



Each and every
young person
has great
potential
to thrive.

We can dramatically change the odds for youth if we commit to upend inequities, embrace science-informed strategies, and accelerate progress.

As the nation rises from crisis to a new normal, we must together expand and deepen opportunities for young people who have been historically underserved by policy and practice.

ARE YOU READY? WE ARE.

With an unwavering focus on youth potential, the Readiness Projects advance work informed by science and grounded in practice, supporting adults in all settings and systems across the diverse youth fields.

The Forum for Youth Investment, the National Urban League, and the American Institutes for Research have united to devote our time, resources, and perspectives to stimulate equity-driven solutions and policies.

With partners, we will accelerate work that demands equitable learning and development opportunities and builds on the strengths of people working at all levels to help children, youth, and young adults thrive.



A unified effort supported by
the Forum for Youth Investment,
the National Urban League, and
the American Institutes for Research



What We Know

Our society is experiencing an explosion of knowledge that both reinforces and reveals how young people learn and what they need to thrive.

Emerging cross-discipline science findings from neuroscience, psychology, sociology, and more, contribute to a powerful body of work informing learning and development. These sciences validate what families and professionals have long known about the critical nature of relationships and learning conditions; and now brings new urgency and evidence to our work.

This converging set of information illuminates the optimal human development periods—in early childhood and adolescence—when we must act with intention and care. Now we have the evidence that with the right context and right relationships, we can rewrite the script for opportunity, especially for youth and young adults experiencing adverse circumstances.

A Moral Imperative to Use Evidence to Maximize Potential

We now have the knowledge we need to progress in how we support human development in childhood and adolescence. And our rapidly changing society demands we maximize potential for each young person.

Relationships are the fuel for brain development. They shape the developing mind, buffer the effects of stress and ignite learning processes. The moment is now to reach young people experiencing trauma and reshape their future trajectory.

Key Findings for Equitable Solutions:

- **Every young person has great potential to thrive, given the right conditions.**
- **Teen and young adult years are as critical to brain development as early childhood years.**
- **The processes of learning and development are complex, ongoing and unique to the individual. They are also accelerated when integrated across multiple domains—cognitive, social, emotional, physical.**
- **Agency and engagement support deeper learning.**

Equitable Conditions for Learning are Essential

Young people's experiences in all contexts matter. The science findings tell us that adversity doesn't happen to children, it happens in their brains and bodies in reaction to experiences that they have. But the effects of adversity can be reversed. Science findings confirm that developmentally rich experiences can be healing. This creates an imperative to design environments that correct for the impact of stress and drive healthy learning and development.

Key Findings for Equitable Solutions:

- **Trust and belonging are key to creating environments that optimize potential. Relationship-filled trusting environments allow people to show who they are—their talents, their interests, how they learn and what they need—making personal pathways more possible.**
- **When needs are met, assets recognized and built upon and conditions for learning optimized, people are able to more fully engage in building skills and acquiring knowledge in the scaffolded, intertwined way that learning happens.**
- **Meaning making is a primary function of how our brains work. Learning and development build on what came before and we draw meaning from our experiences, contexts, and culture.**



TOGETHER, WE WILL CHANGE THE NARRATIVE

We proactively champion the work of anyone committed to helping youth thrive in any setting, including homes, schools, afterschool and community programs, health and mental health, housing, juvenile justice, child welfare, and more. This includes a deep appreciation for the knowledge, perspectives, and evidence generated in these settings.

The emerging cross-discipline science findings encourage us to work cross-system to support and empower adults, connect services, challenge harmful policies, and transform systems.

The **Readiness Projects** will bolster projects that support the readiness of youth, adults, systems and community leaders by finding ways to test the utility of recent science findings, to inform efforts to improve quality, to increase engagement, and to advance equity. As coordinating partners, we will advance a curated set of meetings, projects, and products aimed at leveraging our collective knowledge base and the constellation of activities across the youth-focused fields.

Our Priorities

While every partner and project will not address all of these, the ideal effort will:

Advance “stickier” narratives about how science and research on learning and development can be used to advance equity and thriving.

Amplify the voices of youth and community leaders and ask how a more robust approach to equity and thriving can support and refine their agendas.

Assert the essential role of all adults in all settings – when, where and with whom learning happens—and prioritize efforts to recognize and act upon their perspectives.

Articulate the need to advance the idea of a “thriving youth” field (similar to early childhood) to align work within and across systems and solutions.

Seminal and Recent Consensus-building Efforts Grounded in Science Findings

Community Programs to Promote Youth Development (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2002)

Investing to Improve the Well-Being of Vulnerable Youth and Young Adults: Recommendations for Policy and Practice (Youth Transition Funders Group, 2015)

Science of Learning and Development: A Synthesis (Science of Learning and Development Alliance, 2017)

Science of Adolescent Learning: How Body and Brain Development Affect Student Learning (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2018)

A Research Agenda for the Next Generation (National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, 2018)

The Promise of Adolescence: Realizing Opportunity for All Youth (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019)

Shaping Summertime Experiences: Opportunities to Promote Healthy Development and Well-Being for Children and Youth (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019)

Promoting Positive Adolescent Health Behaviors and Outcomes: Thriving in the 21st Century (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2020)

Readiness Projects will:

CREATE

Experts will develop tools, resources, briefs and needed supports for the field.

ELEVATE

Partners will identify and spotlight the evidence, practices, policies and strategies that are making a difference for learning and development.

ENGAGE

Conveners will bring together cross-sector leaders and stakeholders united in their ambition to help all youth maximize potential.

INFORM & AMPLIFY

With co-strategists, accelerating projects that embrace the science-informed strategies and upend inequities facing children, youth, and adolescents.

ARE YOU READY TO ACT?

Are you driven by equity, committed to action, and looking for ways to use emerging cross-discipline science findings related to learning and development to advance your work?

We're elevating work that is happening across diverse youth settings, opportunities, and fields, engaging partners and co-strategists in joint work, and creating targeted resources that enable leaders to infuse the sciences of learning and development into their work.

We're seeking nothing short of bold, science-informed, equitable supports for thriving youth.

Tell us how you want to be connected:

Stay informed

Get occasional updates as new resources are posted, new partners and projects added, and important milestones are met. We won't bombard you, we promise!

Be inspired

Tell us what you're working on and what you're interested in and we'll loop you into discussions. We are developing issue channels as we identify important, real-time opportunities to act and reflect.

Get involved

Volunteer to test out messages and tools, contribute stories and evidence, co-create topical meetings, products, and projects. Infuse the science findings into your day-to-day work.

Please inform, inspire, and involve us!

As a co-catalyst with the Readiness Projects, help to spark connections and elevate efforts across the diverse youth fields.

The Readiness Projects Partners



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ECOSYSTEM FOR YOUTH BELONGING, OPPORTUNITY, AND SUCCESS



We believe that the possibility of creating equitable environments for learning and thriving for children, youth, and young adults can only be achieved if we acknowledge four things:

- 1. Young people's experiences in all contexts matter, including but not limited to formal systems.**
- 2. The science findings are about human learning and therefore relevant to all systems, not just schools.**
- 3. The power of the findings provides a unique opportunity to create a cross-system and cross-quadrant effort to support and empower adults, connect services, challenge harmful policies, and transform systems.**
- 4. The principles for optimizing engagement—of young people, the adults who work with them, and the families and communities that support them—are universal, while the obstacles to improvement are different in each quadrant and system.**



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