aim	Created/instilled common vision as set of measurable results which they are committed to achieving for all youth; select measurable, relevant indicators.	Created/begun to embed common performance indicators for all programs/opportunities based on agreed definitions of quality and inputs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Defined benchmarks for success by 21 that are publicly known and widely owned. ▪ Forged alliances between single-focus coalitions, task forces, coordinating bodies.
Take Stock	Activated regular processes for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ assessing status of young people and their families ▪ reviewing allocation of public and private investments ▪ reporting results in ways that engage all stakeholders. 	Activated/supported regular processes for assessing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ program quality ▪ program reach ▪ youth/family access ▪ neighborhood resources among all stakeholder groups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Established clear, strong mechanisms for engaging users, providers, funders and advocates in assessment processes – providing input and reviewing results. ▪ Established regular, sustainable ways of assessing need and gauging public opinion.
Take Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strengthened authority of cross-sector coordinating structures. ▪ Established minimum investment levels. ▪ Balanced /shifted youth investment portfolios. ▪ Redefined programs/strategies. ▪ Defined target goals. 	Established/implemented plans for development of adequate infrastructure for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ program assessment ▪ organizational capacity building ▪ staff/volunteer development ▪ quality assurance ▪ equitable deployment of resources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fostered the development of strong, mobilized constituencies within each stakeholder group – users, providers, funders, advocates/champions. ▪ Ensured the long-term engagement of key decision-makers – government, business, non-profit, faith, community. ▪ Implemented business plans to sustain advocacy campaigns



The Forum for Youth Investment is working actively to create the technical and resource capacity needed to help communities and states turn these ideas into action –

- identifying states and localities for whom these frames and processes meet an immediate need;
- identifying national organizations with reach and resources needed to move these ideas and tools out to their members and affiliates (e.g. the National Urban League, the Public Education Network, the National League of Cities);
- identifying national and regional funders interested in supporting the development of national research, technical assistance, and communications capacity as well as state and local planning and implementation.

Recently, the Forum has begun work to create a national Ready by 21 Consortium of corporate and non-profit leaders committed to securing the financial, technical and political resources needed to help states and localities make public commitments to ensure that every young person is [Ready by 21](#).

Sample Grid: Results by Age and Outcome

	Early Childhood (0-5)	Elementary Age (6-10)	Middle School (11-14)	High School (15-19)	Young Adults (20-24)
Ready for College (Formal Learning)	All Young Children Ready to Learn	All Children Developing Basic Skills and Competencies	All Youth Are Succeeding in School	All Young People Are Fully Prepared for Higher Education or Work	All Young Adults Enter Workforce or Higher Ed with Adequate Skills
Ready for Work (Vocational/career experience)	All Young Children Have Awareness that Adults Work	All Children Have Positive Attitudes Towards The Employment of Adults in Their Lives	All Youth Are Aware of Possible Career Paths that Give Them Hope and Purpose	All Young People Make a Successful Transition to Adulthood	All Young Adults Are Employed with a Living Wage And Benefits
Ready for Life					
Thriving (Physical Health)	All Young Children Fully Immunized	All Children Meet Physical Standards for Developmental Age	All Youth Develop Proper Nutrition, Hygiene, and Exercise Routines	All Youth Are Engaged in Physical Activity and Avoid Risk-Compromising Behaviors	All Young Adults Have Good Health and Health Habits
Connecting (Social/Emotional Well-Being)	All Young Children Have Appropriate Attachment to a Significant Adult	All Children Have Positive Self Awareness, and an Ability to Express Themselves	All Youth Engage in Socially Acceptable Behavior and Have a Healthy Self-Concept	All Young People Have a Sense of Independence as Well as Positive Relationships with Those Around Them	All Young Adults Foster Personal and Social Growth in the People In Their Lives
Leading (Civic and Community Engagement)	All Young Children Feel Supported By a Community Around Them	All Children Accept Rules and Social Boundaries	All Youth Demonstrate Attitudes and Behaviors of Civic Responsibility	All Young People Are Involved in Programs to Give Back	All Young Adults Are Making a Difference in Their Community