

Steering A Course Toward Effective Youth Policies:

Dashboards For Youth



All youth ready for
college, work & life.

Adapted from: *State Youth Policy: Helping All Youth to Grow Up Fully Prepared and Fully Engaged*

Thaddeus Ferber and Karen Pittman with Tara Marshall

Based on frameworks advanced by states across America and countries around the world, the Forum for Youth Investment has developed a sample youth policy framework to help policy makers and administrators bring more discipline to the challenge of ensuring that all young people are Ready by 21: ready by college, work and life.TM This framework, which is summarized on pages 8–9 of the full report, builds off of the metaphor of a car dashboard. If one wants to “steer a positive course” for youth, the first thing they will need is a clear vision of the areas of development they wish to promote. Then they will need a clear view of young people at different ages (odometer — which shows how many miles a car has driven), how they are growing and developing (speedometer — which shows how fast a car is moving), the amount of services, supports and opportunities they

are receiving (fuel gauge — which shows how much gas a car has) and the quality of these services, supports and opportunities (octane — which indicates the quality of the gas in a car).

In reality, the dashboard may have to be more complex (perhaps ending up looking more like an airplane’s cockpit control panel). At a minimum, the dashboard would have to monitor the status of five developmental areas (if one were to stretch the metaphor, this could perhaps be thought of as five separate engines). In order to become fully prepared and fully engaged adults, young people need to learn and grow in a range of areas. Whatever age a young person is at, they need to be:¹

¹ There are an infinite number of ways to group and present desired outcomes. Many already exist. This particular list is offered simply as one option among many. The bottom line is that whatever list is selected must 1) cover the

1. learning (developing positive basic and applied academic attitudes, skills and behaviors);
2. working (developing positive vocational attitudes, skills and behaviors);
3. thriving (developing physically healthy attitudes, skills and behaviors);
4. connecting (developing positive social attitudes, skills and behaviors); and
5. leading (developing positive civic attitudes, skills and behaviors).

full range of developmental areas; 2) be memorable and potentially inspirational; 3) link to what research says is important; and 4) create a framework within which organizations and agencies can organize their work.

For each of these developmental areas, one would want to monitor at least three dials on a dashboard (odometer, speedometer and fuel gauge), and one would want to select the quality of the fuel (octane).

1.

ODOMETER (MILES DRIVEN): AGES/DEVELOPMENTAL PERIODS

The first two decades of life are dramatic periods of growth. In order to get a snapshot of the lives of young people, one actually needs to take a number of snapshots — one for each age group. Research shows that investments in young people must begin early and be sustained for more than 20 years. While schools end at age 18, too many 18-year-olds are still not fully prepared for adulthood. Any dashboard must have clear displays for multiple developmental periods.

2.

SPEEDOMETER (SPEED OF CAR): INDICATORS OF GROWTH

Once one knows what developmental period a young person is in, one will want to know if they are achieving their developmental goals. For every age group, there are range of goals for youth: protecting them from harm (and some might even say punishing youth when they harm society, although many focus instead on rehabilitation); preventing a range of negative outcomes, from drug abuse to youth violence; promoting positive outcomes, such as academic success; and ensuring that youth are not just fully prepared, but are fully participating in their world in positive ways. Each are critical, and indicators must track progress in all of these areas.

3.

FUEL GAUGE (QUANTITY OF GAS): INPUTS FROM SYSTEMS

Viewing indicators of growth is not useful unless one can change their direction. Fortunately, states have a number of inputs they can and do provide, organized into various systems (education, juvenile justice, etc.) How do these systems span across both the developmental areas and the goals from protection to participation? There are two ways to answer this question. First, one could map out where each system places its primary emphasis. Second, one could map out the full range of resources each system brings to bear. The primary emphasis of the educational system, for example, is on promoting learning. But, on closer inspection, one would find that it actually devotes resources that span the full range of developmental areas and goals.

4.

OCTANE (QUALITY OF GAS): QUALITY OF SERVICES, SUPPORTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Knowing that inputs are being provided is only one piece of the puzzle. One also needs to know the quality of these inputs. The National Research Council and Institute of Medicine recently released an authoritative report laying out the characteristics of settings that support, or undermine, young people's development.¹ These provide a template by which one could judge the quality of any input into young people's lives.

¹ National Research Council and Institute of Medicine. (2002). Community Programs to Promote Youth Development. Committee on Community-Level Programs for Youth. Jacquelynne Eccles and Jennifer A. Gootman, eds. Board on Children, Youth and Families, Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Outcomes Across the Age Span

The first two decades of life are dramatic periods of growth. In order to get a snapshot of the lives of young people, one really needs to take a number of snapshots — one for each age group. Research shows that investments in young people must begin early and be sustained for more than 20 years. While schools end at age 18, too many youth are still not fully prepared for adulthood. Any dashboard must have clear displays for multiple developmental periods.

Please note: the specific elements in the cells are presented as samples. People using this frame are encouraged to engage stakeholders in a process to define specific outcomes that resonate within their particular context. We would, however, encourage users to consider the full range of developmental outcomes and age groups.

| | | | AGES | | | | |
|---------------------|-------------------|------------|---|---|--|---|---|
| | | | Early Childhood 0-5 yrs | Elementary Age 6-10 yrs | Middle School 11-13 yrs | High School 14-18 yrs | Young Adults 19-24 yrs |
| DEVELOPMENTAL AREAS | READY FOR COLLEGE | Learning | All young children ready to learn | All children developing basic skills and competencies | All youth succeeding in school | All young people are fully prepared for higher education or work | All young adults enter workforce or higher education with marketable skills |
| | READY FOR WORK | Working | All young children have awareness that adults work | All children have positive attitudes toward the employment of adults in their lives | All youth are aware of possible career paths that give them hope and purpose | All young people make a successful transition to adulthood | All young adults are employed with living wage and benefits |
| | READY FOR LIFE | Thriving | All young children are fully immunized | All children meet physical standards for developmental age | All youth develop proper nutrition, hygiene and exercise routines | All youth are engaged in physical activity and avoid risk-compromising behaviors | All young adults have good health and health habits |
| | | Connecting | All young children have appropriate attachment to a significant adult | All children have positive self awareness, ability to express themselves | All youth engage in socially acceptable behavior and have a healthy self-concept | All young people have a sense of independent as well as positive relationships with those around them | All young adults foster personal and social growth in the people in their lives |
| | | Leading | All young children feel supported by a community around them | All children accept rules and social boundaries | All youth demonstrate attitudes and behaviors of civic responsibility | All young people are involved in programs to give back | All young adults are making a difference in their community |

Indicators

(SHOWN FOR 15- TO 19-YEAR OLDS)

For every age group, there are range of goals for youth: protecting them from harm (and punishing youth when they harm society); preventing a range of negative outcomes, from drug abuse to youth violence; promoting positive outcomes, such as academic success; and ensuring that youth are not just fully prepared, but are fully participating in their world in positive ways. Each are critical, and indicators must track progress in all of these areas.

Please note: the specific indicators in the cells are presented as samples. Ideally, each cell would be filled with multiple indicators. An ongoing tension exists between being comprehensive (including every possible indicator) and being comprehensible (selecting only a few indicators to make it easier for people to quickly assess results). One possible solution would be to include multiple indicators, but to report them back in summary form. In other words, each cell would have a single score that summarizes the underlying related indicators. Developing and/or selecting such summary indices would be a valuable research project.² We would encourage anyone undertaking such a project to consider the full range of developmental outcomes and goals for young people. We would also encourage them to use the same overarching framework for the full set of age ranges, yet to develop different summary indices for each developmental period.

| | | | GOALS | | | |
|---------------------|---------|------------|--|---|---|--|
| | | | Protecting | Preventing | Promoting | Participating |
| DEVELOPMENTAL AREAS | COLLEGE | Learning | Percent of students who are not enrolled in school | Percentage of students who “skipped or “cut” classes or schools days in the last three weeks | Percent of students achieving at grade level | Percent of students actively involved in service learning programs |
| | WORK | Working | Number of youth in hazardous and illegal working conditions | Unemployment rate among 16- to 19-year olds | Percent of youth with workplace skills | Percent of youth engaged in workplace activities |
| | LIFE | Thriving | Rates of youth deaths | Percent of youth who are overweight or obese, have STDs, use tobacco or illicit substances, or binge drink. | Percent of youth reporting regular exercise, healthy diet and reproductive health | Percent of youth who are active in programs to promote physical health among their peers |
| | | Connecting | Suicide rates | Percent of youth who are reported to be sad, unhappy or depressed | Percent of youth reporting “adults in my community care about people my age,” and “students in my school treat each other with respect” | Percent of youth serving as peer tutors and counselors |
| | | Leading | Number of violent juvenile arrests per 100,000 juvenile population | Percent of youth who report physical fighting | Percent of youth who participate in one or more community organizations | Percent of 18- to 24-year-olds voting |

²Child Trends, one of the organizations working to advance the science of youth outcomes and indicators, recently compiled a compendium that identifies potential youth outcomes and corresponding indicators, summarizes their research base and includes examples of age-appropriate measures to track them over time. This compendium provides a solid foundation for work on indicators.

Fuel Tank:

INPUT FROM SYSTEMS

Viewing indicators of growth is not useful unless one can change their direction. Fortunately, states have a number of inputs they can and do provide, organized into various systems (education, juvenile justice, etc.) How do these systems cover the array of indicators of development, spanning both the developmental areas and the goals from protection to participation? There are two ways to answer this question. First, one can map out where each system places its primary emphasis — it would come as no surprise, for example, to see that the educational system focuses on promoting learning.

| | | | SYSTEMS | | | | | |
|---------------------|-------------------|------------|---------------|-----------|---------------------------|------------|------------------|-------------------------------|
| | | | Child Welfare | Education | Health And Human Services | Employment | Juvenile Justice | Community-Based Organizations |
| DEVELOPMENTAL AREAS | READY FOR COLLEGE | Learning | | Promoting | | | | |
| | READY FOR WORK | Working | | | | Promoting | | |
| | READY FOR LIFE | Thriving | Protecting | | Preventing | | | |
| | | Connecting | Protecting | | Preventing | | | Promoting |
| | | Leading | | | | | Protecting | Participating |

Fuel Tank

A CLOSER LOOK AT RESOURCES (EDUCATION SYSTEM SHOWN, HIGH SCHOOL AGES SHOWN)

Second, one could map out the full range of resources the systems bring to bear. For example, the educational system actually devotes resources that span the full range of developmental areas and goals.

Please note: the specific resources in the cells are presented as samples. Ideally, this framework would be filled out for each of the systems and sectors that provide supports and opportunities for youth. The next task would be to analyze strengths and gaps. Summary indices which provide an overall indication of how well each of the cells is filled across sectors and systems would be valuable to provide an overall sense of how much support young people are receiving in each aspect of their lives. Again, we would encourage anyone undertaking such a project to consider the full range of developmental outcomes and goals for young people, and to use the same framework to analyze each system and sector. We would also encourage them to use the same overarching framework for the full set of age ranges, yet to develop different summary indices for each developmental period.

| | | | GOALS | | | |
|---------------------|---------|------------|--|-----------------------------------|--|---|
| | | | Protecting | Preventing | Promoting | Participating |
| DEVELOPMENTAL AREAS | COLLEGE | Learning | Ending social promotion | Remedial education | Academic courses | Active learning |
| | WORK | Working | Workers' rights class | Remedial education | Vocational education career awareness | Community internships school-to-career |
| | LIFE | Thriving | Reporting suspected abuse | Sexual education school clinic | Physical education | Team captains |
| | | Connecting | Reported suspected neglect | Counseling | Student clubs | Peer tutors |
| | | Leading | Expulsion policies for dangerous youth | Conflict management training | Civics education | Student council service learning |

Checking the Octane:

DO THE PLACES WHERE YOUNG PEOPLE SPEND THEIR TIME SUPPORT THEIR GROWTH?

Knowing that inputs are being provided is only half of the battle. One also needs to know the quality of these inputs. The National Academy of Sciences recently released an authoritative report laying out the characteristics of settings that support young people’s development – and the characteristics of settings that undermine development.³ These provide a template by which one could judge the quality of any input into young people’s lives. Most settings fall somewhere in between, hopefully meeting minimal quality standards while striving to continually improve.

| | Harmful | Minimal | Optimal |
|--|--|---------|---|
| Physical and Psychological Safety | Physical and health dangers, fear, feeling of insecurity, sexual and physical harassment, verbal abuse. | ↔ | Safe and health-promoting facilities; practice that increases safe peer group interaction and decreases unsafe or confrontational peer interactions. |
| Appropriate Structure | Chaotic, disorganized, laissez-faires, rigid, overcontrolled, autocratic. | ↔ | Limit setting, clear and consistent rules and expectations, firm-enough control, continuity and predictability, clear boundaries and age-appropriate monitoring. |
| Supportive Relationships | Cold, distant, overcontrolling, ambiguous support, untrustworthy, focused on winning, inattentive, unresponsive, rejecting | ↔ | Warmth, closeness, connectedness, good communications, caring, support, guidance, secure attachment, responsiveness |
| Opportunities to Belong | Exclusion, marginalization, intergroup conflict | ↔ | Opportunities for meaningful inclusion, regardless of one’s gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or disabilities; social inclusion, social engagement and integration; opportunities for socio-cultural identity formation; support for cultural and bicultural competence. |
| Positive Social Norms | Normless, anomie, laissez-faire practices, antisocial and amoral norms, norms that encourage violence, reckless behavior consumerism, poor health practices; conformity | ↔ | Rules of behavior, expectations, injunctions, ways of doing things, values and morals, obligations for service |
| Support for Efficacy and Mattering | Unchallenging, overcontrolling, disempowering, disabling. Practices that undermine includes motivation and desire to learn, such a excessive focus on current relative performance level rather than improvement | ↔ | Youth-based, empowerment practices that support autonomy, making a real difference in one’s community and being taken seriously. practice that is enabling, responsibility granting, meaningful challenges. practice that focus on improvement rather than on relative current levels |
| Opportunities for Skill-Building | Practice that promotes bad physical habits and habits of mind; practice that undermines school and learning. | ↔ | Opportunities to learn physical, intellectual, psychological, emotional and social skills; exposure to intentional learning experiences; opportunities to learn cultural. |
| Integration of Family, School and Community Efforts | Discordance, lack of communications, conflict | ↔ | Concordance, coordination and synergy among family, school and community |

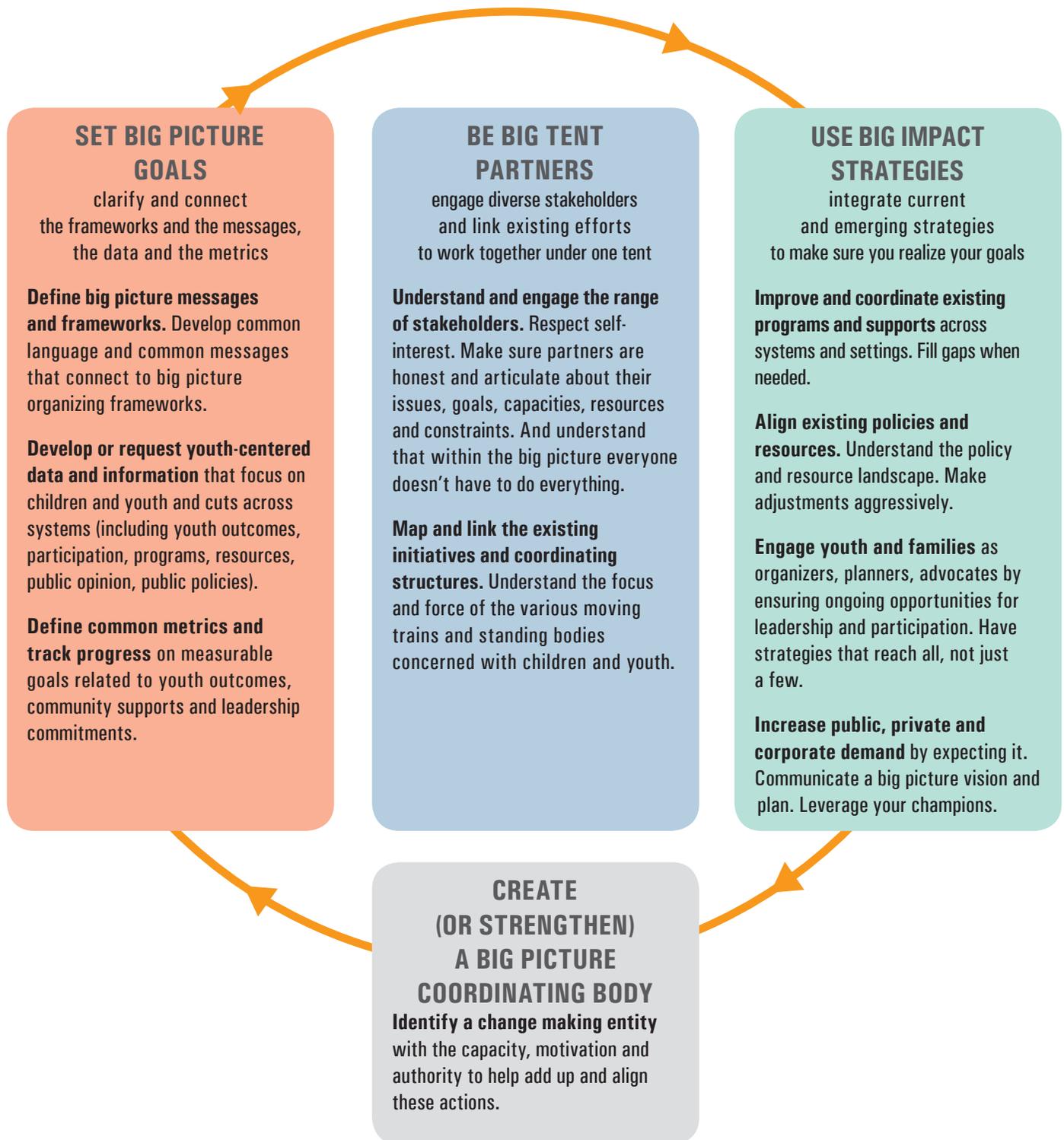
³ National Research Council and Institute of Medicine. (2002). Community Programs to Promote Youth Development. Committee on Community-Level Programs for Youth. Jacquelynne Eccles and Jennifer A. Gootman, eds. Board on Children, Youth and Families, Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

The Blueprint for Action

LEARNING TO *ACT* DIFFERENTLY

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 that make up the . . .

BLUEPRINT FOR ACTION



FOCUS DIFFERENTLY SO THAT TOGETHER WE CAN ACT DIFFERENTLY