



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

# Equitable Ecosystems for Adolescents



**An effort aimed to advance the science findings that show the key components of young people's ecosystem and the strategies and assets that support development, especially for young people who have experienced inequitable or inconsistent access to settings that are intentional in promoting thriving and transformative development.**

## Goal:

This project will direct tools and guidance to community, system and philanthropic leaders – and youth who are advocating directly for themselves – to ensure that three developmental conditions are evident across all settings in which young people live, learn and work:

- Robust and equitable learning and development opportunities;
- Consistent, diverse and healing-centered experiences inside of belonging – inside programs, communities and in the broader society;
- Supported navigation of and opportunities to change systems that impact their lives.

To accomplish this, we will engage a team of advisors to bring findings from the sciences of learning and development alongside the perspectives and grounded sensemaking of experiential experts – young people and their families – plus national thought leaders and seasoned practitioners to:

- Build discussion opportunities for the field, and the Annie E. Casey Foundation, to reimagine and define the components of young people's ecosystem that support them in feeling safe, feeling they belong, and feeling that they matter.
- Provide guidance to the Foundation and system leaders in the wider field about the features of settings and adult characteristics that support transformative development, particularly for young people who have not been consistently or intentionally connected to supportive systems within traditional settings and programs.
- Articulate strategies for improving settings, grounded in young people's experiences, that affect young people's development and life trajectory, and sharing responsibility for fostering engagement, development and belonging between settings and systems.
- Develop tools for policymakers, practitioners, and youth to engage leaders in their communities in identifying and implementing best practices that support transformative learning and development.

This will lead to the creation of tools to support more institutions and spaces to fully leverage the science and elevate young people's voices to make all components of transformative development visible, specifically for young people who have not experienced those systems as supportive or transformative.

## Why we are taking this on:

Equitable Ecosystems for Adolescents centers on the question of belonging, asking the key question: how do we make the concept of “belonging” and the idea that “all experiences matter” as relevant for youth and young adults as it is in the early years?

## Key Partners:

- Shawn Ginwright, author, professor, activist [Senior Advisor]
- Karen Pittman, Forum for Youth Investment
- Rob Jagers, CASEL
- David Osher, American Institutes for Research
- Ilene Berman, Annie E. Casey Foundation
- Youth and Practitioner representatives from:
  - Our Piece of the Pie
  - ROCA
  - The Oasis Center
  - YouthBuild
  - National Urban League
  - Spark Action
  - Columbia Urban League
  - Fresh Tracks
  - Project U-Turn Collaborative
  - Performing Statistics
  - Flourish Agenda
  - Village of Arts and Humanities

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