

SECTION E: ENSURING DISCONNECTED YOUNG MEN OF COLOR SUCCESSFULLY ENTER THE WORKFORCE



ABOUT THIS PLAYBOOK

Ensuring Disconnected Young Men of Color Successfully Enter the Workforce 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>.

OVERVIEW

The unemployment rate for young people aged 16 to 24 is double that of the national unemployment rate.¹ The numbers are even worse for young men of color who are not in school. According to Measure of America’s report, “[Zeroing In on Place and Race](#),” the employment rate of people in this age group who are out of school is 71.7 percent for whites, 68.7 percent for Latinos, and 46.9 percent for blacks.² More than half of black males ages 16 to 24 who are out of school are also not employed. The high rates of youth unemployment is particularly troubling because of the critical role early work experience plays in the lives of opportunity youth and young men of color. The most immediate benefit is a paycheck—many opportunity youth must support their families financially. Long-term benefits are equally important; summer jobs, internships, apprenticeships, and other early work experiences are positively connected to later-life employment and higher wages.³

As disconnected boys and young men of color search for a job, they often struggle to demonstrate to employers that they have sufficient “employability skills” or “soft skills,” job-specific skills, prior work experience, and educational credentials.

Opportunity youth face a number of barriers, among them limited access to reliable transportation; the need to balance school, work, and family obligations; and a lack of the social capital and social networks that include individuals in a position to hire or refer them. Despite these obstacles, opportunity youth remain optimistic and determined to be successful. Over 75 percent of disconnected youth believe that they are personally responsible for getting a good education and job, and 73 percent are very confident they will achieve their goals.⁴

These young people need supports that will place them on a pathway to employment and ensure their success after they obtain a job. To provide these supports, stakeholders across sectors must act in concert. Businesses that provide jobs for disconnected young men of color are often isolated, lack partners, and cannot provide the training and postplacement support necessary to ensure the long-term success of these young men. Alternatively, nonprofits provide training and support, but this means very little if the young person can’t get a job at the end of the program. Youth employment training programs and local education agencies (LEAs) should engage employers to play a leading role as partners to inform training program curricula. Who knows better what skill sets and mind-sets young people need than potential employers?

Businesses should examine their hiring practices and human resource strategies to eliminate any unintentional barriers that prevent disconnected young men of color from making it through their recruitment pipelines. Companies are encouraged to be proactive in implementing inclusive hiring and talent practices. Challenging the perceptions and stereotypes of opportunity youth and young men of color among employers is critical. Research shows a black male needs some college credit under his belt to have a similar chance of securing a job as a white male without a high-school diploma.⁵

In the past several years, corporations have recognized the business and economic imperative to recruit the untapped talent of opportunity youth and young men of color. As described in My Brother’s Keeper Alliance’s “[Playbook for Corporations and Businesses](#),” businesses that support young men of color will build their brand, diversify their talent pool, and reap recruitment and retention benefits. For example, graduates of This Way Ahead–Gap Inc.’s paid internship program for low-income opportunity youth—have higher engagement scores than and double the retention rate of employees who did not participate in the program.⁶



A good first step is to provide young men of color early work experiences in supportive environments through pre-apprenticeships, apprenticeships, internships, and summer or first-job experiences. Disconnected boys and young men of color in particular can benefit from career pathway models, which align and connect programs and allow youth to attain stackable credentials, incorporate multiple entry and exit points, target high-growth sectors and engage employers, and receive support services.⁷ Other strategies are: (1) supporting equitable transportation that can benefit young people in all communities, including low-income communities and those of color, and provide access to the local economy; (2) encouraging employers to “ban the box” and adopt fair-chance hiring policies that do not require questions about an applicant’s criminal convictions in the early stages of the application process; and (3) providing opportunities to leverage the assets of disconnected youth and young men of color, such as creating entrepreneurial programs.

STRATEGIES FOR ACTION

► ENCOURAGE YOUR BUSINESS COMMUNITY TO RECOGNIZE THE UNTAPPED TALENT REPRESENTED BY DISCONNECTED YOUNG MEN OF COLOR.

My Brother's Keeper Alliance's "[Playbook for Corporations and Businesses](#)" is tailored to the unique needs of corporations that are improving their diversity practices, talent strategies, and corporate citizenship efforts to support boys and young men of color. The playbook includes assessment tools such as metrics to drive results and a fair evaluation and hiring checklist. Businesses can also initiate programs such as talent initiatives, mentoring, tutoring, and job shadowing.

► CHANGE EMPLOYERS' PERCEPTION OF DISCONNECTED YOUNG MEN OF COLOR WITH ATYPICAL RÉSUMÉS.

Ask business leaders to avail themselves of the tools and resources provided by [Grads of Life](#), a campaign seeking to change employers' views of young people with nontraditional experience. Grads of Life helps employers to fulfill their talent needs by building employment pathways for 16- to 24-year-olds who have not yet obtained a college credential. In addition to persuasive advertisements, the campaign features resources that can help employers develop sources of talent in the areas of training, mentoring, internships, and hiring initiatives. The Grads of Life tools for gaining company buy-in and conducting cost-benefit analysis can help get companies onboard.

The My Brother's Keeper Alliance's [Why Corporations and Businesses Should Support Boys and Young Men of Color: A business case for securing equal opportunities for all populations, including boys and young men of color](#) highlights the following business drivers for supporting boys and men of color.

- **Build your Brand.** Businesses that make a commitment to furthering the MBK mission will not only see the impact in the community, but also within their own corporate walls. Supporting BYMOC provides businesses the opportunity to build brand equity, diversify their talent pool, and experience recruiting and retention benefits.
- **Diversifies Your Talent Pool.** Businesses can promote a diverse employee population by aligning their talent strategy to support the mission of MBK. A diverse workforce combines employees of different backgrounds, genders, cultures, races, sexual orientations, nationalities, religions, abilities, and with varied experiences that together generate a more creative, innovative, and productive workforce.
- **Provides Recruiting and Retention Benefits.** By supporting BYMOC through talent programs and corporate citizenship initiatives, businesses position themselves as organizations that reflect the diverse reality of the country, which attracts potential employees from all backgrounds.
- **Overall Economic Benefits.** Businesses can be part of a larger solution and benefit the economy as a whole by supporting BYMOC. Continued inequality is a burden to the economy, and businesses can take active steps to address these inequalities by supporting BYMOC during their academic experience and by providing opportunities for YMOC to transition into and succeed in the workplace.

Access the business case materials and the [My Brother's Keeper Alliance Playbook for Corporations and Businesses](#) for data and information that reinforces the economic and business case for supporting boys and men of color as well as tools and resources to help companies support boys and men of color.





FIELD FAVORITES

Gap Inc.'s "[Connecting Youth and Business: A Toolkit for Employers](#)" highlights step-by-step instructions for companies interested in supporting, training, and/or hiring disconnected youth. The toolkit highlights a road map to navigate four important stages.

Assess and Select | *What does my company have to offer?*

- » Assess your company's resources, culture, and readiness for engagement with opportunity youth.
- » Select one of the three lanes of engagement—Soft Skills, Work-Ready Skills, or Learn & Earn—by which companies can provide youth with skills for employment and adulthood.

Scope | *What are my goals and program parameters?*

- » Scope your program. This will help you understand how to apply your company resources to build a successful program.

Plan and Pilot | *What are the key steps to take to launch a pilot?*

- » Build your plan and create goals and metrics. Experiment by conducting a pilot study, soliciting feedback, and understanding the plan's impact and potential business value.

Refine and Grow | *How will the program continue to develop?*

- » Work to refine the pilot based on participant feedback, and build a program for the long term.

For more information on how to create a program for disconnected youth or revamp an existing one, as well as how to assess your company's resources and readiness, access the full [toolkit](#)



► ALIGN TRAINING PROGRAMS TO REFLECT EMPLOYER NEEDS.

Employment training programs should work in tandem with potential employers to identify the specific skill sets—including “employability skills”—they look for during the hiring process. For example, Year Up works with companies to determine the types of skills they desire. Year Up participants spend six months in a classroom learning those skills and the following six months interning with a partner company. Consider [becoming a Corporate Partner](#) or find out if there is a [Year Up program location](#) near you. Use the National Network of Business and Industry Association’s “[Common Employability Skills](#)” to view the types of noncognitive skills needed to be successful in today’s workplace.

► USE AN INTERMEDIARY TO RECRUIT AND RETAIN DISCONNECTED YOUNG MEN OF COLOR.

Talent recruitment and development groups such as [LeadersUp](#) help to link opportunity youth to mid- to-large sized businesses interested in identifying and retaining untapped talent. By using tailored talent recruitment strategies, data-driven analytics, evidence-based practices, and ongoing employee support, LeadersUp has lowered interview-to-hire ratios and increased retention and progression rates. The group is leading pilot programs in Chicago; Columbus, Ohio; and Los Angeles. Additional pilots and upcoming projects created to connect opportunity youth to employment pathways include the mentorship model implemented by UPS to support young men of color transitioning to management positions, and FedEx’s national corporate alliance with the My Brother’s Keeper Initiative and developing pilots. Learn more in their [Two Year Report](#).

► ADOPT SECTORAL STRATEGIES BY WORKING WITH A PARTNERSHIP, IDENTIFYING SMALL- AND MEDIUM-SIZED BUSINESSES, AND BUILDING A PROGRAM BASED ON INDUSTRY-SPECIFIC NEEDS.

The sectoral initiative approach is a workforce development method for helping a business create industry-specific solutions and provide support to both improve workers’ skills and meet the needs of employers. This approach typically focuses on low-income individuals. JobsFirstNYC’s report, “[Optimizing Talent: The Promise and the Perils of Adapting Sectoral Strategies for Young Workers](#),” highlights five common program elements of sectoral initiatives: (1) a high degree of organizational capacity, with the ability to adapt; (2) strong links to local employers that result in an understanding of the target occupation and connections to jobs; (3) job readiness, basic skills, and hands-on technical skills training offered through the lens of a specific occupation or sector; (4) recruitment, screening, and intake processes that result in a good match among the applicant, the program, and the target occupation; and (5) individualized services to support training completion and success on the job. Read the report to learn more about the types of participants the sectoral approaches are particularly suited for, the use of youth development in sectoral initiatives, and the challenges associated with sectoral strategies.

► **ENCOURAGE LOCAL SMALL BUSINESSES TO BECOME A PART OF THE SOLUTION TO COMBAT YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT.**

The U.S. Small Business Administration and Small Business Majority launched the [Commitment to Youth Opportunity Initiative](#) in June 2014. Under the initiative, small businesses make a pledge to create meaningful opportunities for disconnected youth. In addition to outlining six actions small businesses can commit to, the initiative provides resources and tools for both small business leaders and young people interested in starting their own business.

► **TRAIN, HIRE, MENTOR, GRADUATE, AND REVIVE.**

Opportunity Nation released the report “[We Got This: A Call to For Youth Employment](#),” which provides actions employers, youth, community leaders, nonprofits, philanthropy, education institutions, and government can take to (1) [train](#) young adults through work-based learning; (2) [hire](#) youth and increase employer demand for wider pipelines of young talent; (3) [mentor](#) youth through work-based, service learning or civic engagement experiences; (4) [graduate](#) more students with post-secondary credentials and boost high school diploma rates; and (5) [revive](#) opportunity by helping young, nonviolence offenders get on paths to careers and stable productive lives youth.

► **CREATE, PRESERVE, AND EXPAND YOUTHBUILD PROGRAMS.**

Communities should follow New York City’s lead in supplementing YouthBuild grants provided by the U.S. Department of Labor to expand YouthBuild sites and to preserve any existing sites that do not have federal funding. YouthBuild is a comprehensive, yearlong program that engages disconnected youth full-time. Participants’ time is divided equally between working toward their GED or diploma and learning employment skills. They get hands-on experience building affordable housing, earn a stipend, and internalize the ethic of service and leadership. [Find a YouthBuild](#) program near you.

The [Commitment to Youth Opportunity Initiative Pledge](#) invites small business to take the following pledge.

Over the next year, my business commits to take one or more of these actions:

1. Increase the number of opportunity youth hires within my company.
2. Expand full or part-time internship or apprenticeship placements for opportunity youth within my company.
3. Adopt or expand work-based learning opportunities through a high-quality mentoring or training program for local opportunity youth.
4. Partner with state and/or local Workforce Boards to identify prospective youth for job placement within my company.
5. Partner with a local nonprofit, One-Stop Career Center, Community College, or other education system to identify opportunity youth to fill internships and/or entry-level positions in my business.
6. Work with my company’s suppliers to assess opportunities to hire, train or mentor opportunity youth.

Take the [pledge](#) and receive information and resources on your commitment.



► SUPPORT AND UTILIZE NATIONAL SERVICE AND THE CONSERVATION CORPS.

The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) manages AmeriCorps, which involves young people in service at organizations across the country. Three new AmeriCorps programs focus on opportunity youth. The [Youth Opportunity AmeriCorps](#) enrolls formerly incarcerated youth and those at risk of being incarcerated in national service projects. [ServiceWorks](#) uses AmeriCorps VISTA members to target 16- to 24-year-olds in 10 cities: Boston, Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, Newark, San Francisco, St. Louis, and Washington, DC. [Summer Opportunity AmeriCorps](#) addresses the summer opportunity gap by helping young people who serve their communities earn money for college. [The Corps Network](#) connects and supports over 130 corps comprehensive youth development programs that engage 16- to 25-year-olds in service projects, job training, and academic programming. The Corps Network has a wealth of resources, including the [Snapshot: Youth Corps and Workforce Partnerships](#), which highlights strategies to leverage funding, co-enroll young people, and co-locate services between the workforce and corps programs; the [Civic Justice Corps: Transforming Reentry Through Service](#); and the “[Civic Justice Corps Toolkit](#),” which outlines a model to support successful re-entry and diversion through service projects.

► LEVERAGE THE NEW WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY ACT (WIOA), AND HELP YOUR LOCAL WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD (WIB) USE THIS FUNDING TO CREATE A SYSTEM OF COMPREHENSIVE CAREER PATHWAYS.

WIOA requires that a significantly higher proportion of federal workforce funds be spent on out-of-school youth than was required in the previous version of the law. Across the country, Workforce Investment Boards will shift approximately \$140 million from serving in-school youth to serving out-of-school youth. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for local WIBs to develop a system of career pathways connecting disconnected youth to jobs. To get a sense of the different roles stakeholders can play to ensure the public work force system meets the employment needs and interests of job seekers facing barriers, take a look at Heartland Alliance’s “[WIOA Implementation and Planning Toolkit](#).” Additionally, CLASP’s “[WIOA Game Plan](#)” provides a wealth of information on the new law and includes questions to consider when drafting state plans, strategies on implementing the new required measures, and ways to obtain knowledge about opportunities for action.

► PASS LOCAL OR STATE BUDGETS THAT SUBSIDIZE EMPLOYMENT FOR DISCONNECTED YOUTH.

Summer and first jobs are vital to providing young people exposure to the workforce and experiences that support future career successes. Additionally, more efforts that provide longer-term work experience and opportunities for older disconnected are critically needed. Youth employment initiatives should provide comprehensive supports targeting older youth. For example, the [Seattle Mayor’s Youth Employment Initiative](#) has invested 2.5 million dollars and leveraged additional private-sector investment to expand youth employment opportunities for 14- to 24- year olds, first jobs for low-income youth, and internships throughout the city. Participants receive comprehensive work-readiness supports, including case management and transportation to and from internship sites. Summer youth job initiatives recruit young people primarily through schools. This means that most summer jobs go to students who enrolled in school, rather than to disconnected youth. Specialized recruitment approaches are needed to target longer-term jobs for disconnected youth who need them most.

► USE STATE WORKFORCE DATA.

Seven states have publicized the average earnings of education and training program graduates. Additionally, states such as Florida are using data to better align the education and training supply with actual employer demand. The Workforce Data Quality Campaign’s [State Blueprint](#) identifies key features of an aligned, inclusive, market-relevant state data system. Learn what [your state](#) is doing and find examples of how other states are using state-level workforce data strategically, such as expanding using labor market information, assessing employment outcomes, and implementing scorecards for students and workers.

► CONSTRUCT AND/OR STRENGTHEN YOUR STATE, REGIONAL, OR LOCAL CAREER PATHWAYS SYSTEM.

A career pathway system is a cohesive combination of partnerships, resources, policies, data, and shared performance measures that support the development, quality, scaling, and “dynamic sustainability” of career pathways and programs for youth and adults.⁸ The Alliance for Quality Career Pathways has developed a [framework](#) that outlines the three core features of a career pathway, and provides recommended indicators and metrics that can be adopted by quality career pathways. For further information on constructing career pathways, reference “[Multimedia, Career Pathways Explained, Shared Vision, Strong Systems: The Alliance for Quality Career Pathways Framework Version 1.0](#)” or “[Building Comprehensive Youth Employment Delivery Systems: Examples of Effective Practice](#).”

Additionally, explore American Youth Policy Forum’s “[Top 5 Lessons from Miami: Career Pathways in Action](#).” This publication highlights the need for career pathways to involve (1) hands-on learning with high student engagement; (2) information about technical education, as well as current and projected careers; (3) supportive leaders, partners, and policies; (4) high expectations for students; and (5) students involved in work that supports their community.

► IMPLEMENT OR EXPAND APPRENTICESHIP AND PRE-APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS.

Apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship training models, which allow participants to learn while earning an income, boost lifetime wages by an average of \$300,000. Program graduates earn, on average, a starting salary of \$50,000.⁹ The U.S. Department of Labor released a toolkit titled “The Federal Resources Playbook for Registered Apprenticeships,” which offers tips for a variety of stakeholders, including employers, colleges, training programs, state and local workforce systems, community-based organizations, and nonprofit intermediaries. The playbook provides guidance on how to allocate federal funds and resources to support registered apprenticeships.

A comprehensive youth employment services delivery system is a cross-system approach that provides young people in a community a wealth of options and coordinated support services. Young people can access integrated education, skills training and work experience on a pathway that leads to postsecondary or training credentials. Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) has identified five common elements of successful youth employment services delivery system.

1. A strong convening entity to amass stakeholders, shape a community vision, maximize resource sharing and hold systems accountable to that vision.
2. An effective administrative agent to work in partnership with the education system, other youth systems and community providers to assure that the vision of the convening entity is effectively implemented.
3. A well-trained case management arm which is responsible for engaging youth by identifying and meeting needs in the areas of education, employment, basic skills and wrap-around supports.
4. Strong partnerships across systems that serve youth, such as education, juvenile justice and child welfare systems, to share resources and provide additional support to very vulnerable youth.
5. High quality work experience and career exposure components which provide hands on exposure to the work place, instill appropriate work behaviors and ethics and allow for exploration of various occupations and career options.

View CLASP’s [Building a Comprehensive Youth Employment Delivery Systems: Examples of Effective Practice](#) for more information and strategies on building quality youth employment systems including profiles of communities implementing each element successfully.



► IDENTIFY FEDERAL PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES TO DEVELOP CAREER PATHWAYS.

Organizations such as public agencies, American-Indian tribes, community-based organizations, businesses, and nonprofits interested in identifying federal programs and resources that support entry-level opportunities for young people can reference the handbook “[Pathways for Youth Employment: Federal Resources for Employers](#).” This short guide provides an overview of American Job Centers, the Federal Bonding Program, AmeriCorps, and other resources.

► IDENTIFY PRIVATE FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES TO EXPAND EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACHES TO RE-ENGAGE DISCONNECTED YOUNG MEN OF COLOR TO EMPLOYMENT PATHWAYS.

You may be eligible to apply for a grant from the [Youth Opportunity Fund](#) if you are located in Boston; Chicago; Dallas; Los Angeles; Miami; New York City; Newark; St. Louis, MO; San Francisco; or Washington, DC. The fund, led by Citi Foundation and the America’s Promise Alliance, subsidizes innovative ways to place low-income young adults on a path toward college and career success. Another unique resource opportunity is provided by the Social Innovation Fund (SIF), which combines public and private resources to create and evaluate innovative community-based solutions that have evidence of results in low-income communities. SIF awards grants to intermediaries selected through a rigorous, open competition. Resources are directed toward promising nonprofits, as well as state and local governments. Two recent SIF grant recipients focus on opportunity youth. The first, the [Learn and Earn to Achieve Potential \(LEAP\)](#) initiative, led by the Annie E. Casey Family Foundation, concentrates on interventions that help system-involved youth connect to postsecondary education and employment. The second, [Opportunity Works](#), is led by Jobs for the Future and the Aspen Forum for Community Solutions. This project is using a collective impact approach to improving outcomes for opportunity youth and young men of color in 12 communities.

► SUPPORT AND IMPLEMENT EQUITABLE TRANSPORTATION POLICES, AND ADOPT “BAN THE BOX” AND OTHER FAIR-CHANCE HIRING POLICIES.

Almost 33 percent of working-age Americans have a criminal record.¹⁰ Current hiring practices often mandate the elimination of applicants with records before they can exhibit the required competencies and explain the context of the criminal record to prospective employers. “Ban the box” initiatives encourage employers to refrain from asking applicants about prior convictions until reaching the later stages of the hiring process in an effort to remove barriers to employment for individuals with arrest records. Progress in fair-chance hiring practices is being made across the private, public, and philanthropic sectors. Corporations such as Starbucks and Facebook have banned the box. President Obama has called for the banning of the box across the federal government and has encouraged corporations to sign the [Fair Chance Business Pledge](#). The Executives’ Alliance to Expand Opportunities for Boys and Men of Color, a network of national, regional, and community foundations, is driven by a bold vision that all boys and men of color will enjoy full inclusion in all the opportunities America has to offer. Members of this group have also stepped up to “ban the box” and adopt fair-chance practices during their internal hiring practices. The Executives’ Alliance created the [Ban the Box Philanthropy Challenge](#) to encourage other foundations to do the same.

The [White House Fair Chance Business Pledge](#) highlights practices businesses can take to eliminate barriers for people with criminal histories.

Promote Fair Chance Hiring Practices by:

- Banning the box by delaying criminal history questions until later in the hiring process.
- Training human resources staff on making fair decisions regarding applicants with criminal records.
- Ensuring internships and job training are available to individuals with criminal records.
- Using reliable background check providers to help ensure accuracy.
- Hosting a Fair Chance and Opportunity Job Fair.

View the full list and take the pledge [here](#).

Transportation plays a critical role in linking people to opportunities in education, school, and health care, and far too many communities of color lack quality transportation options that are affordable and reliable. The [Transportation Equity Caucus](#) is working to promote policies that create affordable transportation options for all people; ensure fair access to quality jobs, workforce development, and contract opportunities in the transportation industry; promote healthy, safe, and inclusive communities; and invest equitably and focus on results.

► **UTILIZE BEST PRACTICES AND POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT APPROACHES IN EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS SERVING OPPORTUNITY YOUTH.**

Heartland Alliance's National Initiatives on Poverty & Economic Opportunity recently outlined six practices and principles for youth employment programs serving opportunity youth in "[Providing True Opportunity for Opportunity Youth: Promising Practices and Principles for Helping Youth Facing Barriers to Employment](#)." The brief shares lists of existing employment program models and strategies and a list of important elements of comprehensive employment programs.



FIELD FAVORITES

National Initiatives on Poverty & Economic Opportunity is a division of Heartland Alliance dedicated to ending chronic unemployment and poverty. Their recent brief, [*Providing True Opportunity for Opportunity Youth: Promising Practices and Principles for Helping Youth Facing Barriers to Employment*](#), builds on existing literature to uncover promising practices in employment programming for opportunity youth facing some of the most challenging barriers to employment, such as being involved in the justice system or homeless. The brief highlights:

Best practices associated with youth employment programming more broadly:

- A holistic approach that provides comprehensive services.
- Competent, well-trained staff members who can build relationships with participants and connections with employers.
- Inclusion of both basic academic and employability skills training.
- Programming that is relevant to young people and responsive to their input.
- Offering retention follow-up services and financial incentives such as wages or stipends.

Six practices, principles and innovations for youth employment programs serving opportunity youth:

- Target and reach the youth who can benefit the most.
- Design program engagement to align with the realities of serving youth.
- Address the unique developmental needs of opportunity youth.
- Offer paid employment opportunities to educate youth on workplace success basics.
- Emphasize building trusting relationships with participants in staff hiring and training.
- Educate employers on the value and techniques for successfully employing opportunity youth.

Essential components of an employment program:

- Recruitment and engagement of participants
- Assessment for interests, strengths, experience, skills, barriers and learning needs
- Basic academic skills coursework
- Work readiness or “soft skills” training
- “Hard skills” or occupational training
- Career exploration
- Job search assistance and training
- Work experience
- Interview preparation
- Employment-focused support services
- Connections to social services when needed
- Job development and placement services
- Job retention and follow-up



COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHTS

HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT

HARTFORD OPPORTUNITY YOUTH COLLABORATIVE | YOUTHRECONNECT.ORG

Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative is a collective impact effort—chaired by the Mayor of Hartford and made up of leaders across education, youth development and workforce development – to support disconnected youth through results-based accountability.

Learn more about their [Education-Career Pathway System](#) model which provides multiple exit points, meets young people where they are, accounts for their “readiness” level and highlights essential components and phases.

Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative’s Key Principles:

- Meet youth where they are (no “wrong door” with multiple entry ways).
- Offer ongoing and consistent personalized guidance and support (which includes case management).
- Provide on-ramps to on-ramps (help for youth to overcome non-education and non-employment barriers so that they are able to take advantage of programs and services that prepare them for career education and work experience).

Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative’s Pathway System Phases:

- **Engagement:** This phase focuses on outreach to youth and engaging them in programs and services to encircle them with supportive services. The goal of this phase is to address non-education and non-employment barriers such as basic needs (housing, health, food security) and others (child care, transportation, etc.).
- **Preparation:** This phase provides basic education and skill development as well as career awareness and readiness. The goals of this phase is to achieve a high school diploma or equivalent (if needed), development of an individual career plan, measurable skill gains including literacy and/or numeracy gains of one or more educational functioning levels (EFL) and demonstrated proficiency of career readiness skills.
- **Bridging:** This phase provides postsecondary technical, professional, and/or college-level education plus work experience. Goals are attainment of stackable credentials recognized by the U.S. Department of Labor and Connecticut Department of Labor, enrollment in an accredited post-secondary education institution and employment in a job related to training that leads to careers with sustaining wages.
- **Retention:** This phase provides supports to ensure education and employment persistence and success. Examples include just-in-time supports and peer and professional networks. The goals for this phase are continued enrollment in postsecondary education (if applicable) and retained employment.

Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative, in partnership with Capital Workforce Partners, is a recipient of the Opportunity Works Social Impact Fund – an effort led by Jobs for the Future and Aspen Forum for Community Solutions.

Opportunity Works Hartford will serve opportunity youth – two-thirds of whom are young men of color – through programs that are comprised of partnerships between youth-serving nonprofit organizations and community colleges.

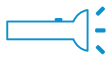
Learn more about [Opportunity Works sites](#).

NEW YORK CITY, N.Y., NEWARK, N.J. AND KANSAS CITY, MO.

PROJECT RISE | WWW.NYC.GOV/HTML/CEO/HTML/INITIATIVES/SIF_RISE.SHTML

[Project Rise](#) serves 18- to 24-year olds that do not have a high school diploma and have been out of school and out of work for six or more months. The 12 month program provides paid internships, secondary education and case management to disconnected youth. At least half of the participants enter Project Rise with a sixth to eighth grade reading level. Participants are placed into cohorts of 25-30 individuals and in order to continue participating in the paid internships, participants are required to maintain regular attendance in the education component of the program. MDRC’s evaluation of the program found that, within 12 months of enrolling in the program, 25 percent of participants earned a secondary credential and 45 percent of the participants that entered the program with at ninth grade reading level or higher received a secondary credential. Additionally, 25 percent of participants gained employment within 12

months. For the full evaluation read MDRC report [Engaging Disconnected Young People in Education and Work: Findings from the Project Rise Implementation Evaluation.](#)



BUSINESS SPOTLIGHTS

THIS WAY AHEAD | WWW.BEWHATSPossible.COM/THISWAYAHEAD

This Way Ahead, launched in 2007, is Gap Inc.'s paid internship program providing low-income teens and young adults their first job experiences. Ninety-eight percent of participants identify as minority. The program provides participants training through a local non-profit, and store employees participate in training as volunteers. Participants receive virtual training and apply for online internships. Participating stores interview and hire interns, and interns work in the store for about 12 hours a week for ten weeks. Interns received ongoing support from nonprofit job coaches and store colleagues. At the conclusion of the internship qualified interns received offers for ongoing employment. In 2016, This Way Ahead is expanding across the nation and will operate in the following U.S. cities: Atlanta, Austin, Boston, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, New York City, Philadelphia and San Francisco.

100,000 OPPORTUNITIES INITIATIVE | WWW.100KOPPORTUNITIES.ORG/

Employer Coalition

The 100,000 Opportunities Initiative is a coalition of leading U.S.-based companies committed to training and hiring 100,000 “opportunity youth” (16-24 year olds who face systemic barriers to jobs and education) by 2018 through apprenticeships, internships, and both part-time and full-time jobs. 100,000 Opportunities has hosted Opportunity Youth hiring fairs in Los Angeles, Seattle, Chicago and Phoenix.

Demonstration Cities

Additionally, the 100,000 Opportunities Demonstration Cities (Chicago, Seattle, Phoenix, New York and Los Angeles) will participate in a national learning community and working to implement four key strategies:

1. **Commitments and call to action from local employers** – A number of large employers with a local presence will coalesce to set a substantial goal for employing former opportunity youth. This local call to action will be amplified by the aligned voices of local elected leaders – including mayors – and by the national campaign.
2. **Systems alignment and coordination across sectors** – A highly effective local backbone organization will manage and convene a cross-city and/or county collaborative that connects multiple public systems (and public revenue streams), Community-based providers, private funders, and local employers in order to align the supply of young workers with the demand of local employers. In doing so, these “collective impact” efforts will generate greater access to employment opportunities for young adults who are too often on the wrong side of the opportunity divide, including boys and men of color, immigrant youth, and young people aging out of the child welfare system.
3. **Innovation and acceleration** – Local collaboratives will partner with best-in-class innovators – such as Leaders Up, Arizona State University (ASU), YouthBuild USA, and Remit (UK) – to design effective employer-led pathways (e.g., that integrate needed training or education with employment), and to rapidly create prototypes for replication and scale. This work will be supported by a pooled grant-making fund managed by Aspen that aggregates investments from national and local funders of the 100,000 Initiative.
4. **Codify and share lessons learned for large scale adoption and impact** – The cities involved in this demonstration effort will be connected to each other through a national learning community. As part of the learning agenda for this work, Aspen and its partners will codify effective innovations in the development of accelerated employer-led pathways and design a “playbook” for other cities and companies to use in their efforts to close the talent gap and to bridge the supply of low income opportunity youth with the demand of local labor markets.



SUMMARY OF STRATEGIES FOR ACTION

ENSURING DISCONNECTED YOUNG MEN OF COLOR SUCCESSFULLY ENTER THE WORKFORCE

1. Engage your business community to recognize the untapped talent represented by disconnected young men of color.
2. Change employers' perception of disconnected young men of color with atypical résumés.
3. Align training programs to reflect employer needs.
4. Use an intermediary to retain and recruit disconnected young men of color.
5. Adopt sectoral strategies by working with a partnership, identifying small- and medium-sized businesses, and building a program based on industry-specific needs.
6. Encourage local small businesses to become a part of the solution to combat youth unemployment.
7. Train, hire, mentor, graduate, and revive young men of color.
8. Create, preserve, and expand YouthBuild programs.
9. Support and utilize national service and the Conservation Corps.
10. Leverage the new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and help your local Workforce Investment Board (WIB) use this funding to create a system of comprehensive career pathways.
11. Pass local or state budgets that subsidize employment for disconnected youth.
12. Use state workforce data.
13. Construct and/or strengthen your state, regional, and local career pathways system.
14. Implement or expand apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs.
15. Identify federal programs and resources to develop career pathways.
16. Identify private funding opportunities to expand evidence-based approaches to reengaging disconnected young men of color with employment pathways.
17. Support and implement equitable transportation polices, and adopt "ban the box" and other fair-chance hiring policies.
18. Utilize best practices and positive youth development approaches in employment programs serving opportunity youth.

STRATEGIES THAT SPAN THE MILESTONES

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

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

NOTES

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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

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