



The Forum for Youth Investment: *Moving Ideas to Impact*

The Forum's tag line reflects our approach to our work and our goals for our partners. Founded in 1998, the Forum has transitioned from being a D.C.-based think tank to being an action tank working with national, state and local leaders in more than 35 states. There are more than 45 staff and 15 consultants associated with our two offices in Washington, D.C. and Ypsilanti, Michigan.

Our mission is straightforward: We help leaders get young people ready for life. But doing so requires a range of strategies – from national thought leadership to on-the-ground action.

The Forum has an unwavering commitment to thought leadership – and to bring academic, field and action research into play where policy and practice decisions are made. We do more than synthesize information. We challenge leaders to improve youth readiness; to increase family, school and community supports; and to increase shared accountability for progress by helping them make the case for what could be.

The Ready by 21 National Meeting, launched in 2012, is the latest and most visible addition to our commitment to cross-fertilize ideas. It's become the annual destination meeting for 500 of the thousands of state and local leaders who stay connected with us through social media, research and writing, invitational meetings and webinars on issues related to youth success.

The Forum is equally committed to action. Each year, we expand our capacity to help leaders who share our passion for big picture change to move these ideas to impact. We create trainings, tools, learning communities, technical assistance and evaluation approaches that respond to their requests and connect them with their peers. We do this on a range of big topics – from program quality improvement to partnership strengthening to aligning and generating public funding. We do this for a range of coordinating vehicles – from children's cabinets to broad city-wide initiatives to provider networks to school-community partnerships.

Going deep requires specialization. Helping all young people be ready by 21 – *ready for college, work and life* – is the vision that drives our work. It knits together the branded technical assistance centers, networks, and projects and initiatives we create to organize our staff and to be better prepared to respond to some of the specific challenges and opportunities facing the national, state and local leaders with whom we work.

The Forum is the organizational home to:

- **TWO MULTI-FACETED TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTERS:**
 - **The David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality**, a field leader in at-scale performance-based accountability systems for out-of-school time (OST) programs and other settings with more than a decade of experience focused on three things: quality improvement system design, effective performance data, and lower stakes accountability.
 - **Big Picture Approach Consulting**, a consolidated technical assistance center supporting the senior consultants who bring the Forum's "big picture" whole-child, whole-community approach to life through teaching, coaching, technical assistance, facilitation and actionable data services designed to strengthen the work of community coalitions and partnerships.
- **TWO NATIONAL NETWORKS:**
 - **The Children's Cabinet Network**, the only national network of state and local policy coordinating bodies for children and youth, focused for a decade on sharing best practices and tools to bring efficiency and effectiveness to efforts to align policies, programs and funding to improve outcomes for young people.
 - **The Opportunity Youth Network**, launched in 2013 with the Aspen Institute for Community Solutions to bring together the country's leading philanthropists, corporations, federal government officials, non-profits and formerly disconnected youth around a goal to reconnect one million opportunity youth in five years.

- **FIVE ONGOING PROJECTS & INITIATIVES**

- **SparkAction**, a collaborative online journalism and advocacy platform created in 2008 to mobilize action for and by young people. It has become a respected neutral brand used by national and local coalitions and advocacy groups to cut across silos to create a central “megaphone” to mobilize like-minded adults and youth around calls to action.
- **The Policy Alignment Initiative**, created in 2013 to galvanize and expand the Forum policy staff’s work with federal, state and local leaders to assess and align government policies horizontally (across systems) and vertically (between levels from local to federal).
- **The Evidence Based Policy and Practice Initiative**, created in 2015 to leverage the learning we have done in the field and in partnership with the W.T. Grant Foundation by creating proactive strategies to drive the next generation of governmental policy innovations designed to use evidence to improve the quality of programs throughout a system.
- **The Children’s Funding Project**, started in 2016 to provide increased support to local children’s cabinets or coordinating bodies that are interested in creating not only youth plans but strategies to fund them and evaluate their impact.
- **The Readiness Project**, started in 2014 to synthesize the growing research on readiness into easy and compelling discussion-starter tools that help communities highlight the systemic but sometimes hidden inequities in the environments where youth spend their time.

All of these efforts advance our mission of helping leaders get young people ready for life. Each has a distinct focus and/or target audience. Learn more about each by reading its respective one-page overview.

