

SECTION A: STRATEGIES THAT SPAN THE MILESTONES



ABOUT THIS PLAYBOOK

Strategies that Span the Milestones is one section of the “Opportunity Youth Playbook: A Guide to Reconnecting Boys and Young Men of Color to Education and Employment.”

The playbook highlights promising practices, strategies, and resources to help My Brother’s Keeper communities support boys and young men of color aged 16 to 24 years old who are neither in school nor employed. Such young people—commonly referred to as “opportunity youth” or “disconnected youth”—have distinct talents and needs, and require dedicated strategies beyond those targeted at boys and young men of color more generally. This playbook provides tips for taking action, shares relevant research, lists key organizations and resources, and spotlights effective programs and policies across the county.

The information and recommendations were compiled from a literature review, written comments submitted by national experts, and feedback provided by Opportunity Youth Network participants during an online meeting.

The full playbook is organized by the six critical milestones enshrined by the White House’s My Brother’s Keeper Community Challenge: entering school ready to learn; reading at grade level by third grade; graduating from high school ready for college and career; completing postsecondary education or training; successfully entering the workforce; and reducing violence and providing a second chance.

Access the full playbook, along with the Playbook Companion which provides additional links to key organizations and resources, at <http://forumfyi.org/OYN-MBK-Toolkit>.

STRATEGIES FOR ACTION

Some of the most powerful strategies for reconnecting disconnected boys and young men of color cut across My Brother's Keeper milestones. Supporting disconnected youth often requires helping in multiple aspects of their lives. Therefore, putting into place some of these integrated approaches can be a particularly valuable place to start.

► INCLUDE DISCONNECTED BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR IN DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING YOUR STRATEGY.

Jason Warren, a 17-year-old participant in Youth Force in New York City, said, "If you had a problem in the black community, and you brought in a group of white people to discuss how to solve it, almost nobody would take that panel seriously. In fact, there would probably be a public outcry. It would be the same for women's issues or gay issues. But every day, in local arenas all the way to the White House, adults sit around and decide what problems youth have and what youth need, without ever consulting us." This statement is poignant and powerful but hardly new: Jason said it more than a decade ago. His words still ring true, and that needs to change.

Fortunately, the situation is changing. [Opportunity Youth United](#) has demonstrated how bringing formerly disconnected youth into leadership positions can help shape efforts to reconnect them to their peers. Community leaders should adopt the policy recommendation they developed and outlined in its report, "[Recommendations to Increase Opportunity and Decrease Poverty in America.](#)" Young leaders should be encouraged to create an Opportunity Youth United Community Action Team in your city.

The National Youth Alliance on Boys and Men of Color highlights three guiding principles in its [National Youth Alliance on Boys and Men of Color](#):

1. Ensure the active participation and leadership of boys and young men of color at all levels of decision making. In other words, nothing for us without us. No one understands the plight of young people of color better than we do, because we deal with it daily. Our voices, experiences, ideas, and solutions not only need to be included in a meaningful way, they must be central to the conversation and process.
2. Invest deeply in programs and strategies that build the power of communities to eliminate the structural inequities that impact boys and young men of color. Contrary to the messages often propagated about us, the challenges we face are not the result of laziness, violence, or apathy. They are due to hundreds of years of oppression and the persistence of inequity in our communities, including under-resourced schools, a lack of jobs, and discrimination by the police and courts. Traditional one-on-one mentorship programs alone cannot address these issues. The focus must be placed on eliminating these longstanding inequities. Youth and community organizing are especially needed because they empower us to take collective action and transform ourselves as individuals and communities at the same time. We take seriously our responsibility for strengthening our communities; we also call on our country's leaders to join us in addressing the real barriers to equal opportunity that still surround us.
3. Employ an expansive frame that recognizes the diversity of boys and young men of color as well as the importance of empowering and improving the lives of girls and women of color. Boys and young men of color have complex identities beyond the black and brown binary. Often excluded from the conversation are our indigenous Native-American, Asian Pacific-Islander, and Southeast Asian brothers. In addition, expanding the frame of "masculinity" to include queer- and transgendered- identified boys and young men of color is a critical shift that will ensure a more inclusive set of strategies. We also recognize that we cannot improve the lives of boys and young men of color if we leave behind our sisters and mothers.

Read the full [brief](#) to learn about the policies and philanthropic recommendations of the National Youth Alliance on Boys and Men of Color.





FIELD FAVORITES

Opportunity Youth United's National Council of Young Leaders created "[Recommendations to Increase Opportunity and Decrease Poverty in America.](#)" Their six priority recommendations are:

- 1. Expand Effective Comprehensive Programs—bring what works to everyone in need**
 - The comprehensive programs that are already succeeding with opportunity youth should be expanded. These are typically full-time programs that include education, job training, counseling, personal supports and mentors, leadership development opportunities, a positive peer group, pathways to college and jobs, and service opportunities in which young people can learn that it is possible to be paid for doing something good.
- 2. Expand National Service—ensure that national service opportunities are accessible to all**
 - Increase the inclusion of low-income people of all ages in community service through national service programs like AmeriCorps, NCCC, Senior Corps, Service Learning, Volunteer Generation, and VISTA.
 - The impact of providing service dramatically changes the identity of low-income individuals, encouraging long-term civic engagement. When we experience our own neighbors and peers as service-givers, rather than passive recipients of charity from people of different class and racial backgrounds, the effects are impressive.
- 3. Expand Private Internships—incentivize pathways forward**
 - Support internships that offer low-income people paid employment experience with private corporations that provide appropriate supports and the potential for long-term hiring. Establish a corporate tax credit of up to \$4,000 for each six-month paid internship that results in employment. Some of us have experienced amazing internships in the private sector through Year Up, coupled with college prep and a supportive community.
- 4. Increase All Forms of Mentoring—mentoring is proven to have a positive impact**
 - Expand mentoring programs and elevate both formal and informal mentoring as a core component for all programs serving opportunity youth. Young people need caring individuals to give us confidence, respect, and support in planning and working toward a productive future. We need mentors with a similar background who have overcome familiar obstacles, as well as those of different backgrounds who can open completely new horizons.
- 5. Protect and Expand Pathways to Higher Education—enable access to meaningful credentials**
 - Ensure that college and registered apprenticeships are both affordable and attainable for low-income students. Protect and expand education awards, scholarships, low-cost community and state colleges, loans that are not predatory or excessively burdensome, and Pell Grants. Eliminate barriers to obtaining financial assistance and strengthen pathways. We understand that higher education is one key to lifelong success.
- 6. Support Diversion and Re-entry Programs in the Justice System—enable people to get themselves back on track**
 - We must focus on better re-entry pathways and supports for people coming out of lockdown and out of the justice system, for both juveniles and adults. We need second chances for youthful offenders to rebuild their lives through community-based supports, high-quality education, and re-entry programs that smooth the path to employment, education, and community service.
 - We also must make the reduction of disparities in juvenile justice a high priority. Too many young people of color are referred to the system for infractions that do not land their nonminority peers in handcuffs or lockup. In addition, we must address the root causes of the obstacles faced by low-income people of color, and end the pipeline to prison for both children and youth. Too many of our peers are expected to be dead or in jail before they reach age 25, and many internalize this expectation for themselves. We see evidence all around us that this is what happens in our neighborhoods when young men and women fall off track. It appears that the pipeline to prison has been well laid. We need to provide young people with the tools to break this cycle.

Opportunity Youth United is on the steering committee of the [National Youth Alliance on Boys and Men of Color](#), which works to (1) bring together national networks and key organizations that empower young men of color by building relationships, sharing resources and practices, and developing shared strategies; (2) ensure that the voices of boys and young men of color are included in new initiatives to improve outcomes; and (3) create opportunities for young leaders to meet directly with policymakers and funders to share their recommendations.

Learn about the set of guiding principles and recommendations developed by the National Youth Alliance on Boys and Men of Color in the [Boys and Young Men of Color National Youth Table Statement](#).

Are you interested in more opportunities to hear what disconnected youth have to say? Explore what America's Promise Alliance learned in a powerful series of group and individual interviews and surveys with opportunity youth, summarized in [“Don't Call Them Dropouts”](#) and [“Don't Quit on Me.”](#)

Some additional resources on youth engagement include: [“Jim Casey Youth Opportunities' Achieving Authentic Youth Engagement: Core Values & Guiding Principles”](#) which focuses on foster-care youth, and the [“Forum for Youth Investment's Building Effective Youth Councils: A Practical Guide to Engaging Youth in Policy,”](#) which concentrates on all youth. If your community has an existing youth council, ensure that disconnected boys and young men of color are well represented on it.

► USE A RACIAL AND GENDER EQUITY LENS TO PROMOTE CULTURAL COMPETENCE AND SENSITIVITY IN ALL FACETS OF WORK WITH DISCONNECTED BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR.

Equity isn't a program or a one-time event. It is a lens that needs to be applied to every effort we take on as we analyze issues and identify solutions. Leaders need to understand the role of race and gender, and to pay close attention to disparities and their structural root causes. A wide range of nonprofits and foundations have rallied around the [Life Course Framework](#) to ensure such a lens is applied consistently and rigorously. Proponents of collective impact initiatives have emphasized the importance of embedding an explicit focus on equity, as described in the [“Stanford Social Innovation Review”](#) series.

Such a racial and gender equity lens can be applied to a wide range of populations, sectors, and agencies. For example, in the child welfare arena, the [Alliance for Racial Equity in Child Welfare](#) provides national leadership to support improved outcomes for children and families of color involved with the nation's child welfare system. The National Association of Public Child Welfare Administrators created a [Disproportionality Diagnostic Tool](#) to help examine disproportionate representation of children of color within a child welfare agency's jurisdiction. In the afterschool programs/youth development arena, the YMCA of Madison created a [“Race to Equity Toolkit for Conversation”](#) to help schools and faith and community groups that want to discuss the data presented in the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families' “Race to Equity” project report, and what steps they can take to narrow racial disparities in their organizations. This toolkit could be adapted to support conversations anywhere in America. Also, take advantage of [“Racial Equity Tools,”](#) which provides curricula and resources to help those hoping to increase their own understanding of racial equity, or to work toward justice at the system, community, and organization levels. In the communications arena, [Story for All](#) helps groups share stories in ways that address equity; harness the power of a story to document, preserve, share, and promote dialogue about valuable wisdom and experiences; and support cultural traditions as well as tolerance, respect, and health. Additionally, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's [“Removing Barriers and Creating Opportunities”](#) is a messaging guide to help leaders garner support across sectors to close gaps in health and opportunities for young men of color.



► GATHER DATA ON YOUR COMMUNITY'S DISCONNECTED BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR

The [Opportunity Index](#) measures 16 indicators, including rates of disconnected youth, in every state; in Washington, DC; and in more than 2,600 counties (select the indicator: “young people in school or working”). Do you live in one of the 25 largest U.S. cities? If so, you are in luck—[Measure of America](#) has compiled [rates of disconnection](#) down to the neighborhood level, including racial and ethnic breakdowns. Are you located in one of the 100 biggest cities? Measure of America covers rates of disconnection in these areas as well, along with those of every state, county, and congressional district in the country, disaggregated by gender, race, and ethnicity. If you reside in one of the 35 cities that participate in [The National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership](#), you can get access to data mapped down to the most granular neighborhood level.

If you have searched for data on any child and youth topic, you have likely found your way to the [KIDS COUNT data center](#), an invaluable source of information about demographics, economic well-being, education, family and community, health, safety, and risk behaviors. The center includes data for the United States arranged by state, by territory, and by county; information covering city and congressional districts is also available.

The [Schott Foundation for Public Education](#) recently declared that “Most astonishing has been the fact that year after year, and still true in 2015, most districts and states have failed to adopt a uniform way of counting and making publicly available the graduation rates for black males and other subgroup populations.”¹ The foundation filled this gap by creating an [interactive map dashboard](#) of black male graduation rates as part of their “[Black Boys Report.](#)” [PolicyLink](#) sits at the epicenter of the movement for boys and young men of color, so it comes as no surprise that they have a comprehensive [National Equity Atlas](#) with data on changing demographics, racial inclusion, and the economic benefits of equity in the 100 largest cities, in the 150 largest regions (SMAs), in all 50 states, and in the nation as a whole. The [Campaign for Black Male Achievement](#) has a widely acclaimed [Black Male Achievement Life Outcomes Dashboard](#) where you can obtain indicators that track opportunities for black males in the United States. The Heller School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University launched a [state-of-the-art research project](#) designed to meet the urgent need for a national, integrated information source. The project helps communities understand who their children are by documenting and tracking the rapidly changing demographics of children and families in the United States. To ascertain what their children need, the project has designed a system for monitoring not only child outcomes, but also key factors (including opportunities, conditions, and resources) that drive child outcomes. The system also provides guidance on how to improve opportunities for all children, especially those who may need the most help, by focusing explicitly and rigorously on issues of racial/ethnic and socioeconomic equity in child health and well-being.

► DETERMINE HOW MUCH FUNDING IS AVAILABLE AND IDENTIFY OPPORTUNITIES TO LEVERAGE FUNDS TO SERVE DISCONNECTED BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR.

Determine how much federal funding is available for opportunity youth, based on the list of funding streams compiled by the Campaign for Youth in “[Our Youth, Our Economy, Our Future: A Road Map for Investment in the Nation’s Talent Pipeline](#)” Also, take a look at the “[Bridge to Reconnection: A Plan for Reconnecting One Million Opportunity Youth Each Year](#)” which provides guidance on how much funding would need to be added to various funding streams to meet the reconnection goal. You can also see if your community is participating in any of the federal government’s signature “place-based initiatives” by consulting its [interactive map](#). Are you interested in federal funding streams to cover the vital summer months? Discover the resources compiled by the White House as part of the Summer Opportunity Project.

Do you want to map out state and local funding streams as well? Read “[Adding It Up: A Guide for Mapping Public Resources for Children, Youth & Families](#)” by the Forum for Youth investment.



► ENSURE THERE IS A MECHANISM TO ALIGN GOVERNMENTAL EFFORTS FOR DISCONNECTED BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR

This can be a focus area within a broader intergovernmental structure, such as a children’s cabinet. A children’s cabinet is a policy-coordinating body comprising the heads of all government agencies with child- and youth-serving programs. Cabinet members work together to coordinate services and collaboratively develop a common set of outcomes and plans that foster the well-being of young people. Check to see if your community or state has a [Children’s Cabinet](#) and if it does, encourage members to create a subgroup focused on disconnected boys and young men of color. If your state or community does not have anything resembling a children’s cabinet, take a look at the [“Elements of Success Issue 1: Structural Options”](#) to help determine the right structural characteristics for a newly formulated council or cabinet.

► CONSIDER APPLYING TO BECOME A FEDERAL PERFORMANCE PARTNERSHIP PILOT (P3) SITE.

Performance Partnership Pilots (P3) allow selected local, tribal, and state agencies to enter into an agreement with the federal government that grants broad flexibility in how the site uses existing discretionary federal funds. These pilots will implement evidence-informed practices while committing to achieve significant improvements for disconnected youth. P3s can request to (1) blend their existing federal discretionary funds across multiple eligible programs, and/or (2) receive flexibility from federal program requirements. Learn more by visiting the [P3 Online Hub](#).

► LEARN FROM NATIONAL NETWORKS AND PLACE-BASED INITIATIVES FOCUSED ON BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR AND OPPORTUNITY YOUTH.

A number of national initiatives are helping communities across the country better serve opportunity youth and boys and young men of color. If there are any located in your community, reach out to them as a possible partner. You can also search the links below to gather ideas to bring into your community.

- The [Alliance for Boys and Men of Color](#) is a coalition of change agents committed to improving the life chances of California’s boys and young men of color.
- [Campaign for Youth](#) is a coalition of national organizations whose mission is to devise and implement strategies that help to reconnect and increase chances for success among young people who are out of work, out of school, or out of the mainstream.
- [Communities Collaborating to Reconnect Youth Network](#), led by the Center for Law and Social Policy, brings together workforce and youth development professionals in communities across the country to improve the opportunities and well-being of young people by establishing innovative partnerships among local youth-serving systems by creating effective cross-system collaborations in communities.
- [Gateway to College National Network](#) supports communities in building sustainable pathways for disconnected youth (former high-school dropouts) to achieve a high-school diploma and a meaningful college credential.
- The [Intermediary Network](#) connects local and national organizations to share effective strategies, learn from one another, and grow and professionalize intermediary practice across the country. INet’s special focus is on opportunity youth.
- The Annie E. Casey Foundation’s [Learn and Earn to Achieve Potential \(LEAP\)](#) initiative focuses on youth and young adults, aged 14 to 25, particularly those who have been involved in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems or are homeless. LEAP partners with three national organizations—Jobs for America’s Graduates, Jobs for the Future, and MDRC—and is funded by the Corporation for National and Community Service’s Social Innovation Fund.
- [NLC Reengagement Network](#), managed by the National League of Cities, assists cities in exploring and pursuing reengagement policy and programming.
- The [Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund](#), managed by the [Aspen Forum for Community Solution](#), supports community collaboration focused on building and deepening education and employment pathways for opportunity youth.
- [Opportunity Works](#) is funded by the Corporation for National and Community Service’s Social Innovation Fund and managed by [Jobs for the Future](#) in partnership with the Aspen Institute’s Forum for Community Solutions. It supports communities that bring together local stakeholders—K-12 systems, colleges, employers, community organizations—to collaborate across systems, and to build education and career pathways for unemployed or underemployed young people.



FIELD FAVORITES

PolicyLink’s [“Building Place-Based Initiative for Boys and Men of Color and Vulnerable Populations: A Community Planning Guide”](#) highlights steps community can take to conduct a policy review and to formulate recommendations for action that improve the lives of boys and men of color. The guide also includes a Policy Review Matrix (appendix 1) that highlights opportunities to examine important issues, target populations and sub-populations, and relevant departments/agencies across the six milestones.

- » Review data on milestones and indicators
- » Bring together a team
- » Identify policies
- » Analyze impact
- » Develop recommendations
- » Identify a leadership organization
- » Broaden constituencies
- » Establish infrastructure
- » Target and concentrate resources
- » Develop an implementation strategy

For further information on how to get started in each of the areas listed above, learn from examples of places across the country, and explore the Policy Review Matrix, read the [“Building Place-Based Initiative for Boys and Men of Color and Vulnerable Populations: A Community Planning Guide.”](#)

SUMMARY OF STRATEGIES FOR ACTION

STRATEGIES THAT SPAN THE MILESTONES

1. *Include disconnected boys and young men of color in developing and implementing your strategy.*
2. *Use a racial and gender equity lens, and promote cultural competence and sensitivity in all facets of work with disconnected boys and young men of color.*
3. *Gather data on disconnected boys and young men of color in your community.*
4. *Determine how much funding is available and identify opportunities to leverage funds to serve disconnected boys and young men of color.*
5. *Ensure there is a mechanism to align governmental efforts for disconnected boys and young men of color.*
6. *Consider applying to become a federal Performance Partnership Pilot (P3) site.*
7. *Learn from national networks and place-based initiatives focused on boys and young men of color and opportunity youth.*



NOTES

1. Schott Foundation for Public Education. (2015). "Black Lives Matter: The Schott 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males. Cambridge, MA: Schott Foundation for Public Education.

ACCESS THE TOOLKIT COMPANION, LIST OF KEY ORGANIZATIONS AND RESOURCES FOR SUPPORTING DISCONNECTED BOYS AND YOUNG MEN OF COLOR BY MILESTONE AT [FORUMFYI.ORG/OYN_MBKA_TOOLKIT](http://forumfyi.org/oyn_mbka_toolkit)



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