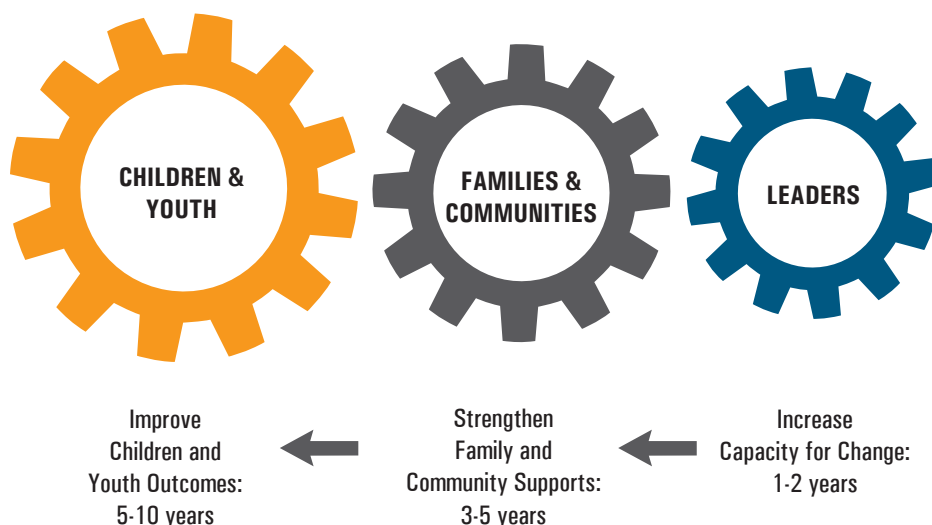




All youth ready for college, work & life.

# The Challenge

# KEY IDEAS



## MOVING THE SMALL GEAR MAKES A BIG DIFFERENCE

It sometimes takes a decade to make significant progress on an intractable problem. But changes in community supports can happen more quickly and changes in leadership can happen even sooner.

Ready by 21<sup>®</sup> isn't a program or a campaign or even an initiative. It is a challenge to all who care about children and youth to think differently – to learn a different way to approach all of the tasks associated with trying to manage, make or measure change at any level from the classroom to the capitol – so that they can act differently. Specifically, so that they can make decisions that lead to bigger goals, bolder strategies, better partnerships.

Becoming fluent in Big Picture thinking is similar to becoming fluent in another language. It's a skill that broadens one's capacity to respond. Those who master Big Picture thinking can use it in their personal, professional and public lives, creating sharper agendas for action.

This is a guide to the key ideas behind the Ready by 21 Challenge:

**The Dilemma.** Too few young people are entering adulthood ready and our collective efforts to make a difference are far too fragmented to have a big impact.

**The Solution.** Changing the way we do business means that we need to throw out old assumptions about how change happens and engage youth and adult change makers with the ideas, resources and tools that help them

*Think Differently*...learn to focus and prioritize differently using a Big Picture Approach, so that together they can

*Act Differently*...set bigger goals, use bolder strategies and be better partners, within an overall Blueprint for Action.

**The Delivery System.** Partners, places and products are key to the five year plan of creating a critical mass of youth and adult leaders in every state across the country. Leaders have many opportunities for getting started in taking up the Ready by 21 Challenge. For more information, go to [www.forumfyi.org](http://www.forumfyi.org).

# The American Dilemma

## IS A LEADERSHIP DILEMMA

### THE AMERICAN DREAM:

All youth are ready.

Every family and community is supportive.

Each leader is effective.

### THE AMERICAN REALITY:

*Only 4 in 10 youth are ready for college, work and life.*

Nationally, only two-thirds of high school students graduate on time – only half in urban areas. Employers report that 4 in 10 high school students lack the skills needed for work. And research analyses by Gambone, Connell and Klem suggest that only 4 in 10 young adults are really doing well, meaning they are in school or working, healthy and connected to community.

*Only 1 in 3 youth feel they have the supports they need.*

The Every Child/Every Promise survey commissioned by America's Promise Alliance found that only one third of 5 to 17 year olds were receiving four or more of the promises that they needed for positive development.

*Too few leaders are effective.*

Given this evidence, it is relatively easy to see that leaders are not being as effective as they hope to be in making a difference for America's youth.

### THE AMERICAN DILEMMA:

Competing priorities, fragmented services, unstable funding and low expectations – for children and youth, families and communities, and public and private leaders – combine to create complacency.

### Too Few Young People are Ready

Researchers Gambone, Connell & Klem (2002)

estimate that **only 4 in 10** are doing well in their early 20s.

**22% are doing poorly** in two life areas and not well in any

- **Productivity:** High school diploma or less, are unemployed, on welfare
- **Health:** Poor health, bad health habits, unsupportive relationships
- **Connectedness:** Commit illegal activity once a month



Doing Poorly  
22%



In The Middle  
35%



Doing Well  
43%

**43% are doing well** in two life areas and okay in one

- **Productivity:** Attend college, work steadily
- **Health:** Good health, positive health habits, healthy relationships
- **Connectedness:** Volunteer, politically active, active in religious institutions, active in community

### Too Few Young People Have the Supports They Need

- According to the National Promises Study commissioned by America's Promise Alliance, **only 3 in 10** young people get the developmental resources they need to succeed.

- Caring Adults
- Safe Places
- Healthy Starts
- Education for Marketable Skills
- Opportunities to Give Back



With 0 or 1  
Promises



With 2 or 3  
Promises



With 4 or 5  
Promises

# We Need to Change How We Think About Change

The new mantra is “focus, focus, focus.” Pick a population, pick a problem, pick a solution. Public and private leaders are told to find a niche and stick with it in order to direct limited resources towards a manageable goal.

Left unchecked, however, leaders can create too many initiatives that don’t necessarily add up to have a big impact on the problems that are thwarting family and community efforts to support their children.

Think of the number of separate change-focused initiatives, task forces and coalitions underway even in a small community. Part of the dilemma is that

**the more we *focus* on narrow pieces,**  
**the more we *fragment* the responses,**  
**the more we *fail* our children and youth.**

But it doesn’t have to be this way. The Center for the Study of Social Policy found that community change initiatives focused on big goals were as likely to succeed as those focused on small ones. The difference was in the planning, not the visioning.

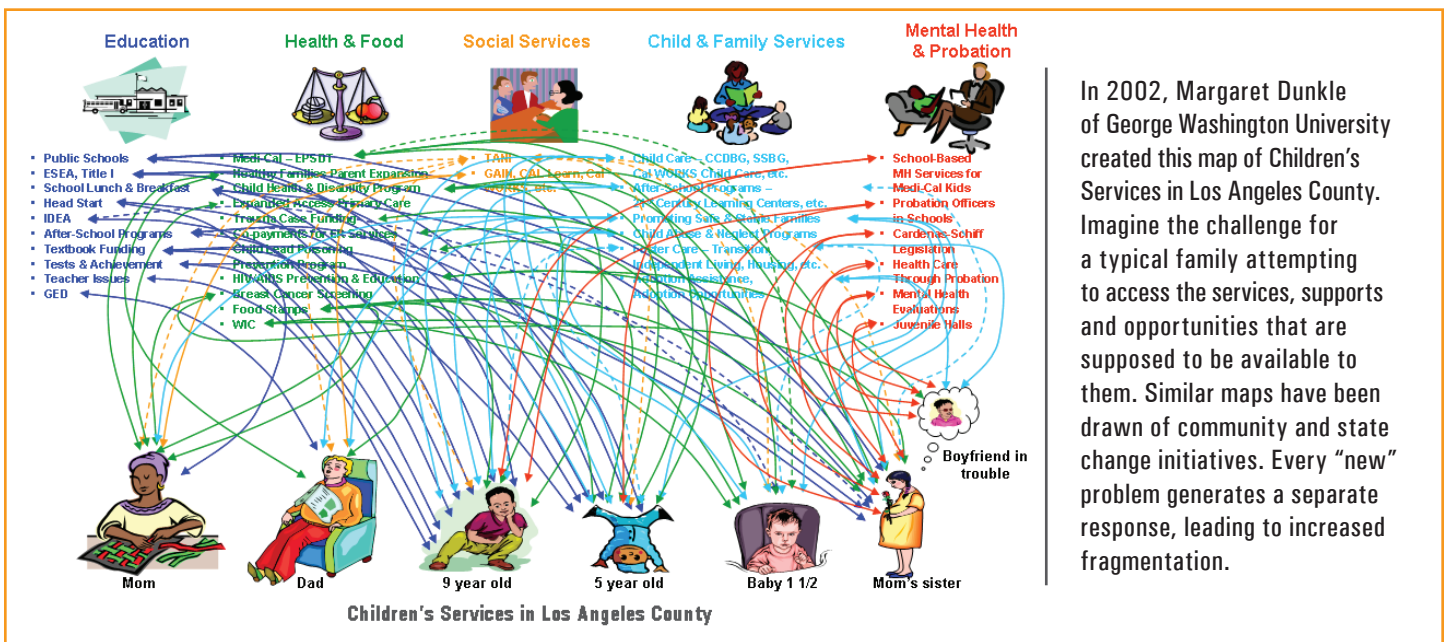
$$\text{Change} = \text{Dissatisfaction} \times \text{Vision} \times \text{Plan}$$

The Harvard Change Model helps us understand why. Harvard Business School researchers have found that the level of organizational change equals the level of dissatisfaction with the status quo times the clarity of the vision, times the adequacy of the plan.

Disconnected change efforts within a community or network may actually dissipate the energy for change. The response to lackluster change results should not be to

focus in on smaller pieces, but to crank up the demand for a bolder vision and a better plan.

Leaders need to learn to focus differently in a way that lets them see both the forest and the trees. Rather than only zooming in on one piece at a time, leaders need to learn to zoom out to see the big picture to make sure current efforts add up before they simply add on new programs, new solutions, new initiatives.



# The Big Picture Approach: LEARNING TO *THINK* DIFFERENTLY

Research, practice and public opinion offer a set of principles that can help us think more broadly about what it means to have ready youth, resourceful families and communities, and responsible leaders. But are we really compelled to act on this knowledge?

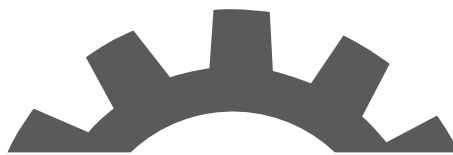
These principles are not just suggestions about ways to improve our efforts. They are the instructions for doing business differently. Moving these principles consistently into practice requires establishing a new system of checks and balances to counter learned habits that keep us doing the same things even when they aren't working just because they are safe.

## FROM CORE PRINCIPLES



### ABOUT CHILDREN & YOUTH

- Invest early and often.
- Support the whole child.
- Focus attention on those most in need.
- Build on strengths, don't just focus on problem-reduction.



### ABOUT COMMUNITY SUPPORTS

- Recognize children don't grow up in programs, they grow up in families and communities.
- Support a full range of learning opportunities, formal/informal, in school and out.
- Assess and improve quality, reach and impact across all places young people spend their time.
- Recruit, train and retain good staff.



### ABOUT LEADERS

- See youth and families as change agents, not clients.
- Engage all sectors and stakeholders.
- Coordinate efforts, align resources.
- Inspire and inform the public.



## TO COMMON LANGUAGE

Expect adequate progress across OUTCOME AREAS:	Support all AGE GROUPS & POPULATIONS:	Address range of GOALS using range of APPROACHES:	Ensure adequate SUPPORTS:	Across TIMES:	Enlist full range of SETTINGS:	Implement all CHANGE STRATEGIES:	Engage all STAKEHOLDERS:
Learning Working Thriving Connecting Leading/ Contributing	Early Childhood School Age Middle School High School Young Adult  <i>such as</i> Low Income Disabled Rural Minority	Problem-Reduction/ Protection Prevention Preparation/ Development Leadership/ Engagement	Caring Adults Safe/ Structured Places Healthy Start & Supports Effective Education Opportunities to Make a Difference	During School Weekends Before/ After School Summers Evenings Holidays	Families Schools Community Organizations Parks & Rec Faith Juvenile Justice Child Welfare Work/Business Neighborhoods Other	Increase Demand Align Policies & Resources Engage Youth/Families Improve Systems, Services & Programs	Educators Funders & Catalysts Advocates Providers Faith Business Policy Makers Public Agencies Parents Youth

Please note: The detailed lists above are provided as examples and draw on commonly used language (e.g., America's Promise Alliance 5 Promises). The Big Picture Approach doesn't prescribe the specific language in each list but rather challenges leaders to be intentional in addressing all of the categories.

The Big Picture Approach encourages leaders to start with developing common language that can be translated not only into vision and goal statements, but also into planning frameworks that provide a new youth-centered way of looking at information. Once they have learned this new way of thinking, they are able to take it into the basic steps of action planning – taking aim, taking stock, targeting action and tracking progress – but in a big picture way.

In addition to looking at youth outcomes and community supports, the framework challenges leaders to assess their own change efforts – are they and their partners employing the full range of strategies necessary to really make a difference? What strategies are missing? And what stakeholders?

One way to move this common language into practical frameworks is to take the categories two at a time and make them into a “dashboard.” The “developmental dashboard” shown here starts by applying two basic principles – young people need supports from when they are little until they are big (invest early and often) and they need supports across a full range of developmental areas (support the whole child) – and turns them into a simple age by outcomes grid. The example below is used to ask the question, “How well are young people doing?” The cells can be filled in with public perceptions or hard data. Communities and states have used the dashboard process to define and select indicators of child well-being, developing report cards that track progress against their Big Picture Goals.

Big Picture assessments are important, not only because they help identify the red cells, but because they map progress in all areas. It is important to pick a few things for all stakeholders to focus on (e.g., academic success for high school students, physical health of preschoolers, parent education and supports for families). But consider what happens if leaders throw away the rest of the picture. A few red cells may move to yellow. But without monitoring, in that same time period, yellows may shift to red and greens may shift to yellow. The net result: limited overall change. The challenge is to make overall improvements in the “Big Picture.” This is why it is important to focus on the forest and the trees.

These frames, or lenses, help leaders not simply zoom in to focus on one problem at a time, but also zoom out and keep the full picture in focus. They help bring precision to our collective passion to change the odds for youth.



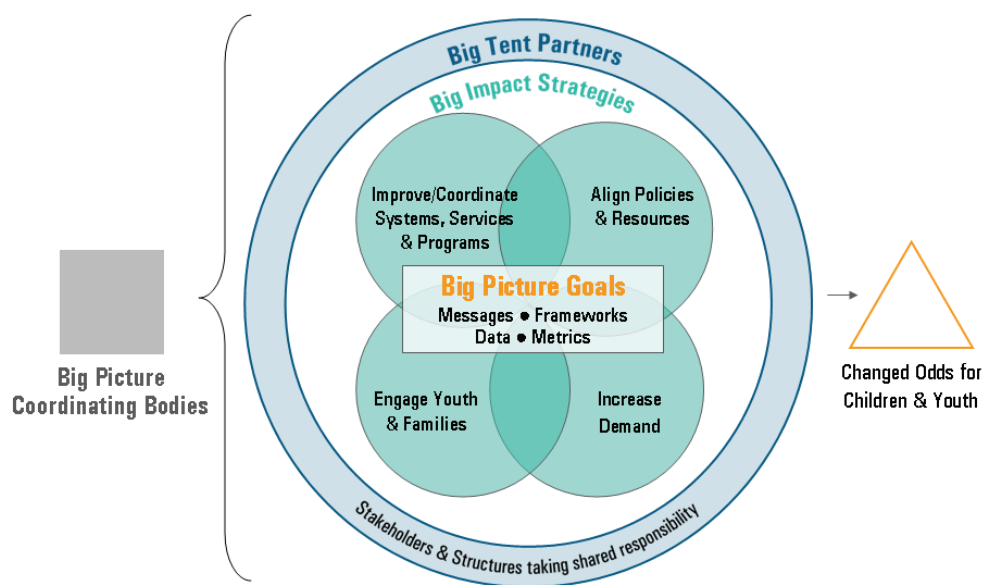
# The Blueprint for Action: LEARNING TO ACT DIFFERENTLY

In every community and state across the country, you can find people tackling the ten tasks that are part of an overall Blueprint for Action (see list at far right.) The Blueprint diagram at right shows the relationship among these tasks. It helps leaders think about how their work fits together so that they can increase the collective horsepower of their efforts and get better returns on their investments.

The **Big Picture Goals** provide the critical focal point for the work. The **Big Impact Strategies** are interconnected and need to be focused on achieving the goals. The **Big Tent Partners** are the circle of actors coming together to leverage their efforts to make change happen. These partners need to take on shared responsibility for changing the odds for children and youth. They also need to support the **Big Picture Coordinating Bodies** asked to manage change.

Partners are depicted in a circle not only to signal shared responsibility but also to signal the need for containment. Perhaps the biggest challenge for Big Tent Partners is to keep their efforts inside the tent. A story that frequently plays out at the state or local level goes something like this: A coordinating group is established with a broad mandate to create a plan for children and youth, but the group is not really given the capacity or authority to do so. A crisis happens – an outbreak of gang violence, an increase in the dropout rate – and a separate task force is set up, charged with creating a plan and implementing strategies that are not connected to the efforts going on in the circle. Rather than bringing new energy, another competing effort is created, adding to the cacophony of messages and activity.

One of the primary indicators that people are thinking and acting differently is that they not only coordinate existing efforts but, when the need arises to address a new problem, they



voluntarily bring it inside the tent to ensure that they build on efforts that are currently underway.

Just as communities and states are challenged to add up and align the Big Picture around youth outcomes and community supports, they are also challenged to map their collective efforts within the Blueprint. Harnessing the energy inside the tent and focusing it towards the Big Picture Goals is the most effective way to improve returns on investment by increasing your horsepower for change.

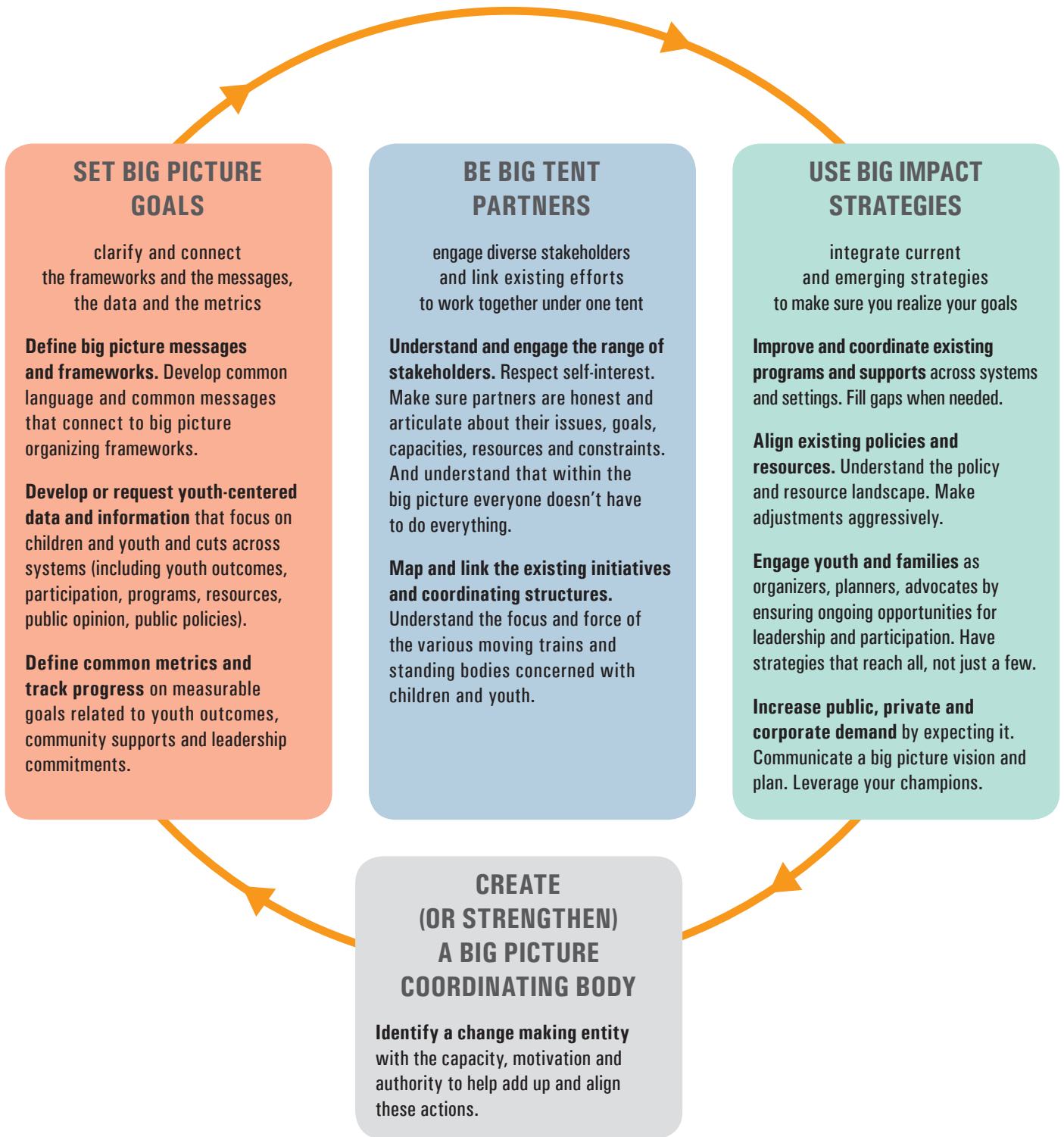
The Ready by 21 Tool Box includes diagnostic tools that help stakeholders assess the overall change horsepower of their state or community. Additional tools help them actually map their existing and emerging work and look for ways to leverage and align their efforts.

Beyond this initial diagnostic work, the Ready by 21 Tool Box helps leader clarify the information, frames and practical applications that they need to take action. It includes reports, resource guides and “power” tools on:

- Developing common frameworks and action plans
- Promoting child and youth development
- Identifying a core slate of child and youth indicators
- Mapping the program and resource landscape
- Improving program quality city-wide
- Engaging young people
- Making the case for integrated learning systems – in school and out
- Improving the youth work workforce
- Aligning policies and funding
- Creating youth-centered children’s budgets
- Strengthening coordinating bodies.

To explore these resources or learn more about the Ready by 21 e-news updates, webinars, training, institutes, coaching and technical assistance, go to the Forum’s website at [www.forumfyi.org](http://www.forumfyi.org).

Leaders need to use the Big Picture Approach  
– sharpening the focus of the whole picture while setting priorities within it –  
to plan for and tackle each of the following 10 action steps.



**FOCUS DIFFERENTLY SO THAT TOGETHER WE CAN ACT DIFFERENTLY**

## About the Forum for Youth Investment

The Forum for Youth Investment is a nonprofit, nonpartisan “action tank” dedicated to helping communities and the nation make sure all young people are Ready by 21 – ready for college, work and life. Informed by rigorous research and practical experience, the Forum forges innovative ideas, strategies and partnerships to strengthen solutions for young people and those who care about them. A trusted resource for policy makers, advocates, researchers and practitioners, the Forum provides youth and adult leaders with the information, connections and tools they need to create greater opportunities and outcomes for young people.

The Forum was founded in 1998 by Karen Pittman and Merita Irby, two of the country’s top leaders on youth issues and youth policy. The Forum’s 25-person staff is headquartered in Washington D.C. in the historic Cady-Lee House with a satellite office in Michigan and staff in Missouri, New Mexico and Virginia.

## About Ready by 21®

The Ready by 21 Challenge calls on states and communities to change the odds for children and youth by changing the way they do business. This requires broadening definitions of what it means for youth to be ready, for schools and communities to be supportive and for all leaders to be engaged. Working in partnership with the business, government, education and nonprofit sectors, the Forum for Youth Investment provides frameworks, coaching and tools to help leaders think differently, act differently and act together. The Ready by 21 Big Picture Approach helps leaders – from young people to parents, program directors to policy makers – bring precision to their passion, ensuring that all young people are ready by 21 – ready for college, work and life.

The five year goal is to have a critical mass of leaders in every state across the country who have learned to focus and prioritize differently so that they can set bigger goals, use bolder strategies, be better partners, and work together to ensure that their individual efforts add up rather than simply add on.

Partners, places and products are all a part of the Ready by 21 delivery system. National partners representing the education, government, nonprofit, business and community philanthropy sectors are working to inform, support and champion the state and local leaders taking on this work. (For more on the partners, see the Ready by 21 National Partners Profiles & Commitments book.) Through these partnerships and through targeted networks, an increasing number of states and localities are taking up the Challenge. (For more on partnerships, places and the full range of Ready by 21 tools and resources, see the Ready by 21 Challenge book.)

For more information on the Ready by 21 Challenge, please contact Andrea Felix, Special Assistant to the Executive Director, at 202-207-3328 or [andrea@forumfyi.org](mailto:andrea@forumfyi.org).

The Forum for Youth Investment  
The Cady-Lee House  
7064 Eastern Avenue  
Washington, DC 20012-2031  
Phone: 202.207.3333  
Fax: 202.207.3329  
Web: [www.forumfyi.org](http://www.forumfyi.org)  
Email: [youth@forumfyi.org](mailto:youth@forumfyi.org)