

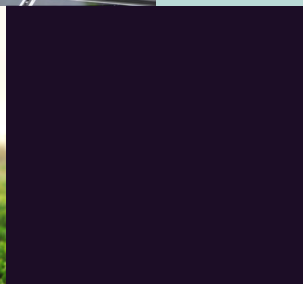
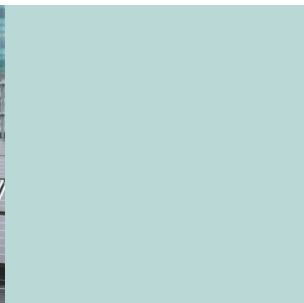


YOUTH SYSTEMS BUILDING ACADEMY

A Compendium of
Community Accomplishments

September 2024

An initiative of the
United States Department of Labor



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Glossary of Terms

CoC	Continuum of Care
DOL	U.S. Department of Labor
ISY	In-school youth
LWDB	Local Workforce Development Board
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
OSY	Out-of-school youth
WIOA	Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act

“Before the YSB Academy, I felt like my voice didn't matter. Now, I see how my ideas can bring real change. Working with my community, I've helped create projects that are improving our city and creating job opportunities. This experience has shown me the power of collaboration and has given me a sense of purpose and belonging. It has truly changed my life.”

– Cohort 1 Youth Participant, Youth Systems Building Academy

Welcome

Dear colleagues,

Youth with barriers to employment – particularly youth from marginalized and underrepresented communities – require strong education and training opportunities and comprehensive service delivery models that weave together resources and approaches to offer seamless support. This no-wrong-door approach helps communities holistically address the needs of young people and set them on a path to career success.

The DOL Employment and Training Administration is pleased to share this compendium reflecting the efforts and accomplishments of 19 diverse communities from across the United States that participated in DOL's Youth Systems Building Academy (YSB Academy or Academy) in 2023 and 2024. The YSB Academy aligns with DOL's [2030 Vision Convening](#) to create opportunities for underserved communities and build strong sector partnerships. The 6-month Academies provided support to workforce systems and key local partners as they created plans to design, implement, or scale system-level improvements to support holistic youth employment outcomes.

As you will read in the following pages, communities' efforts were multilayered and complex, focusing on increasing equitable policies and practices for youth career pathways; aligning local systems' policies, resources, and services; using data to inform system improvements; and including youth voices in messaging, recruitment, and other programmatic decision-making.

We hope that your community can use this resource to spark thinking and planning for further no-wrong-door approaches to connect to meaningful, sustaining career paths.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Kemp
Division Chief, Youth Services
Employment and Training Administration
U.S. Department of Labor

Overview

The first and second cohorts of the Youth Systems Building Academy (YSB Academy or Academy) received individualized training and technical assistance to increase capacity to improve local youth employment systems and outcomes. After a competitive self-nomination process, DOL selected 19 communities across 2 cohorts to participate in the YSB Academy, each led by their local workforce board and representing urban, suburban, and rural areas across the United States. To participate, each community team – led by its workforce board – submitted commitment letters from at least two additional partners and an outline of tangible goals and objectives for achieving them. Community partners ranged from educational, justice, and other human services systems to foundations and labor unions, among others. In alignment with YSB Academy goals, participating communities focused on the following:

- Creating platforms for integrating youth voices into program design and delivery.
- Building equitable, holistic ecosystems that effectively serve the needs of youth.
- Identifying partners to pool resources, create accountability, and streamline services.
- Developing employment opportunities that result in livable wages.

YSB Academy Communities

Cohort 1

(January–June 2023)

- Boulder County, CO
- Buffalo & Erie County, NY
- Kanawha County, WV
- Lake County, IL
- New York City, NY
- Portland, OR
- Southcentral Region – Anchorage, AK
- South Central Iowa
- Tangipahoa Parish, LA

Cohort 2

(January–June 2024)

- Baltimore, MD
- Boston, MA
- Denver, CO
- Miami-Dade County, FL
- Omaha, NE
- Oswego County, NY
- Pittsburgh, PA
- Ramsey County, MN
- Riverside County, CA
- Southeast Michigan, MI

YSB Academy by the Numbers

- 2 cohorts
- 19 participating communities
- 66 community partners

Workforce Agencies Forged Partnerships With...

- Faith-based organizations
- Foundations
- Justice organizations
- Local and state government
- Nonprofit and direct service organizations
- Secondary school systems
- Unions
- Universities, community colleges, and technical colleges

YSB Highlights and Accomplishments

From engaging youth voices to building partnerships and aligning the processes needed to sustain community-led systems change, communities engaged in similar activities to jump-start their systems building efforts. This section highlights community accomplishments during the Academy across both cohorts. Common themes and lessons learned quickly emerged based on communities' efforts to build youth-focused and -driven employment systems:¹

- Data
- Outreach
- Partnerships
- Services
- Youth Voice

Data

Identifying existing employment-related and supportive services like transportation, childcare, and health was foundational to several communities' systems building efforts. Mapping these community assets prompted conversations among partners about existing resources, gaps, and barriers youth may face in accessing support. Long-term planning also required discussion about data sharing across partners, with a priority on analyzing data to inform policy and processes that embrace diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility.

Outreach

Many communities explored ways to best communicate with young people about workforce opportunities. Strategies included thoughtfully devising messaging and outreach plans that may have varied by intended population (e.g., whether youth were in or out of school, involved in the justice system, or experienced other barriers). Communities explored collecting young people's communication preferences, attended local job fairs, hosted youth summits, presented at middle and high schools, and organized other community events. For some, outreach also entailed engaging young people's families, providing support and knowledge about career options and related topics for the entire family.

Partnerships

Robust collaboration among critical partners within a community was essential for systems building efforts. It required deliberate activities that began with building relationships, cultivating buy-in from leadership and staff, and creating structures that sustained the relationship. Collaboration agreements across community partners led to unified messaging, resource sharing, and youth pathway planning and mapping. Some YSB Academy communities designated a lead organization or staff person to facilitate, align, and track collaboration among partners. The lead organization had to be prepared to navigate partners' multiple and sometimes conflicting priorities. Establishing shared practices and protocols among diverse partner organizations formalized the foundational elements, expectations, roles, and responsibilities among agencies.

¹ Academy resources on WorkforceGPS: youth.workforcegps.org/resources/2024/09/10/19/32/Youth-Systems-Building-Academy.

Services

A core system building activity for several YSB Academy communities involved seeking ways to streamline existing service delivery systems across partners to offer young people a coordinated, no-wrong-door approach across workforce, education, and human services. For some, this involved updating application processes to create universal application opportunities across programs. YSB Academy communities further recognized that career exploration should be ongoing and may include youth learning about different career opportunities through paid internships, pre-apprenticeships, on-the-job training, or registered apprenticeships. These opportunities equipped youth with practical skills and supervision and created pathways for youth who could not afford to participate in unpaid job experiences. Other activities included helping young people understand the educational prerequisites required for different careers and learning the skills and aptitudes needed to succeed in jobs.

Youth Voice

Engaging youth as active participants in systems building efforts and decision-making processes was foundational to developing high-quality supports that were accessible to youth. To increase the likelihood of participation, engagement, and buy-in, youth involvement encompassed strategies such as focus groups, surveys, and other data collection efforts; advisory groups or committees; and direct hires. Engaging and empowering youth requires organizations to compensate young people for their time. Many YSB Academy communities found that youth feedback on program design and outreach provided valuable insight, guidance, and recommendations for how communities can design and implement meaningful systems change.

Accomplishments

Data Accomplishments – Cohort 1

Boulder County, Colorado

As part of the Academy, Boulder County's Housing and Human Services Department improved data entry procedures and processes to facilitate faster, more effective referrals to workforce system partners. During regularly scheduled team meetings, partners also brought and shared data insights from their respective systems (i.e., Workforce and Human Services) to inform initiative efforts.

Lake County, Illinois

Lake County catalogued more than 600 youth-serving organizations, training programs, and employment opportunities (e.g., local apprenticeships). The [interactive, web-based asset map](#) provides young people and other users with the information they need to connect with a service provider. To refine its outreach strategies and youth systems investments, the team updated its estimations of youth disconnection in Lake County and established a replicable methodology to measure change over time.

New York City, New York

Data collection was a core goal for New York City, with a focus on improving analytics to support stronger transitions, promote continuous improvement, and ensure that collective efforts address historic educational and employment disparities. The team began crafting a data structure to publicly share information and create accountability, including clear, compelling career readiness data indicators. It also planned to expand existing MOUs citywide while building the technical capacity to share data and measure impact over time.

Portland, Oregon

Worksystems collected data from community partners through one-on-one meetings. The team focused on the demographics of the youth each organization engages with through programming, highlighting groups that collaborate with justice-involved youth. The team then reviewed and discussed the data and the list of organizations working with high populations of justice-involved youth to identify opportunities for services, support, and partnership. Worksystems also added an application question to its programs to collect data on the number of justice-involved youth who participate in paid work experiences through [PDX Youth@Work](#).

Southcentral Region – Anchorage, Alaska

A crucial step in Southcentral Region – Anchorage's systems building efforts was to gather population data, partner organization program information, and feedback from youth program participants to make the case for systems change. By inventorying the assets of youth-serving agencies and organizations focused on the Anchorage and Matanuska-Susitna region, the team was able to identify potential support and gaps for its intended population. It also collected quantitative data from the Research and Analysis Division of the

Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development on demographics of the 16–24-year-old Alaskan population it intended to serve.

South Central Iowa

To engage young people, South Central Iowa first used an evidence framework to assess youth engagement and analyze youth-specific labor market information data. The team, led by young people, later partnered with Iowa State University to develop a system to collect qualitative data to better understand the lived experiences of youth, particularly those not engaged in education, the workforce, or community. The study's purpose was to ensure that systems and leaders understand the opportunities and challenges for area youth.

Tangipahoa Parish, Louisiana

To inform the development of its unified workforce model for young people, during the Academy, Tangipahoa Parish started to analyze local economic forecast data to identify future occupations and industries to prioritize. It also reviewed state and local labor laws that may have impacts on youth work-based learning opportunities.

Data Accomplishments – Cohort 2

Baltimore City, Maryland

During the Academy, Baltimore leveraged funding from [Baltimore's Promise](#) to outline a scope of work for a landscape analysis. This landscape analysis would help the team understand youth workforce opportunities (or lack thereof) and the experiences of student population groups from grade 9 to age 24 and explore whether youth experience the system as disjointed or coordinated. The analysis would also assess the experiences of youth with limited English proficiency or special needs or who were unhoused, young parents, disconnected, immigrants, refugees, or absentee. It also assessed factors relating to gender and race.

Omaha, Nebraska

To inform recruitment and overall efforts to support youth, Omaha reviewed labor market information, union apprenticeship enrollments and slots, and data from programs funded to serve youth, community colleges, re-entry programs, and infrastructure and economic development projects. The team also mapped community organizations' services to identify gaps in local services for young people.

Oswego County, New York

To better understand youth perspectives and work experiences, Oswego County is partnering with graduate students at the Oswego State University of New York (SUNY Oswego) in a fall 2024 capstone project to develop a study and collect baseline data from youth ages 16–24.

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

During the Academy, Pittsburgh collected and analyzed [Future Ready PA Index career readiness indicators](#) for McKeesport, Clairton, and Woodland Hills to compare proficiencies, pathways, and college and career readiness measures. This effort helped the team gauge

success related to school accountability measures and community partnerships in support of career education that can add value to school communities.

Ramsey County, Minnesota

During the Academy, Ramsey County and its partners began identifying and implementing shared metrics across its partnerships to measure the collective impact of its coalition. The group reviewed previous work completed by a local family foundation to identify the most important metrics and strict education and employment data. This review included youth and young adults' connections to caring adults, their hope for their future, and their place in the community. Additionally, Ramsey County identified funding sources to support the comprehensive mapping of the existing youth workforce ecosystem.

Riverside County, California

Riverside County began developing a comprehensive youth community asset and fiscal mapping model for one of the county's districts – a replicable pilot that would effectively enhance youth support across the region. As a part of this process, the team finalized approvals and a budget to develop the model and pilot.

Southeast Michigan

During the Academy, Southeast Michigan compiled data sources to which the team collectively had access. These sources related to youth, parents, K–12 schools, counselors, community organizations, and employers. The team focused on how it was using each data set, what gaps existed, and whether and how the data are shared with the larger field. The team also began categorizing the data related to career planning and systems building.

Outreach Accomplishments – Cohort 1

Kanawha County, West Virginia

Kanawha County secured and began to use virtual reality headsets to expose youth to historically nontraditional careers for their genders, such as welding to girls and nursing and healthcare to boys. The team also created [Res-Con](#), a one-of-a-kind event that caters to the diverse needs of the community. Understanding that some barriers for youth are generational, the county developed Res-Con to provide support and knowledge about career options and related topics for the entire family. Whether individuals are seeking employment, looking into home purchases, navigating a path to recovery, exploring career exposure opportunities, considering a thriving career in the state without college degrees, or pursuing entrepreneurship or careers in healthcare, Res-Con provides an opportunity for personal and professional growth. Kanawha County also recruited and engaged youth ambassadors to speak at high school fairs and youth-related events in the community to increase awareness about nontraditional career options for youth.

New York City, New York

To re-engage young people who are out of school and work through tailored outreach, programs, and services, New York City created a plan to evaluate, leverage, and scale effective models and systems to reconnect out of school, out of work youth and young adults to education and workforce programs and mental health and other support services.

Outreach Accomplishments – Cohort 2

Boston, Massachusetts

Boston explored ways to communicate to young adults the opportunities for and benefits of workforce training, which included conducting a Young Adult Career Pathways Survey, distributed to young adults ages 16–25, to identify gaps in the Boston youth ecosystem. Additionally, the team collected young adult communication preferences from current program participants, local job fairs, and other community outreach events.

Denver, Colorado

To increase Denver youth's awareness of the local workforce system, the team began to explore youth-focused marketing, including how to solicit feedback from youth about platforms to use and types of information to share. The team also sought and received leadership support to use workforce resources to create a comprehensive youth marketing strategy as part of the initiative. With the help of workforce system youth interns, the team created a content calendar to bolster its social media presence.

Miami-Dade County, Florida

Miami-Dade County has been actively raising awareness about its Academy initiatives and programs among potential participants and the broader community. By partnering with community organizations, it intends to reach underserved populations and provide comprehensive support.

Omaha, Nebraska

To engage young adults in trade industries, the team developed a marketing and outreach campaign (ONEUP, Trade Up), with customizable logos based on industry, messaging, and social media strategies. The campaign included materials for youth, parents, and employers to spotlight training and educational opportunities, including trades apprenticeship programs.

Oswego County, New York

To broaden outreach and unify messaging to youth with community workforce partners, Oswego County is partnering with SUNY Oswego. The outreach plan will serve as a project for SUNY public relations students, who will share it with the Youth Advisory Council the county is forming for feedback.

Partnerships Accomplishments – Cohort 1

Boulder County, Colorado

By participating in solutions-focused discussions, Boulder County's Workforce and Human Services partners leveraged timely community-based programs to reach more disconnected youth. The regular meeting time helped solidify the partnership by dedicating a consistent schedule to team strategy, innovation, and problem-solving, especially regarding availability of and eligibility for youth resources shared by workforce system staff.

Buffalo & Erie County, New York

The Buffalo & Erie County team sought to increase partner coordination by preparing an ecosystem map of programs and services and developing a list of blind spots, hurdles to overcome together, and viable solutions. The team also hired a senior director to oversee and run the [Buffalo Futures hub](#). The team also successfully implemented the Aim Higher out-of-school youth program at the Career One-Stop Center through the strategic use of WIOA Youth funding, thereby advancing policy objectives related to workforce development and interagency collaboration. Furthermore, both Buffalo Futures and Aim Higher staff secured New York State Department of Labor Gun Violence Prevention funding, aligning with policy initiatives to offer career-focused alternatives to youth affected by gun violence.

Lake County, Illinois

Lake County built a strong, diverse network, including workforce, education, community college, and union partners, to guide its systems building efforts in a deliberate, collaborative, and innovative way. The team received grants to fund its Academy action plan and hired consultants to help create materials to develop its youth ecosystem, such as a county asset map and youth listening session protocol. The team also reinvigorated the Youth Task Force to authentically capture youth voices.

The collaborative effort resulted in Lake County Workforce Development Board being awarded a DOL Apprenticeship Expansion Grant, which allowed it to hire an apprenticeship navigator. This role collaborates with the pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs and with employers to register apprenticeship programs with DOL and add apprenticeship programs to the Eligible Training Provider List.

The workforce board increased its budget for paid work experiences, Individual Training Accounts, and supportive services – specifically to buy laptops to increase access to high-quality jobs and career paths. The team also received funds from the Lake County Board to increase the summer youth program hourly wage and serve more youth.

To continue enhancing access to high-quality work-based learning opportunities within the community, Lake County partnered with Grayslake School District and the local community college to apply for the U.S. Department of Education's [Career Challenge Z](#) and reached the semifinals in the competition.

New York City, New York

The New York City team met biweekly during the Academy and for many months after to align on strategy and action steps to achieve the goals laid out in the city's [Pathways to an Inclusive Economy: An Action Plan for Young Adults Career Success](#) report. The partners also worked together to secure new funding to implement innovative Academy programs.

Portland, Oregon

Worksystems held one-on-one meetings with 90 partners to learn about each organization's priorities, intended demographics, programs, and youth services. Its goal was to increase understanding of current available opportunities and support for youth across the region, and Worksystems shared lessons learned from these meetings with the larger Portland YSB Academy team. To solidify and sustain its partnership, Portland also drafted an MOU between Worksystems, the Portland Opportunities Industrialization Center (POIC), and the

Department of Community Justice outlining the organizations' shared commitment to provide positive skill-building activities for youth who have been involved in the justice system, with the goal of fostering safer communities.

Southcentral Region – Anchorage, Alaska

Early in its efforts, Southcentral Region – Anchorage prepared for and held large strategic planning sessions to build relationships among partners, lay the foundation for further conversation, and cocreate a holistic workforce approach for disadvantaged Alaskan youth. These facilitated convenings of youth training and service providers helped the team create an asset inventory, start collaborative systems building work, and identify a backbone organization to lead its ongoing systems building efforts.

Southcentral Region – Anchorage also developed a story for communicating its systems building work to the larger community and funders. The team developed a name for the initiative, Alaska GRIND, and explored how it could produce communications about its efforts (e.g., a 1-pager and 30-second elevator pitch).

South Central Iowa

Early on, South Central Iowa identified and affirmed shared values across its diverse partnership. The team, led by its partner, the Legacy Foundation, hosted a session facilitated by Iowa State University and the LWDB, at which local agencies and youth outlined a strategy for intentional partnership and service delivery. The team recruited young people to realize its goal of fully engaging youth in systems building and reform. Youth cocreated a job description for an authentic youth engagement coordinator, raised \$60,000 to fund the position, and joined the hiring committee. Youth also raised \$32,500 and were paid a \$5,000 stipend to codesign a youth community apprenticeship, with a focus on youth and public-private partnerships.

Tangipahoa Parish, Louisiana

Tangipahoa Parish sought to implement agreements across parish partners to build its youth ecosystem. It also planned to identify relevant workforce industry sections and reach out to potential partners to formalize work-based learning opportunities for youth. To start, Tangipahoa Parish identified gaps in its Academy partnerships and recruited additional community organizations, such as one of its local school districts, to begin building a unified workforce model.

Partnerships Accomplishments – Cohort 2

Boston, Massachusetts

During the Academy, Boston mapped existing programs and surveyed young adults. Through this process, the team identified gaps in services and ideated new and existing models to fill gaps. Partner organizations also each made organizational commitments to contribute to Boston's overall plan to meet the identified workforce and support the needs of the city's young adults.

Miami-Dade County, Florida

To strengthen community partnerships focused on youth systems building, Miami-Dade County has launched monthly professional development workshops for youth providers. These workshops offer an overview of CareerSource South Florida's business services available to employers, effective outreach strategies, and connections to training vendors specializing in essential job skills. The team is also identifying and planning partnerships with:

1. Local businesses to ensure that training programs align with workforce needs and
2. Schools, colleges, and universities to create pathways for students.

Omaha, Nebraska

To expand its efforts, Omaha engaged Omaha Public Schools, local re-entry programs, and labor unions, to provide perspectives on developing a local holistic youth ecosystem. Partners created a consistent meeting schedule to resolve collaboration barriers, identify resources, define information needs, and review occupational gaps for the large economic development projects coming to the region. Additionally, partners applied for several local and federal funding opportunities to provide resources to sustain Omaha's systems building efforts.

Oswego County, New York

To highlight youth programs in the county, Oswego County compiled a list of existing youth-serving organizations, detailing the type of support provided, population served, address, service area, and website address. Using Geographic Information System data, the team mapped the information to identify geographic gaps in youth services.

The Oswego LWDB also pledged to create one or two paid work experiences for youth dedicated to the ideas and efforts in the YSB Academy action plan. The time and input from these young people will help them along their own career pathways. They will also be a part of the Youth Advisory Council and facilitate discussions as the YSB action plan evolves.

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Pittsburgh built an asset map to pinpoint schools with which the team had the most connections and identify potential additional partnerships. The team hosted meetings to learn about each partner organization's funding, priorities, programs, and services for youth and increase understanding of partner perspectives, resources, and limitations. It also secured commitments from the superintendents of the three school districts (McKeesport, Clairton, and Woodland Hills) and contacted major employers in healthcare and clean energy who are interested in connecting directly with high school youth.

Ramsey County, Minnesota

During the Academy, Ramsey County documented partners' roles and responsibilities as part of the team's systems building efforts. The team also presented its proposed work and action plan to the larger community of potential ecosystem partners at the annual spring [Youth Works!](#) networking event, which included staff and leaders from high schools, colleges, community organizations, and employers. Additionally, the team identified how the existing Workforce Innovation Board Youth Committee can more actively engage in systems

building rather than only fulfilling compliance roles set out in WIOA. The team began exploring how to fund a full-time position to focus solely on the ecosystem building efforts.

Riverside County, California

During the Academy, Riverside County's Workforce Development Division and CoC created the Riverside County YWHA to coordinate services for overlapping populations of youth served. The county crafted flowcharts of funding mechanisms, priorities, programs, and youth services to inform each division of the other's services and populations. The team also identified, contacted, and coordinated with partner agencies, such as Juvenile Justice and Integrated Service Delivery, to develop a universal application and screening using the [Whole Person Health Score](#). This led to streamlining interagency collaboration and funding allocation by standardizing data sharing protocols, referral processes, funding requests, and program evaluations. Increased awareness and policy alignment also led to cross-training plans for frontline staff and warm handoffs between divisions, ensuring more efficient, effective service delivery.

Southeast Michigan

Southeast Michigan listed potential partners to engage in its systems building work and created a communication system with partner organizations' various boards to confer, create, and work together. The team reached out to local and national organizations to support and sustain its YSB goals. It authored a small pilot grant with one district and college to serve as its beta test for strategies. It also embedded its YSB Academy action plan into Southeast Michigan Community Alliance's (LWDB) overall strategic plan.

Services Accomplishments – Cohort 1

Boulder County, Colorado

Using a [positive youth development](#) framework, Boulder County hosted listening sessions to understand young adults' needs. Based on these sessions, the team expanded its partnerships, including with local public schools, to offer more opportunities for ISY. The team further built and enhanced partnerships with community organizations that provide youth services. This collaboration helped the team identify and eliminate service duplications, ensuring a more unified effort. Boulder County also partnered with the school district's RaptorTECH program, which supports students in earning an associate degree in cybersecurity and provides mentorship and internship opportunities.

Buffalo & Erie County, New York

Buffalo & Erie County designed the [Buffalo Futures hub](#), which launched in July 2023, offering colocated partner services. It includes success coaching, career pathway exploration opportunities, resume and cover letter assistance, and peer mentorship. The team also brainstormed how to leverage the hub as a prototype and starting point for building a larger youth employment system.

Kanawha County, West Virginia

Kanawha County designed and implemented a [Minority Youth \(MY\) Career Academy](#) with the goal of providing valuable career exploration opportunities, mentorship, and resources

to help underrepresented youth make informed decisions about their futures in nontraditional careers. The MY Academy uses virtual reality headsets to introduce OSY to different career paths and in its pilot effort included 12 participants.

Lake County, Illinois

Lake County gathered information and resources to design and implement its Youth Development Practitioner Apprenticeship, which began in January 2024 with 19 apprentices and 12 supervisors and mentors. The program is developing future leaders and helping local nonprofits develop workforce professionals who will guide youth toward their goals.

New York City, New York

New York City carefully reviewed various programs across local agencies to create holistic career-connected learning opportunities, early interventions to support youth in transition, and support for out of school, out of work youth. The city's goals were to understand available resources and gaps and to expand career-contextualized academics and advising; career exploration, preparation, and training; work-based learning; internships; and apprenticeships.

Portland, Oregon

After extensively reviewing local programs, services, and youth demographics, Portland identified objectives and prioritized populations for a program to prepare alumni of the Department of Community Justice's [youth-led community garden program](#) for education or work experiences. It would also use funds from the county's [Learn & Earn program](#), PDX Youth@Work, and POIC's DOL Growth Opportunities Grant to build youths' soft and workplace skills, thereby bridging the gap between justice involvement and workforce attachment. Worksystems and POIC + Rosemary Anderson High School explored staffing, outlined a process for accessing opportunities, and supported justice system staff in implementing the pilot.

Tangipahoa Parish, Louisiana

The Tangipahoa Parish team explored existing education and training programs and supportive service programs for opportunity youth,² including youth in foster care and justice-involved youth, to identify existing supports and gaps and thereby develop its unified workforce model. It also began enrolling young people in a Ready for Industry initiative to help prepare youth for career opportunities in in-demand industries. Additionally, GeauxJobs joined the Young Hispanic Pre-College Preparation and Leadership Program at Southeastern University to help create a path to success for Hispanic students.

Services Accomplishments – Cohort 2

Boston, Massachusetts

Boston explored options to enhance career navigation and workforce services that meet young adults where they are, including career coaching, employment connections, job training referrals, and wraparound supports (e.g., housing and transportation assistance,

² [Opportunity Youth](#) are young people ages 16–24 who are disconnected from school and work.

GED preparation, and Criminal Offender Record Information clinics). These supports would be offered by career centers (e.g., American Job Centers), which are operated by Action for Boston Community Development, Jewish Vocational Service, and community-based organizations.

Denver, Colorado

To establish a framework that ensures that all youth have access to meaningful employment pathways, Denver planned and began a colocation pilot program for Eckerd Connects in Denver Public Schools (DPS). This included drafting an agreement for bidirectional referrals between DPS staff (serving ISY) and Eckerd Connects NextGen staff (serving OSY). Through an asset mapping activity, the team identified other local programs and resources serving youth, including basic needs, mental health supports, housing, and transportation. Through this effort, the team identified challenges that unhoused, immigrant, undocumented, and resettled or refugee youth face in accessing certain supports. The team also developed a document highlighting Denver's dropout timeframes compared with those of other jurisdictions, emphasizing the critical need for timely connections to Eckerd NextGen and other youth providers. In addition, it compiled and routinely updates a spreadsheet that features more than 200 youth-related resources currently focused on basic needs, including the various organizations' requirements and points of contact.

Miami-Dade County, Florida

To support the development of the team's streamlined integrated service delivery tool, Miami-Dade County has researched and identified priority career pathways for youth. It has aligned these pathways with approved training vendors to deliver training and skill development tailored to the needs of the local workforce.

Omaha, Nebraska

Omaha piloted a trades career pathway, and is refining policies, practices, and programming to support youth in the trades. This pilot included assessments by the local community college and WIOA Title II Adult Education and Family Literacy Act programs, remediation services and support to help young people, and placements with local labor unions. The WIOA Youth Program began using the National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) test to elevate participants' basic skills and support preparation for an apprenticeship entrance exam.

Oswego County, New York

Oswego County has participated in pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship task force meetings, with plans to explore initiatives in neighboring counties for replication. The county also plans to expand and grow its annual Youth Career Summit, led by the Oswego City-County Youth Bureau, which introduces eighth-grade students from nine school districts to occupations available across Oswego County. The summit features hands-on demonstrations and presentations from more than 40 local businesses.

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

During the Academy, Pittsburgh assessed schools' needs in the McKeesport, Clairton, and Woodland Hills districts. It identified resources to introduce additional career education

planning and links to the workforce system. Pittsburgh also devised a pipeline from school and graduation to education and employment. This helped the team determine roles and responsibilities so it could integrate additional career planning and connections to the workforce system while also outlining needs for funding and staff.

Riverside County, California

Riverside County began integrating the Workforce Development Division into the CoC's Coordinated Entry System to offer youth workforce services and CoC housing resources. It identified the agencies and resources needed, chose a pilot site, obtained a site license, met to understand the process and procure training materials, and trained at the pilot site. The team also identified funding opportunities, explored policy flexibility to integrate services, and requested proposals for a program that would support young people involved in the justice system who were re-entering the workforce. Additionally, the team identified trauma-informed approaches and how to integrate them into its [Youth Opportunity Centers](#) by training new career coach staff, developing requirements, and monitoring service providers.

Southeast Michigan

During the Academy, Southeast Michigan identified various community resources and programs to address mental and physical health, education and training, housing and basic needs, employment, and other needs of young people. The team also began devising supports that go beyond [Education Development Plans](#) to reflect students' career goals and define paths toward achieving them. It planned to assess the career planning processes and resources at one high school with the intent to expand the model.

Youth Voice Accomplishments – Cohort 1

Boulder County, Colorado

To engage youth as part of its Academy work, Boulder County developed a survey to explore how youth experienced the county's career pathways system. The county also planned and hosted a pilot [Youth Impact Summit](#) designed to center the voices of youth as workforce system partners who could share their insights and wisdom for an improved system and mutually beneficial partnerships. The summit provided a space for youth to show up as leaders and adults as active listeners and partners.

Buffalo & Erie County, New York

To improve outreach to youth and increase youth access to the hub and other youth employment supports, the team began to create a marketing plan that uses a “trusted advisor” outreach strategy to identify adults who can connect young people to hub services. The team also created a youth advisory council, which has hosted multiple events to engage and empower other youth and a podcast providing a platform for their voices to be heard on important issues.

Lake County, Illinois

To ground its efforts in youth feedback, the team developed a listening session strategy and data gathering process during the Academy. The team then hosted listening sessions with

30–50 Lake County youth, including high school students and young adults; representatives from youth-serving organizations; and employers to inform systems building efforts.

New York City, New York

During the Academy, New York City presented at one of the city's [Work-Based Learning Coalition's](#) quarterly meetings and to youth to gather feedback on the goals and strategies it was outlining. Additionally, NYC Talent, Department of Youth and Community Development, and New York City Public Schools hired youth apprentices to help implement the city's [Pathways to an Inclusive Economy](#) action plan.

Portland, Oregon

During the Academy, Portland reviewed literature on promising and best practices for incorporating youth voices into program and system efforts. The team also reviewed and updated Department of Community Justice surveys to gather youth feedback about department programs. Portland additionally reviewed participant surveys used across partners to confirm which information to collect, the best collection methods, and options to compensate youth for their time. The team began planning for a Youth Advisory Board by hiring support staff and devising board onboarding, payment, and recruitment protocols.

Southcentral Region – Anchorage, Alaska

Southcentral Region – Anchorage hired a facilitator to conduct youth focus groups to gather information about what young people want and need out of the workforce system. The findings were published in the [Barriers to Youth Employment: Anchorage and Mat-Su Focus Groups](#) report.

South Central Iowa

During the Academy, South Central Iowa hosted the Imagine the Future of Ottumwa youth community event to recruit young people to partner in the team's system renovation work. At the event, youth practiced advocacy by meeting with several elected officials, including a member of Congress, and cocreated multiple resources to scale efforts in other rural communities. The team won a grant to launch the [Youth Community Co-Designer Academy](#) to fund and scale its efforts and compensate youth as consultants on various projects. The city of Ottumwa also passed an ordinance to establish a local youth council and raised \$1 million to build a year-round youth center.

Tangipahoa Parish, Louisiana

Early in its Academy work, Tangipahoa Parish recruited and hired WIOA Youth Program participants to help the team research best practices for embedding youth voices into programs and its ecosystem building activities. The young people's research helped inform initiative efforts and next steps.

Youth Voice Accomplishments – Cohort 2

Baltimore City, Maryland

During the Academy, Baltimore defined its vision and purpose for youth engagement in the city's workforce development system; identified additional partners to facilitate its youth

engagement strategy; and outlined a coordinated, comprehensive youth engagement strategy in which the team would:

1. Complete an environmental scan of youth engagement and leadership organizations in Baltimore and
2. Convene youth engagement organizations and young people using an [appreciative inquiry](#) roundtable method to gather feedback about how Baltimore can work toward more authentically engaging youth in the workforce system.

Denver, Colorado

During the Academy, Denver began to explore ways to identify and recruit youth currently or previously enrolled with Denver Public Schools and Eckerd Connects NextGen to solicit feedback. This exploration included meeting with other communities to learn about their promising and best practices for youth engagement. This feedback, through listening sessions and other activities, would help create the team's simplified framework to connect young people to career pathways and inform the team's marketing strategies.

Omaha, Nebraska

Omaha developed a survey to collect feedback from youth ages 16–24 about the public workforce system, its education and training programs, how they explore careers, the barriers they experience, and their definitions of success. The team is planning to ask youth-serving organizations to nominate youth representatives to Omaha's Youth Committee, which will assist ISY and OSY ages 14–24 with employment, skill building, and career exploration.

Oswego County, New York

To broaden its understanding of youth needs and perspectives, Oswego County plans to recruit youth ages 16–24 from different backgrounds, populations, and education levels across the county to join a Youth Advisory Council. The council will provide input in developing, implementing, and recruiting for new and existing youth-centered programs and services. It will also elect a representative to attend LWDB Youth Committee meetings.

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Pittsburgh hired eight young people to build a framework for career education. The team will use this framework to create action teams comprising ISY and educators who will lead implementation within their schools.

Ramsey County, Minnesota

Ramsey County began developing plans to offer Workforce 101 training for young people, followed by the opportunity to officially serve on a youth advisory board and be represented on the Workforce Innovation Board. County staff, with support from partners, had already begun developing the curriculum for these trainings and plan to engage young people to further build the structure and name of the youth advisory board.

Riverside County, California

Riverside County conducted focus groups with youth ages 18–26 – including working mothers with low income, re-entry populations, working young adults with a high school diploma or less, and former foster youth – on their work needs and challenges. The team plans to synthesize their findings to develop programs to better meet youths’ actual needs and improve its services.

Southeast Michigan

Southeast Michigan already had a [High School Student Ambassador Program](#) to help build students’ resumes, create leadership opportunities, and build on transferable skills while helping to educate the student population on the importance of setting their postsecondary education goals. Ambassadors were engaged at pop-up events, and schools hosted events for parents. During the Academy, Southeast Michigan expanded its Youth Ambassadors model and began to incorporate youth input and presence when planning workforce events. The team also engaged youth ambassadors at three high schools to provide peer support for post-secondary goals – with plans to expand throughout the county starting in fall 2024. In addition, it surveyed 147 youth to capture ideas for improving outreach and recruitment for programs and services.

Community Profiles: Cohort 1 (January–June 2023)

Boulder County, Colorado

Overview

In recent years, Boulder County has had a highly educated talent pipeline, with 95.5 percent of the population completing at least high school (among those 25 years or older) and 62.9 percent earning a bachelor's degree or higher (among those 25 years or older). This has made it more challenging for youth who have less education to enter the workforce.

[Research](#) has also suggested that exposing young people, particularly those of color, to workforce training and initiatives can help young adults earn credentials, employment experiences, and vital connections through apprenticeships, internships, job opportunities, and other types of work-based learning opportunities. Young adults with less education in the county needed access and exposure to career paths, including opportunities for hands-on learning, and positive relationships with adults who would support their development.

To address these issues, Boulder County's focus in its Academy work was to help young adults reach their full potential in the local workforce system. The county intended to design and implement an ecosystem for youth that reduces barriers, especially for youth of color, and broadens partners' understanding of – and shift workforce systems toward – equitable access to quality, viable career pathways. This included increasing young people's access to positions in growth industries by mobilizing cross-sector partnerships.

Key Youth Systems Building Partners

- [Workforce Boulder County \(LWDB\)](#)
- Boulder County [Community Action Programs](#)
- Boulder County Department of Human Services, [Colorado Works](#) (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program)

Engaging youth as partners and following a positive youth development framework in our work led to community partnerships that would not have developed otherwise. By prioritizing youth engagement and creating intentional spaces for youth to share feedback and ideas, the voices of both ISY and OSY are integrated into our program design and in building the vision of an opportunistic workforce system.

Accomplishments

Data

As part of the Academy, Boulder County's Housing and Human Services Department improved data entry procedures and processes to facilitate faster, more effective referrals to workforce system partners. During regularly scheduled team meetings, partners also brought and shared data insights from their respective systems (i.e., Workforce and Human Services) to inform initiative efforts.

Partnerships

By participating in solutions-focused discussions, Boulder County's Workforce and Human Services partners leveraged timely community-based programs to reach more disconnected youth. The regular meeting time helped solidify the partnership by dedicating a consistent schedule to team strategy, innovation, and problem-solving, especially regarding availability of and eligibility for youth resources shared by workforce system staff.

Services

Using a [positive youth development](#) framework, Boulder County hosted listening sessions to understand young adults' needs. Based on these sessions, the team expanded its partnerships, including with local public schools, to offer more opportunities for ISY. The team further built and enhanced partnerships with community organizations that provide youth services. This collaboration helped the team identify and eliminate service duplications, ensuring a more unified effort. Boulder County also partnered with the school district's RaptorTECH program, which supports students in earning an associate degree in cybersecurity and provides mentorship and internship opportunities.

Youth Voice

To engage youth as part of its Academy work, Boulder County developed a survey to explore how youth experienced the county's career pathways system. The county also planned and hosted a pilot [Youth Impact Summit](#) designed to center the voices of youth as workforce system partners who could share their insights and wisdom for an improved system and mutually beneficial partnerships. The summit provided a space for youth to show up as leaders and adults as active listeners and partners.

Advice

- Embrace the philosophy of “nothing about us without us” to ensure that you actively involve youth in decision-making processes. This approach allows for deeper engagement, ensuring that you consider young people's perspectives before implementing significant changes.
- Take time to get to know representatives from partner organizations and understand why everyone is invested in the work. Establish strong relationships and a deeper understanding of one another before tackling the detailed aspects of the effort.
- Building and changing systems takes time. Avoid the pressure to produce a perfect outcome quickly; instead, focus on gradual progress, and be open to adjusting along the way.

Next Steps

Boulder County plans to partner with youth to evaluate current programs through a series of listening sessions. It will also host a [design thinking](#) session to further realize its Academy vision and craft additional opportunities for young adults in the county. The team plans to hire youth interns to create a youth board that has advisory and decision-making power.

Buffalo & Erie County, New York

Overview

Buffalo is one of the [most segregated cities](#) in the nation. The poverty rate for neighborhoods of color (40 percent) is nearly [four times higher](#) than the poverty rate in White neighborhoods (11 percent). Fifty percent of children of color in Buffalo and Niagara younger than age six live below the poverty line compared with 15 percent of White children. Since 2015, the [Greater Buffalo Racial Equity Roundtable](#), comprising more than 350 community partners, including many private companies, has worked steadily to advance its goal of racial equity and an expanded, inclusive economy. Based on the belief that a strengthened, well-coordinated youth employment system was critical to achieving such an inclusive economy, the Buffalo workforce board established a [Youth Employment Coalition](#) with community partners in 2020.

Buffalo & Erie County recognized that building an inclusive economy that provided dedicated support for youth workforce development would require better coordination of youth-serving partners. Many of these partners already worked together but had different intake processes, had different services, and did not always provide clear next steps toward building a career for a young person. Buffalo and Erie joined the Academy to better coordinate system organizations to build a high-functioning youth workforce system. Buffalo & Erie County's overall vision for its youth systems building work was that youth ages 16–24 follow clear pathways that lead to family-sustaining careers. An important step in doing this would be to create an online hub – called [Buffalo Futures](#) – for youth seeking employment supports. The hub offers young people detailed information on in-demand regional career pathways with few hurdles to entry-level positions.

Key Youth Systems Building Partners

- [Buffalo & Erie County Workforce Investment Board \(LWDB\)](#)
- [The Service Collaborative](#)
- [Erie County Department of Social Services](#)
- [Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo](#)
- [Youth Employment Coalition](#)

The YSB Academy helped us better understand the existing systems locally and nationally that are already serving youth and identify ways we can work together better.

Accomplishments

Partnerships

The Buffalo & Erie County team sought to increase partner coordination by preparing an ecosystem map of programs and services and developing a list of blind spots, hurdles to overcome together, and viable solutions. The team also hired a senior director to oversee and run the [Buffalo Futures hub](#). The team also successfully implemented the Aim Higher

out-of-school youth program at the Career One-Stop Center through the strategic use of WIOA Youth funding, thereby advancing policy objectives related to workforce development and interagency collaboration. Furthermore, both Buffalo Futures and Aim Higher staff secured New York State Department of Labor Gun Violence Prevention funding, aligning with policy initiatives to offer career-focused alternatives to youth affected by gun violence.

Services

Buffalo & Erie County designed the Buffalo Futures hub, which launched in July 2023, offering colocated partner services. It includes success coaching, career pathway exploration opportunities, resume and cover letter assistance, and peer mentorship. The team also brainstormed how to leverage the hub as a prototype and starting point for building a larger youth employment system.

Youth Voice

To improve outreach to youth and increase youth access to the hub and other youth employment supports, the team began to create a marketing plan that uses a “trusted advisor” outreach strategy to identify adults who can connect young people to hub services. The team also created a youth advisory council, which has hosted multiple events to engage and empower other youth and a podcast providing a platform for their voices to be heard on important issues.

Advice

- Do not underestimate the high level of social services needs youth may face, and make sure that social services providers are part of your coalition.
- Relationships are essential to success. You must have relationships in both the public and private sectors to meaningfully improve youth outcomes.
- Once our youth advisory council was truly up and running, we were better able to integrate youth voices. Make sure you have a system to regularly check in with the population of youth you are trying to serve.

Next Steps

Buffalo & Erie County is working on sustainability planning for each of its Academy initiatives. The team will also continue supporting its youth advisory council and will implement its trusted advisor network of adults who can refer youth to Buffalo Futures.

Kanawha County, West Virginia

Overview

Kanawha County data show that by 2033, the county will need 3,875 nurses and 1,068 nursing assistants. They have also shown that [less than one-third](#) of enrollees at community and technical colleges in West Virginia are male. This gap is even greater in sectors such as nursing, early childhood education, and substance use counseling. In these sectors, less than 10 percent of enrolled students are men, but they are needed to help fill shortages in these critical occupations.

Kanawha County joined the YSB Academy in hopes of increasing youth awareness of and access to the workforce system partner network of resources that support opportunities for employment and training in nontraditional gender careers. To realize this vision, the county planned to align partners and adopt innovative outreach strategies promoting a no-wrong-door initiative to recruit men for careers in industries such as registered nursing, certified nursing assistance, and licensed practical nursing and women for careers in construction (e.g., carpentry and pipe fitting) and transportation (e.g., commercial truck driving).

Key Youth Systems Building Partners

- [Region III Workforce Development Board of Kanawha County \(LWDB\)](#)
- [Human Resource Development Foundation, Inc.](#)
- [Mountain State Educational Services Cooperative](#)
- [BridgeValley Community and Technical College](#)
- [West Virginia Division of Rehabilitation Services](#)

By participating in the YSB Academy, we were able to gain valuable insights on and best practices for serving youth. Through several innovative ideas and initiatives, we were able to implement changes that made substantial improvements in our outreach to youth as well as our youth outcomes.

Accomplishments

Outreach

Kanawha County secured and began to use virtual reality headsets to expose youth to historically nontraditional careers for their genders, such as welding to girls and nursing and healthcare to boys. The team also created [Res-Con](#), a one-of-a-kind event that caters to the community's diverse needs. Understanding that some barriers for youth are generational, the county developed Res-Con to provide support and knowledge about career options and related topics for the entire family. Whether individuals are seeking employment, looking into home purchases, navigating a path to recovery, exploring career exposure opportunities, considering a thriving career in the state without college degrees, or pursuing entrepreneurship or careers in healthcare, Res-Con provides an opportunity for personal and professional growth. Kanawha County also recruited and engaged youth ambassadors

to speak at high school fairs and youth-related events in the community to increase awareness about nontraditional career options for youth.

Services

Kanawha County designed and implemented a [Minority Youth \(MY\) Career Academy](#) with the goal of providing valuable career exploration opportunities, mentorship, and resources to help underrepresented youth make informed decisions about their futures in nontraditional careers. The MY Academy uses virtual reality headsets to introduce OSY to different career paths and in its pilot effort included 12 participants.

Advice

When reflecting on its youth systems building efforts to date, Kanawha County shared the following advice for other communities' consideration:

- Create strong partnerships with community organizations, employers, and educational institutions.
- Implement comprehensive career guidance, mentoring, and support services.
- Measure outcomes and solicit feedback for continuous improvement.

Next Steps

Kanawha County plans to expand its services by strengthening partnerships through collaboration, increasing funding sources, and focused outreach. The team is also creating a mentorship program for youth.

Lake County, Illinois

Overview

Poverty rates among White, Black, and Latine community members in Lake County reflect [disparities among communities of color](#). Approximately 6.5 percent of White residents were living in poverty compared with approximately 20 percent of Black residents and 14 percent of Latine residents. In 2019, Lake County was home to [9,452 young adults](#) ages 16–24, almost 9 percent of whom were neither enrolled in school nor working. Furthermore, [communities of color](#) are affected by living conditions, work circumstances, and underlying health conditions that affect access to sustainable employment.

These disparities – compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic – had an impact on youth programming in Lake County. In 2021, Lake County Workforce Development Board reported that 2020–2021 WIOA-funded youth program enrollments and financial performance were not meeting benchmarks because of high schools remaining remote; industries not offering paid internships and work experiences; young people finding well-paid entry-level work and not being interested in program participation; reduced services in transportation and childcare; a lack of in-person training and education; and less access to healthcare and mental health services. Therefore, in joining the Academy, Lake County's vision was to convene youth-serving collaborators across the county, launch a career and college awareness campaign, increase access to work-based learning and pre-apprenticeship programs, and develop a professional network to serve youth through the DOL-funded [Youth Development Practitioner Apprenticeship](#).

Key Youth Systems Building Partners

- [Lake County Workforce Development Board \(LWDB\)](#)
- [Lake County Workforce Development Department](#)
- [College of Lake County](#)
- [Lake County Regional Office of Education](#)
- [Indiana, Illinois, Iowa Foundation for Fair Contracting](#)
- [The International Union of Operating Engineers Local 150](#)
- [YouthBuild Lake County](#)
- [Youth Conservation Corps](#)

The most impactful change in Lake County that would not have happened without the YSB Academy is the collaborative partnerships we created as a team – which changed the local narratives on collaboration and service integration, with a focus on serving the marginalized communities.

Accomplishments

Data

Lake County catalogued more than 600 youth-serving organizations, training programs, and employment opportunities (e.g., local apprenticeships). The [interactive, web-based asset](#)

[map](#) provides young people and other users with the information they need to connect with a service provider. To refine its outreach strategies and youth systems investments, the team updated its estimations of youth disconnection in Lake County and established a replicable methodology to measure change over time.

Partnerships

Lake County built a strong, diverse network, including workforce, education, community college, and union partners, to guide its systems building efforts in a deliberate, collaborative, and innovative way. The team received grants to fund its Academy action plan and hired consultants to help create materials to develop its youth ecosystem, such as a county asset map and youth listening session protocol. The team also reinvigorated the Youth Task Force to authentically capture youth voices.

The collaborative effort resulted in Lake County Workforce Development Board being awarded a DOL Apprenticeship Expansion Grant, which allowed it to hire an apprenticeship navigator. This role collaborates with the pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs and with employers to register apprenticeship programs with DOL and add apprenticeship programs to the Eligible Training Provider List.

The workforce board increased its budget for paid work experiences, Individual Training Accounts, and supportive services – specifically to buy laptops to increase access to high-quality jobs and career paths. The team also received funds from the Lake County Board to increase the summer youth program hourly wage and serve more youth.

To continue enhancing access to high-quality work-based learning opportunities within the community, Lake County partnered with Grayslake School District and the local community college to apply for the U.S. Department of Education's [Career Challenge Z](#) and reached the semifinals in the competition.

Services

Lake County gathered information and resources to design and implement its Youth Development Practitioner Apprenticeship, which began in January 2024 with 19 apprentices and 12 supervisors and mentors. The program is developing future leaders and helping local nonprofits develop workforce professionals who will guide youth toward their goals.

Youth Voice

To ground its efforts in youth feedback, the team developed a listening session strategy and data gathering process during the Academy. The team then hosted listening sessions with 30–50 Lake County youth, including high school students and young adults; representatives from youth-serving organizations; and employers to inform systems building efforts.

Advice

- Approach youth services as a community. Consider a [collective impact](#) strategy, recognize the depth of this journey, and don't do it alone – your partners and industries are invaluable!
- Really listen to the youth and young adults. Create a safe place for them to express their thoughts, ideas, and concerns about education, training, employment,

challenges, and solutions. Invite young people to be part of the solution; be mindful of their ideas, and act.

- Be prepared to lead through a cycle of challenges and successes. Invest the time, celebrate the successes, and work with partners, youth, and industry to address challenges as they arise.

Next Steps

Lake County will finalize its report from youth, employer, and youth-serving organization listening sessions to inform its ongoing systems change efforts. The team also will continue implementing the Youth Development Practitioner Apprenticeship Program. The College of Lake County, Regional Office of Education, and the Lake County Workforce Development Board have also started collaborating to launch a Lake County Pathways Project with area high schools and College and Career Pathway Endorsements.³

Lake County will host a Youth Symposium on September 26, 2024, as part of its ongoing efforts to advance the objectives outlined in its funded work plan and engage youth and key collaborators in meaningful discussions about employment opportunities, challenges, and aspirations. In late October 2024, it will also coordinate [Career Navig8 Lake](#) to motivate eighth-grade students to continue their career exploration and planning. Business and industry partners from throughout Lake County will provide students with brief but impactful hands-on experiences that will connect them directly with the diverse career opportunities within the community.

³ Illinois' [Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness Act](#) (110 ILCS 148) includes a process for school districts to award College and Career Pathway Endorsements to high school graduates. Students earn endorsements by completing an individualized learning plan, a career-focused instructional sequence, and professional learning opportunities.

New York City, New York

Overview

In August 2022, New York City Mayor Eric Adams issued [Executive Order 22](#), which overhauled the city's approach to workforce development. Among other measures, it formed the Mayor's Office of Talent and Workforce Development (NYC Talent), which merged the former Mayor's Office of Youth Employment with multiple offices, task forces, and committees dedicated to streamlining and enhancing youth service delivery. The first-of-its-kind former Mayor's Office of Youth Employment expanded, aligned, and improved all programs that helped young people build skills, gain work experience, explore potential career paths, and prepare for career success and economic security. Combining these efforts resulted in more than 50 strategies and ideas to better meet young people's needs.

New York City joined the YSB Academy to help refine its goals and prioritize action steps. The city's vision was that every New Yorker by age 25 would attain the educational credentials, paid work experience, and essential skills necessary to launch a career aligned with their passion and purpose, contribute to the economy and their community, and achieve significant milestones on the path to economic security. To achieve this vision, the city sought to increase career-connected learning at every stage of a young person's journey; expand early interventions to ensure that young people remain connected to career paths; re-engage young people who are out of school and work; improve data collection and analytics; and implement a comprehensive strategy to improve employer engagement.

Key Youth Systems Building Partners

- [NYC Mayor's Office of Talent and Workforce Development \(LWDB\)](#)
- [NYC Department of Youth and Community Development](#)
- [City University of New York](#)
- [New York City Public Schools](#)

The creation of our strategy was accelerated by the YSB Academy. Participation in the Academy facilitated the setting of goals to support the career readiness and successful labor market entry of young people in New York City.

Accomplishments

Data

Data collection was a core goal for New York City, with a focus on improving analytics to support stronger transitions, promote continuous improvement, and ensure that collective efforts address historic educational and employment disparities. The team began crafting a data structure to publicly share information and create accountability, including clear, compelling career readiness data indicators. It also planned to expand existing MOUs citywide while building the technical capacity to share data and measure impact over time.

Outreach

To re-engage young people who are out of school and work through tailored outreach, programs, and services, New York City created a plan to evaluate, leverage, and scale effective models and systems to reconnect out of school, out of work youth and young adults to education and workforce programs and mental health and other support services.

Partnerships

The New York City team met biweekly during the Academy and for many months after to align on strategy and action steps to achieve the goals laid out in the city's [Pathways to an Inclusive Economy: An Action Plan for Young Adults Career Success](#) report. The partners also worked together to secure new funding to implement innovative Academy programs.

Services

New York City carefully reviewed various programs across local agencies to create holistic career-connected learning opportunities, early interventions to support youth in transition, and support for out of school, out of work youth. The city's goals were to understand available resources and gaps and to expand career-contextualized academics and advising; career exploration, preparation, and training; work-based learning; internships; and apprenticeships.

Youth Voice

During the Academy, New York City presented at one of the city's [Work-Based Learning Coalition's](#) quarterly meetings and to youth to gather feedback on the goals and strategies it was outlining. Additionally, NYC Talent, Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD), and New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) hired youth apprentices to help implement the city's [Pathways to an Inclusive Economy](#) action plan.

Advice

- Create strong partnerships across systems that serve youth, including education, workforce, and youth development providers.
- Have a strong convening entity to gather partners, shape a community vision, maximize resource sharing, and hold systems accountable to that vision.
- Invite youth voices and community feedback about programs, policies, and decisions.

Next Steps

New York City will continue partnering with city agencies to expand career-connected learning, expand early interventions to connect youth and young adults, and re-engage young people who are out of school and work. City University of New York, NYCPS, DYCD, Small Business Services, the NYC Human Resources Administration, and NYC Talent are collaborating with the New York City Workforce Development Board and Interagency Talent Cabinet (two major entities supporting the city's entire workforce ecosystem) on system-level goals to improve data collection and improve and expand employer engagement.

Portland, Oregon

Overview

Between 10 and 15 percent of the WIOA youth served by Worksystems (Portland's LWDB) attest to juvenile justice involvement at registration. Historically, Worksystems had not specifically focused on this population and relied on community-based contractors to find youth that meet WIOA eligibility requirements.

As a result, the workforce, education, and justice systems rarely coordinated programs that serve justice-involved youth, primarily at the direct service or individual case levels, where career coaches and case managers interacted to support common youth customers. This systems misalignment led to a lack of understanding of – and information sharing about – local workforce opportunities.

Portland joined the Academy to address these issues. Portland's overall vision was to support safe communities where youth affected by violence or involved in the juvenile justice system had access to positive skill-building activities. To do this, Portland intended to design an initiative across the workforce, education, and justice systems to serve youth and young adults (ages 16–24) who were justice involved by providing opportunities that might include education and employment support toward a career path.

Key Youth Systems Building Partners

- [Worksystems \(LWDB\)](#)
- [Portland Opportunities Industrialization Center + Rosemary Anderson High School](#)
- Multnomah County Department of Community Justice, [Juvenile Services Division](#)

With newly shared knowledge and understanding of available resources to engage justice-impacted youth as they transition into workforce development, we are better positioned to support the community and provide intentional connections to community-based organizations providing work experience and learning opportunities.

Accomplishments

Data

Worksystems collected data from community partners through one-on-one meetings. The team focused on the demographics of the youth each organization engages with through programming, highlighting groups that collaborate with justice-involved youth. The team then reviewed and discussed the data and the list of organizations working with high populations of justice-involved youth to identify opportunities for services, support, and partnership. Worksystems also added an application question to its programs to collect data on the number of justice-involved youth who participate in paid work experiences through [PDX Youth@Work](#).

Partnerships

Worksystems held one-on-one meetings with 90 partners to learn about each organization's priorities, intended demographics, programs, and youth services. Its goal was to increase understanding of current available opportunities and support for youth across the region, and Worksystems shared lessons learned from these meetings with the larger Portland YSB Academy team. To solidify and sustain its partnership, Portland also drafted an MOU between Worksystems, the Portland Opportunities Industrialization Center (POIC), and the Department of Community Justice outlining the organizations' shared commitment to provide positive skill-building activities for youth who have been involved in the justice system, with the goal of fostering safer communities.

Services

After extensively reviewing local programs, services, and youth demographics, Portland identified objectives and prioritized populations for a program to prepare alumni of the Department of Community Justice's [youth-led community garden program](#) for education or work experiences. It would also use funds from the county's [Learn & Earn program](#), PDX Youth@Work, and POIC's DOL Growth Opportunities Grant to build youths' soft and workplace skills, thereby bridging the gap between justice involvement and workforce attachment. Worksystems and POIC + Rosemary Anderson High School explored staffing, outlined a process for accessing opportunities, and supported justice system staff in implementing the pilot.

Youth Voice

During the Academy, Portland reviewed literature on promising and best practices for incorporating youth voices into program and system efforts. The team also reviewed and updated Department of Community Justice surveys to gather youth feedback about department programs. Portland additionally reviewed participant surveys used across partners to confirm which information to collect, the best collection methods, and options to compensate youth for their time. The team began planning for a Youth Advisory Board by hiring support staff and devising board onboarding, payment, and recruitment protocols.

Advice

- Plan for and be flexible about change. Be patient because staffing and priorities often shift. Give new team members time to get up to speed.
- Take advantage of every opportunity to further strengthen the partnership. For example, when the Department of Community Justice lost staff who supported the Hands of Wonder Garden Program, Worksystems leveraged its existing partnership with the Portland State University School of Social Work to have students engage in a paid work experience to provide extra support while the county hired new staff.
- Prioritize consistency in meetings because systems building work is often in addition to staff's other full-time commitments. Keeping consistency throughout – even when progress seems slow – is important to keep moving forward.

Next Steps

Portland plans to expand its partnership and include additional community-based organizations serving youth who have been involved in the juvenile justice system. The team also plans to modify its MOU to reflect current plans, to identify funding for a Department of Community Justice employment specialist to support and connect youth to broader youth workforce programs, and to implement a youth advisory council to share input on justice-involved youth programs.

Southcentral Region – Anchorage, Alaska

Overview

Studies in Alaska indicate that “outmigration” (in which families and youth move from rural to urban areas) has been driven by rural citizens seeking new employment or education opportunities in cities. However, opportunities often do not come to fruition, and without the support networks of home, young people find themselves homeless in and around the Anchorage area. In addition, Alaska Native youth have been historically less connected to the workforce system in Alaska and have experienced setbacks in education at higher rates than their peers.

The Southcentral Region – Anchorage community joined the YSB Academy to begin to address these issues. The community’s overall vision for its Academy work was to strengthen its youth service delivery system, providing young Alaskans easy access to training, work-based learning, and support services to grow and thrive.

To realize this vision, Southcentral Region – Anchorage focused its Academy efforts on disadvantaged youth who experience barriers to the workforce, namely Alaska Native youth and youth experiencing homelessness, by increasing engagement with homeless providers and Tribal organizations to cocreate a holistic system that builds on existing youth training, education, work-based learning, and services.

Key Youth Systems Building Partners

- [Alaska Workforce Investment Board](#) (State WDB)
- [Alaska Vocational Technical Center](#)
- [Alaska Division of Vocational Rehabilitation](#)
- [Covenant House Alaska](#)
- [Cook Inlet Tribal Council](#)
- [Job Corps](#)

Through the YSB Academy, our greatest change was an awareness of the needs of youth and increased awareness of what local organizations are doing to address the issues we sought to address with this initiative. Our relationships are stronger, and collaboration conversations are more frequent. As we move forward, the foundational work that was completed as a part of this initiative will serve to build a system.

Accomplishments

Data

A crucial step in Southcentral Region – Anchorage’s systems building efforts was to gather population data, partner organization program information, and feedback from youth program participants to make the case for systems change. By inventorying the assets of youth-serving agencies and organizations focused on the Anchorage and Matanuska-Susitna region, the team was able to identify potential support and gaps for its intended

population. It also collected quantitative data from the Research and Analysis Division of the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development on demographics of the 16–24-year-old Alaskan population it intended to serve.

Partnerships

Early in its efforts, Southcentral Region – Anchorage prepared for and held large strategic planning sessions to build relationships among partners, lay the foundation for further conversation, and cocreate a holistic workforce approach for disadvantaged Alaskan youth. These facilitated convenings of youth training and service providers helped the team create an asset inventory, start collaborative systems building work, and identify a backbone organization to lead its ongoing systems building efforts.

Southcentral Region – Anchorage also developed a story for communicating its systems building work to the larger community and funders. The team developed a name for the initiative, Alaska GRIND, and explored how it could produce communications about its efforts (e.g., a 1-pager and 30-second elevator pitch).

Youth Voice

Southcentral Region – Anchorage hired a facilitator to conduct youth focus groups to gather information about what young people want and need out of the workforce system. The findings were published in the [*Barriers to Youth Employment: Anchorage and Mat-Su Focus Groups*](#) report.

Advice

- Identify a backbone or convenor organization to lead partner efforts. Without a committed partner to serve in this capacity, getting started may be hard.
- Embed your initiative in an organization that is doing the work – or aspects of it on a smaller scale – to build on existing resources, staff knowledge, and infrastructure.
- Clearly articulate a strategy and an operational plan so that personnel turnover has minor impact on your initiative.

Next Steps

Southcentral Region – Anchorage plans to workshop an ideal system in Alaska and pilot a small project among community partners to demonstrate their capacity to work together and test strategies to support Alaskan youth.

South Central Iowa

Overview

Since the summer of 2020, Iowa's local workforce has been undergoing a major systems transformation. This has included restructuring 16 distinct workforce areas into 9, establishing new boards, hiring new executive directors, writing local plans, procuring [Title I services](#), securing one-stop certifications, and establishing partnerships. At the same time, Iowa's rural populations have been [declining](#). With these changes, South Central Iowa recognized the need to intentionally cocreate and reimagine workforce supports with youth so that they feel they belong and are invested in where they live, work, and play.

South Central Iowa joined the YSB Academy to authentically engage youth in codesigning their career paths and to build resilient rural communities where young people feel they belong. South Central Iowa planned to engage and equip youth with the skills and opportunities needed to contribute meaningfully to their communities and as part of their workforce systems transformation.

Key Youth Systems Building Partners

- [South Central Iowa Local Workforce Development Board \(LWDB\)](#)
- [Ottumwa Job Corps Center](#)
- [Ottumwa Community School District](#)
- [Ottumwa Regional Legacy Foundation](#)
- [First Church of the Open Bible](#)
- [City of Ottumwa](#)
- [Ottumwa Health and Human Services](#)
- [Iowa State University Extension and Outreach](#)
- [Iowa Workforce Development](#)

Because of the YSB experience, we have made significant strides in youth engagement and community development. The city of Ottumwa passed an ordinance to establish a youth city council and raised \$1 million to build a year-round youth center. Youth now serve on various community boards, and we have hired an authentic youth engagement coordinator. Youth are recognized as experts and have been invited to advocate at regional, state, and national levels. Through this initiative, we are transforming our community with our future leaders.

Accomplishments

Data

To engage young people, South Central Iowa first used an evidence framework to assess youth engagement and analyze youth-specific labor market information data. The team, led by young people, later partnered with Iowa State University to develop a system to collect

qualitative data to better understand the lived experiences of youth, particularly those not engaged in education, the workforce, or community. The study's purpose was to ensure that systems and leaders understand the opportunities and challenges for area youth.

Partnerships

Early on, South Central Iowa identified and affirmed shared values across its diverse partnership. The team, led by its partner, the Legacy Foundation, hosted a session facilitated by Iowa State University and the LWDB, at which local agencies and youth outlined a strategy for intentional partnership and service delivery. The team recruited young people to realize its goal of fully engaging youth in systems building and reform. Youth cocreated a job description for an authentic youth engagement coordinator, raised \$60,000 to fund the position, and joined the hiring committee. Youth also raised \$32,500 and were paid a \$5,000 stipend to codesign a youth community apprenticeship, with a focus on youth and public-private partnerships.

Youth Voice

During the Academy, South Central Iowa hosted the Imagine the Future of Ottumwa youth community event to recruit young people to partner in the team's system renovation work. At the event, youth practiced advocacy by meeting with several elected officials, including a member of Congress, and cocreated multiple resources to scale efforts in other rural communities. The team won a grant to launch the [Youth Community Co-Designer Academy](#) to fund and scale its efforts and compensate youth as consultants on various projects. The city of Ottumwa also passed an ordinance to establish a local youth council and raised \$1 million to build a year-round youth center.

Advice

- Provide opportunities for youth to express ideas, give input on projects, and take on leadership roles. This helps ensure that programs and system changes are relevant and effective for the young people they are designed to serve. Engaging youth with lived experience empowers them as change agents to leverage their valuable firsthand insight into young peoples' needs and interests.
- Just start! Do not get bogged down by the enormity of the goal and vision. Start somewhere. Invest in a strong convening entity to bring together key partners. Have conversations to build relationships with elected officials, corporate leaders, youth-serving systems, and community providers. System transformation does not have to be completely planned out before beginning, but it does have to begin.
- Partner. Partner. Partner! Develop strong partnerships across systems that serve youth, such as education, juvenile justice, and child welfare. These partnerships allow for resource sharing and provide additional support to vulnerable youth. A comprehensive approach requires all of a community's sectors, systems, and resources to come together strategically.

Next Steps

South Central Iowa plans to continue compensating youth for their time and services while seeking additional partnerships and funding sources to support its initiatives. The team is

conducting a third-party evaluation to measure the program's impact and build evidence for youth-centered systems transformation. As part of its expansion, the team plans to open a year-round youth center and establish a youth leadership academy, which will serve as phase two of its pre-apprenticeship program. Additionally, South Central Iowa plans to increase the number of paid youth job shadowing internships, pre-apprenticeships, and experiential learning opportunities.

Tangipahoa Parish, Louisiana

Overview

Tangipahoa Parish, in southern Louisiana, sits between the New Orleans and Baton Rouge metropolitan areas. According to a 2022 [United Way study](#), the youth poverty rate was 37 percent, and 50 percent of southern Louisiana households were asset limited and income constrained but employed. A lack of high-speed internet and limited public transportation impede career navigation and decrease opportunities for young people. The community also struggled with both the move to a technological workforce and a shortage of skilled labor. Meanwhile, local public schools were prioritizing credentials for all high school students, but many graduates did not have the guidance necessary to understand what those credentials meant. Smaller rural areas also did not have the resources to offer various trainings, which resulted in a lack of or decrease in skilled programs that offer technology or in-demand occupations.

Tangipahoa Parish joined the Academy to engage diverse partners, including education, workforce development, and business, to develop a unified workforce model to meet young adults' dynamic workforce needs. This model would help youth apply their K-12 credentials to further skill development or the workforce. By doing so and meaningfully engaging young people to advance their needs, the community hoped to reduce youth poverty rates in southern Louisiana.

Key Youth Systems Building Partners

- [GeauxJobs \(LWDB\)](#)
- [Tangipahoa Parish School System](#)
- [Northshore Technical Community College](#)
- [Tangipahoa Chamber of Commerce](#)
- [Tangipahoa Parish Economic Development](#)
- [Northshore Regional STEM Center](#)

The YSB Academy improved the way we included youth in our efforts, allowing them to amplify their voices as a part of the decision-making process.... The Academy gave the adults at the table a wake-up call to the fact that we may not always know what is best for young people.

Accomplishments

Data

To inform the development of its unified workforce model for young people, during the Academy, Tangipahoa Parish started to analyze local economic forecast data to identify future occupations and industries to prioritize. It also reviewed state and local labor laws that may have impacts on youth work-based learning opportunities.

Partnerships

Tangipahoa Parish sought to implement agreements across parish partners to build its youth ecosystem. It also planned to identify relevant workforce industry sections and reach out to potential partners to formalize work-based learning opportunities for youth. To start, Tangipahoa Parish identified gaps in its Academy partnerships and recruited additional community organizations, such as one of its local school districts, to begin building a unified workforce model.

Services

The Tangipahoa Parish team explored existing education and training programs and supportive service programs for opportunity youth,⁴ including youth in foster care and justice-involved youth, to identify existing supports and gaps and thereby develop its unified workforce model. It also began enrolling young people in a Ready for Industry initiative to help prepare youth for career opportunities in in-demand industries. Additionally, GeauxJobs joined the Young Hispanic Pre-College Preparation and Leadership Program at Southeastern University to help create a path to success for Hispanic students.

Youth Voice

Early in its Academy work, Tangipahoa Parish recruited and hired WIOA Youth Program participants to help the team research best practices for embedding youth voices into programs and its ecosystem building activities. The young people's research helped inform initiative efforts and next steps.

Advice

- Build partnerships with a wide array of community partners, such as K–12 school systems, technical and community colleges, local chambers of commerce, and economic development offices, to avoid assumptions regarding their focuses and agendas.
- Align policies, resources, and programming across multiple funding streams to remove barriers to youth employment.
- Increase awareness of public workforce systems among youth through community outreach efforts. Ensure that youth have a role in designing these efforts.

Next Steps

Tangipahoa Parish will continue identifying and adding new partners to its initiative. The team also plans to enhance its youth engagement efforts by providing opportunities for amplifying youth voices and bolstering peer representation in program design and development related to in-school and out-of-school work experience programs.

⁴ [Opportunity Youth](#) are young people ages 16–24 who are disconnected from school and work.

Community Profiles: Cohort 2 (January–June 2024)

Baltimore, Maryland

Overview

Since 2015, momentum has been building in Baltimore to realign the city's youth workforce ecosystem. Funding to evaluate and refine models and implementation shifts based on state and local legislation has attracted and convened diverse organizational partners committed to investing in Baltimore youth. However, system gaps and barriers have prevented the scaling of quality, equitable youth-to-adult opportunities and require a systematic alignment of partners and resources – and an inclusion of young people – to effectively meet the unique needs of Baltimore's diverse youth population.

Baltimore joined the YSB Academy to help realize its vision of aligning systems and coordinating the efforts and resources of partners that serve youth and young adults. Its goal was to leverage established data-sharing agreements so it could analyze the youth employment landscape and identify and address gaps, barriers, and duplication of services. Baltimore also wanted to develop and establish a comprehensive strategy to amplify youth voices, engagement, and leadership in youth employment and systems building by increasing the number of decision-making roles for young people within the Baltimore City Workforce Development Board and partner organizations.

Key Youth Systems Building Partners

- [Mayor's Office of Employment Development \(LWDB\)](#)
- [Baltimore's Promise](#)
- [Baltimore City Public Schools](#)
- [Baltimore City Community College](#)
- [Annie E. Casey Foundation](#)

With the support of the YSB Academy, we explored real and meaningful ways to include youth in decision-making all along the workforce development journey.

Accomplishments

Data

During the Academy, Baltimore leveraged funding from [Baltimore's Promise](#) to outline a scope of work for a landscape analysis. This landscape analysis would help the team understand youth workforce opportunities (or lack thereof) and the experiences of student population groups from grade 9 to age 24 and explore whether youth experience the system as disjointed or coordinated. The analysis would also assess the experiences of youth with limited English proficiency or special needs or who were unhoused, young parents, disconnected, immigrants, refugees, or absentee. It also assessed factors relating to gender and race.

Youth Voice

During the Academy, Baltimore defined its vision and purpose for youth engagement in the city's workforce development system; identified additional partners to facilitate its youth engagement strategy; and outlined a coordinated, comprehensive youth engagement strategy in which the team would:

1. Complete an environmental scan of youth engagement and leadership organizations in Baltimore and
2. Convene youth engagement organizations and young people using an [appreciative inquiry](#) roundtable method to gather feedback about how Baltimore can work toward more authentically engaging youth in the workforce system.

Advice

- Build a coalition that includes K–12 schools, local businesses, community organizations, government agencies, funders, higher education institutions, and young people. Diverse partner involvement ensures that the system benefits from wide-ranging perspectives and resources.
- Establish a shared vision and common goals for the youth workforce system. This alignment helps partners work together more effectively and ensures that all efforts are directed toward the same outcomes.
- Include young people in the inquiry, design, and evaluation phases to genuinely create a youth workforce system that best serves them and reflects their wants and needs.
- Implement structures for regular communication and coordination among partners. This could include monthly meetings, joint planning sessions, and shared platforms for information exchange. Effective collaboration reduces duplication of efforts and maximizes impact.

Next Steps

Baltimore will continue to meet regularly to finalize the landscape analysis scope of work to include key research questions. The team will offer support and guidance to the landscape analysis contractor. Additionally, the team will further refine the youth engagement strategy by completing the environmental scan of youth engagement and leadership organizations in Baltimore and using appreciative inquiry to determine how young people can deepen their voices and impact within Baltimore's workforce system. It plans to host a system convening to share the results of the landscape analysis and then use those results to develop and implement the CareerBound initiative, which creates and facilitates education and workforce opportunities for Baltimore City Public Schools' students and graduates.

Boston, Massachusetts

Overview

Historically, Boston has had many workforce and education resources for youth, but these resources do not meet the challenges that Boston youth face today and do not always provide young people with pathways to well-paying jobs, particularly for low-income youth and Black and Latino youth. Instead, many young adults flounder in [survival jobs](#) that offer no advancement. [Data](#) suggest that approximately 7,200 [opportunity youth](#) were living in Boston in 2021, about 5,500 of whom had a high school diploma.⁵ Each year, there are over 1,500 Boston Public School graduates do not go on to college, and about 125 youth participate in WIOA annually. Boston data also show that BIPOC young adults from low-income communities are underserved: although 6.7 percent of 16–24-year-olds are out of school and work, the rate climbs to 10 percent for Black youth and 18 percent for Latino youth.

Boston's goals were to reduce the racial and economic inequities in the city by providing its young adult population with a more comprehensive portfolio of services that will help them move into well-paying jobs. Boston's vision for its YSB Academy work was to create career pathways for youth and organize the ecosystem of workforce programs by building a bridge that connected WIOA Youth, high school graduates, and alternative program graduates to workforce programs, case management supports, incentives, or other elements that increase engagement, enrollment persistence, completion, and post-program success.

Key Youth Systems Building Partners

- [Boston Private Industry Council \(LWDB\)](#)
- City of Boston, [Office of Workforce Development](#)
- [Action for Boston Community Development](#)
- [Jewish Vocational Service](#)
- [United Way of Massachusetts Bay](#)
- [YouthBuild Boston](#)
- [Coalition for Career Development Center](#)

Through the YSB Academy, we have built a collective understanding of what our workforce ecosystem needs to better serve young adults and a better understanding of where each of our organizations fits into the ecosystem.

Accomplishments

Outreach

Boston explored ways to communicate to young adults the opportunities for and benefits of workforce training, which included conducting a Young Adult Career Pathways Survey,

⁵ Data provided by the Boston Private Industry Council from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2021 American Community Survey.

distributed to young adults ages 16–25, to identify gaps in the Boston youth ecosystem. Additionally, the team collected young adult communication preferences from current program participants, local job fairs, and other community outreach events.

Partnerships

During the Academy, Boston mapped existing programs and surveyed young adults. Through this process, the team identified gaps in services and ideated new and existing models to fill gaps. Partner organizations also each made organizational commitments to contribute to Boston's overall plan to meet the identified workforce and support the needs of the city's young adults.

Services

Boston explored options to enhance career navigation and workforce services that meet young adults where they are, including career coaching, employment connections, job training referrals, and wraparound supports (e.g., housing and transportation assistance, GED preparation, and Criminal Offender Record Information clinics). These supports would be offered by career centers (e.g., American Job Centers), which are operated by Action for Boston Community Development, Jewish Vocational Service, and community-based organizations.

Advice

- Select a backbone organization with deep connections throughout the youth-serving ecosystem.
- Recruit the biggest institutions and organizations working to prevent disconnection and to re-engage disconnected youth with education and the workforce.
- Involve young adults in the process of identifying gaps, surveying, and identifying solutions.

Next Steps

Boston plans to continue building its career centers' capacity to provide career navigation services for young adults and to pilot programs that connect young adults with job training and career-oriented college programs. The team also intends to share its YSB Academy action plan with the [Boston Opportunity Youth Collaborative](#) and fold the work into that existing collaborative. The team has committed to seeking funding to better connect Boston's school system with its career center system and to better equip the career centers to serve young adults. It will also explore bringing a youth development apprenticeship to Boston.

Denver, Colorado

Overview

The Colorado Department of Education [reported](#) a 3.8 percent dropout rate for all high school students in Denver County for school year 2022–23. Additionally, dropout rates were higher among Black, Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, Hispanic or Latino, and Native American or Alaska Native students. Because many students struggled academically and enrollments declined, graduation rates also declined.

Denver joined the Academy to tackle these issues and to amplify awareness of the public workforce system among students by implementing a cohesive marketing strategy; leveraging best practices for serving OSY; and strengthening partnerships between workforce, education, and community programs. It also focused on using data-driven insights to enrich services and demonstrate collective impact beyond quantitative data by incorporating qualitative insights. It further intended to create a sustainable infrastructure that amplifies youth voices in creating and continuously improving the youth ecosystem. By fostering strong partnerships, leveraging innovative strategies, and prioritizing equity and inclusion, Denver also planned to establish a framework that ensures that all youth have simplified access to meaningful employment pathways and can realize their goals and dreams, contribute to their community, and create hope for future generations to come.

Key Youth Systems Building Partners

- Denver Economic Development and Opportunity, [Denver Workforce Development \(LWDB\)](#)
- [Denver Public Schools](#)
- [Eckerd Connects NextGen](#)

The Academy afforded us dedicated time to strengthen our relationships, prioritize our provider partnerships, and strategize the development of sustainable practices.

This ensures that our initiatives will not only continue to grow but will also become integral to our operational framework as we engage with new providers in the future.

Accomplishments

Outreach

To increase Denver youth's awareness of the local workforce system, the team began to explore youth-focused marketing, including how to solicit feedback from youth about platforms to use and types of information to share. The team also sought and received leadership support to use workforce resources to create a comprehensive youth marketing strategy as part of the initiative. With the help of workforce system youth interns, the team created a content calendar to bolster its social media presence.

Partnerships

To enhance and sustain partnerships across Denver's workforce, education, and community programs, the team engaged the workforce program's policy liaison to gather partner feedback on [Program Guidance Letters](#) (which drive workforce system policy) and to begin to explore policy changes and alignment across programs. The team also started planning and designing training for partners on trauma-informed practices and a trauma-informed coaching model for staff to use when engaging with youth.

Services

To establish a framework that ensures that all youth have access to meaningful employment pathways, Denver planned and began a colocation pilot program for Eckerd Connects in Denver Public Schools (DPS). This included drafting an agreement for bidirectional referrals between DPS staff (serving ISY) and Eckerd Connects NextGen staff (serving OSY). Through an asset mapping activity, the team identified other local programs and resources serving youth, including basic needs, mental health supports, housing, and transportation. Through this effort, the team identified challenges that unhoused, immigrant, undocumented, and resettled or refugee youth face in accessing certain supports. The team also developed a document highlighting Denver's dropout timeframes compared with those of other jurisdictions, emphasizing the critical need for timely connections to Eckerd NextGen and other youth providers. In addition, it compiled and routinely updates a spreadsheet that features more than 200 youth-related resources currently focused on basic needs, including the various organizations' requirements and points of contact.

Youth Voice

During the Academy, Denver began to explore ways to identify and recruit youth currently or previously enrolled with DPS and Eckerd Connects NextGen to solicit feedback. This exploration included meeting with other communities to learn about their promising and best practices for youth engagement. This feedback, through listening sessions and other activities, would help create the team's simplified framework to connect young people to career pathways and inform the team's marketing strategies.

Advice

- Carve out dedicated time to focus on common goals and engage in collective brainstorming to enhance your youth ecosystem.
- Planning is essential, but just for the beginning of the work. It may not yield immediate, meaningful results, but it will establish the framework needed to achieve your larger goals.
- Stay focused on the goals you set. As you plan for the desired changes and improvements, you may find that more ideas will emerge, creating a snowball effect.

Next Steps

Denver plans to develop training on newly established and updated policies agreed on by partners and based on updated Program Guidance Letters. It will continue to support cross-referrals between the public school system and Eckerd Connects NextGen, whereby both

programs will invite each other to various tabling events, engaging graduating seniors to facilitate post-high school workforce transitions. The team will also begin its colocation pilot in the 2024–25 school year, when Eckerd Connect NextGen staff will visit a local high school biweekly; their presence will be promoted on city social media and Denver Public Schools' platforms and during back-to-school night activities. To enhance its marketing to youth, Denver will also expand to different social media platforms, such as Instagram, and will engage youth enrolled in partner programs to film testimonials to amplify messaging across Denver Workforce platforms and through its pilot high school's social media and webpage. In the long term, the team plans to engage the workforce system's data and technology team, local community-based organizations, and city agencies, such as the Office of Children's Affairs, to expand resource accessibility across its system.

Miami-Dade County, Florida

Overview

In 2021, Florida enacted the [Reimagining Education and Career Help \(REACH\) Act](#) to establish consistent eligibility standards across the state and enhance the services and accountability of workforce-related programs. As part of this initiative, Miami-Dade County joined the YSB Academy to kick-start the development of a more inclusive, innovative service delivery system. The team intends to improve collaboration among community organizations, training providers, and business partners, providing a platform for creating accessible, forward-thinking, and relevant youth services and programs.

One of Miami-Dade County's first Academy goals was to design and implement an integrated service delivery tool to streamline outreach and create a more efficient workforce system tailored for Miami-Dade County youth. This included partnering with community-based organizations that specialize in underserved populations to develop workforce plans specific to their needs and launching monthly professional development workshops for youth providers.

Key Youth Systems Building Partners

- South Florida Workforce Investment Board/[CareerSource South Florida \(LWDB\)](#)
- [Miami-Dade County Public Schools](#)
- [Miami-Dade County Juvenile Services Department](#)

The YSB Academy has been instrumental in establishing a framework for meaningful partnerships, leading to improved service delivery. We have strengthened our strategic partnerships with local businesses and community-based organizations and developed an enhanced service delivery platform that expands the services and programs available to Miami-Dade County youth and employers.

Accomplishments

Outreach

Miami-Dade County has been actively raising awareness about its Academy initiatives and programs among potential participants and the broader community. By partnering with community organizations, it intends to reach underserved populations and provide comprehensive support.

Partnerships

To strengthen community partnerships focused on youth systems building, Miami-Dade County has launched monthly professional development workshops for youth providers. These workshops offer an overview of CareerSource South Florida's business services available to employers, effective outreach strategies, and connections to training vendors specializing in essential job skills. The team is also identifying and planning partnerships with:

1. Local businesses to ensure that training programs align with workforce needs and
2. Schools, colleges, and universities to create pathways for students.

Services

To support the development of the team's streamlined integrated service delivery tool, Miami-Dade County has researched and identified priority career pathways for youth. It has aligned these pathways with approved training vendors to deliver training and skill development tailored to the needs of the local workforce.

Advice

Reflecting on its youth systems building efforts, Miami-Dade County offers the following advice for other communities:

- Foster strong partnerships. Collaborate with a wide range of partners, including local businesses, educational institutions, community organizations, and government agencies. Develop a shared vision and set of goals to ensure alignment and collective effort. Regular communication and collaboration are key to maintaining these relationships and achieving shared outcomes. Actively involve local employers in program design and implementation to ensure that training meets workforce needs.
- Design comprehensive, flexible programs. Address the diverse needs of youth, including career exploration, skills training, academic support, and personal development. Ensure that programs are adaptable to the changing job market and participants' needs. Provide comprehensive support services to help participants overcome barriers to success.
- Use data and adopt continuous improvement strategies. Collect and analyze data to understand local labor market needs, track participant progress, and measure program effectiveness. Use data to make informed decisions and continuously improve programs. Establish clear performance metrics; monitor outcomes such as job placement rates, credential attainment, and participant satisfaction; and gather feedback from participants, employers, and partners.

Next Steps

Miami-Dade County will partner with training providers to create programs tailored to local industry needs while expanding learning opportunities that lead to in-demand certifications. The team plans to strengthen partnerships with local businesses to streamline and increase job placements. Additionally, it intends to work closely with educational institutions to create clearly defined career pathways and provide comprehensive career counseling, thereby removing barriers to program participation and completion. Miami-Dade County will gather local labor market data to inform program offerings and monitor key performance indicators. The team will also launch a focused outreach campaign to offer additional assistance to underprivileged populations.

Omaha, Nebraska

Overview

The looming shortage of skilled workers for infrastructure projects within the next decade poses a significant threat to the strength and stability of Omaha's transportation, utilities, and broadband systems. In the counties served by Heartland Workforce Solutions (Omaha's LWDB), low unemployment rates and an aging workforce necessitate urgent action to recruit and engage young adults in these industries.

Omaha joined the Academy to begin exploring ways to engage youth in these critical industries. Omaha envisioned a transformed landscape where increased wages, credentials, and reduced unemployment in opportunity ZIP codes reflect the success of community collective efforts. Omaha aspired to see a more diverse workforce in the trades, with tangible outcomes reflected in real wage and census data, demonstrating a direct correlation between its collaborative endeavors and positive results. To do this, Omaha intended to strengthen existing initiatives by exposing youth (ages 16–24) to trade careers; enhancing diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility within the trade sector; establishing clear career pathways; and improving census data.

Key Youth Systems Building Partners

- [Heartland Workforce Solutions \(LWDB\)](#)
- [Dynamic Workforce Solutions](#) (WIOA youth services provider)
- [Omaha Public Schools](#)
- [Persevere](#) (Re-entry program)
- [Metropolitan Community College](#)
- [International Association of Heat and Frost Insulators Local #39](#)
- [International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local #22](#)

The YSB Academy helped us improve communication and collaboration between the LWDB, community college, unions, and public school system to better understand the needs of youth and address basic skills deficiencies.

Accomplishments

Data

To inform recruitment and overall efforts to support youth, Omaha reviewed labor market information, union apprenticeship enrollments and slots, and data from programs funded to serve youth, community colleges, re-entry programs, and infrastructure and economic development projects. The team also mapped community organizations' services to identify gaps in local services for young people.

Outreach

To engage young adults in trade industries, the team developed a marketing and outreach campaign (ONEUP, Trade Up), with customizable logos based on industry, messaging, and

social media strategies. The campaign included materials for youth, parents, and employers to spotlight training and educational opportunities, including trades apprenticeship programs.

Partnerships

To expand its efforts, Omaha engaged Omaha Public Schools, local re-entry programs, and labor unions, to provide perspectives on developing a local holistic youth ecosystem. Partners created a consistent meeting schedule to resolve collaboration barriers, identify resources, define information needs, and review occupational gaps for the large economic development projects coming to the region. Additionally, partners applied for several local and federal funding opportunities to provide resources to sustain Omaha's systems building efforts.

Services

Omaha piloted a trades career pathway, and is refining policies, practices, and programming to support youth in the trades. This pilot included assessments by the local community college and WIOA Title II Adult Education and Family Literacy Act programs, remediation services and support to help young people, and placements with local labor unions. The WIOA Youth Program began using the National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) test to elevate participants' basic skills and support preparation for an apprenticeship entrance exam.

Youth Voice

Omaha developed a survey to collect feedback from youth ages 16–24 about the public workforce system, its education and training programs, how they explore careers, the barriers they experience, and their definitions of success. The team is planning to ask youth-serving organizations to nominate youth representatives to Omaha's Youth Committee, which will assist ISY and OSY ages 14–24 with employment, skill building, and career exploration.

Advice

- Talk to the youth. Ensure that the programming you are offering is beneficial and what young people want.
- Bring trades and unions to the table.
- Be patient! This work will not be accomplished in a week, month, or year; it is a process.

Next Steps

Omaha plans to begin collaborating more closely with Omaha Public Schools to be more present in the upcoming academic school year for youth K–12 and launch its marketing campaign for the initiative. The team will also meet and work with industry partners to discover the new and upcoming jobs needed to build pre-apprenticeships and apprenticeships in those fields. It will further seek to increase its engagement of youth entering the workforce.

Oswego County, New York

Overview

In 2022, Micron Technology [announced plans](#) to invest up to \$100 billion during the next 20 years to construct the largest semiconductor facility in U.S. history in Clay, New York. Construction will create nearly 50,000 jobs in Central New York, including 9,000 high-paying jobs at Micron, which is less than 10 miles from Oswego County. The county expected that Micron would also attract ancillary advanced manufacturing businesses, which further underscored the need for additional workforce development in this sector. Although the community has historically offered many employment opportunities, other factors have prevented youth connection to employment, including food insecurity and a lack of transportation, childcare, and stable housing. Without services related to these basic needs, many young people have been unable to sustain employment or career growth.

Oswego County joined the YSB Academy to create a no-wrong-door system that provides seamless referral to workforce programs and services across the county. It aspired to improve young people's opportunities and outcomes by increasing understanding of equitable policies and practices for youth career pathways and broadening awareness of, recruitment for, and access to resources and services, including work readiness, training, employment, and supportive service programs. Through the Academy, the team hoped to enhance young people's skills and meet the needs of Central New York's growing labor force with the youth of Oswego County.

Key Youth Systems Building Partners

- [Workforce Development Board of Oswego County \(LWDB\)](#)
- [Oswego County Opportunities, Inc.](#)
- [Oswego City-County Youth Bureau](#)
- [Richard S. Shineman Foundation](#)

Without the Academy, we would not have been discussing the incorporation of youth voice and paid work experience to help influence the planning, design, recruitment, and implementation of innovative programs and services for Oswego County youth.

Accomplishments

Data

To better understand youth perspectives and work experiences, Oswego County is partnering with graduate students at the Oswego State University of New York (SUNY Oswego) in a fall 2024 capstone project to develop a study and collect baseline data from youth ages 16–24.

Outreach

To broaden outreach and unify messaging to youth with community workforce partners, Oswego County is partnering with SUNY Oswego. The outreach plan will serve as a project

for SUNY public relations students, who will share it with the Youth Advisory Council the county is forming for feedback.

Partnerships

To highlight youth programs in the county, Oswego County compiled a list of existing youth-serving organizations, detailing the type of support provided, population served, address, service area, and website address. Using Geographic Information System data, the team mapped the information to identify geographic gaps in youth services.

The Oswego LWDB also pledged to create one or two paid work experiences for youth dedicated to the ideas and efforts in the YSB Academy action plan. The time and input from these young people will help them along their own career pathways. They will also be a part of the Youth Advisory Council and facilitate discussions as the YSB action plan evolves.

Services

Oswego County has participated in pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship task force meetings, with plans to explore initiatives in neighboring counties for replication. The county also plans to expand and grow its annual Youth Career Summit, led by the Oswego City-County Youth Bureau, which introduces eighth-grade students from nine school districts to occupations available across Oswego County. The summit features hands-on demonstrations and presentations from more than 40 local businesses.

Youth Voice

To broaden its understanding of youth needs and perspectives, Oswego County plans to recruit youth ages 16–24 from different backgrounds, populations, and education levels across the county to join a Youth Advisory Council. The council will provide input in developing, implementing, and recruiting for new and existing youth-centered programs and services. It will also elect a representative to attend LWDB Youth Committee meetings.

Advice

- Convene a dedicated group of partners that are enthusiastic about youth empowerment.
- Be honest about where you are and where you want to be as a community, including weaknesses and potential opportunities.
- Develop realistic goals, and do not be afraid to revise them when adapting to your community context.

Next Steps

Oswego County is committed to meeting regularly to understand youths' perspectives on the local workforce. It also plans to develop a paid work experience position for one or two youths to prioritize and thoughtfully include youth voice. It is forging a partnership with SUNY Oswego's Master of Business Administration program for a proposed study on youth perspectives on the workforce; the county hopes to use this research to develop a focused marketing strategy to effectively engage youth. Oswego County envisions creating and implementing an education campaign that highlights its programs' elements and benefits,

regional in-demand occupations, and registered apprenticeships. It hopes to strengthen partnerships with employers to create pre-apprenticeship models for high school students and OSY and expand registered apprenticeships beyond traditional industries.

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Overview

[Allegheny County](#) is 745 square miles and has a population of 1.2 million people. The county comprises Pittsburgh and the city's 129 surrounding municipalities. Within [Allegheny County](#) are 43 school districts, 6 career and technical centers, 29 colleges or universities, and 1 community college network. In 2022, approximately 150,000 young people ages 15–24 lived in Allegheny County, including more than 10,000 new high school graduates.

In 2023, Pittsburgh was named a [Workforce Hub](#) by the Biden administration, and Partner4Work became the lead agency to coordinate efforts with the city and partners. Through the collective work of employers, training agencies, intermediaries, and philanthropy, President Biden's [Investing in America Agenda](#) will spur more than 1,000 new jobs and expanded apprenticeship programs. To meet the growing demands within industries, Pittsburgh needs to connect its schools with its workforce systems to enable local employers to source talent directly from schools and local alumni.

Pittsburgh joined the YSB Academy to enhance meaningful connections between its school systems, workforce development agencies, and employers. Its vision was to build a strong youth employment system that enables employers to source talent from local high schools through relevant career education, access to work-based learning opportunities and credentials for students, and productive community-school-business partnerships.

Key Youth Systems Building Partners

- [Partner4Work \(LWDB\)](#)
- [Auberle](#)
- [Goodwill of Southwestern Pennsylvania](#)
- [Woodland Hills School District](#)
- [Consortium for Public Education](#)

The YSB Academy afforded us substantial dedicated time for learning and planning together. Without it, we would not have a comprehensive plan to implement going forward. Genuinely sharing decision-making with young people was a persistent challenge, but through this partnership, we have been able to center youth at the foundation of our plan and allow our system to be shaped by young people.

Accomplishments

Data

During the Academy, Pittsburgh collected and analyzed [Future Ready PA Index career readiness indicators](#) for McKeesport, Clairton, and Woodland Hills to compare proficiencies, pathways, and college and career readiness measures. This effort helped the team gauge success related to school accountability measures and community partnerships in support of career education that can add value to school communities.

Partnerships

Pittsburgh built an asset map to pinpoint schools with which the team had the most connections and identify potential additional partnerships. The team hosted meetings to learn about each partner organization's funding, priorities, programs, and services for youth and increase understanding of partner perspectives, resources, and limitations. It also secured commitments from the superintendents of the three school districts (McKeesport, Clairton, and Woodland Hills) and contacted major employers in healthcare and clean energy who are interested in connecting directly with high school youth.

Services

During the Academy, Pittsburgh assessed schools' needs in the McKeesport, Clairton, and Woodland Hills districts. It identified resources to introduce additional career education planning and links to the workforce system. Pittsburgh also devised a pipeline from school and graduation to education and employment. This helped the team determine roles and responsibilities so it could integrate additional career planning and connections to the workforce system while also outlining needs for funding and staff.

Youth Voice

Pittsburgh hired eight young people to build a framework for career education. The team will use this framework to create action teams comprising ISY and educators who will lead implementation within their schools.

Advice

- Push yourselves past the initial more tangible ideas of building a new program or holding an event. Consider system dynamics to identify opportunities for system-level impact and scalability.
- Assemble your community team with intentionality and leverage ongoing strengths and progress. This will make implementation easier.
- Abandon or amend your original plan based on lessons learned from others.

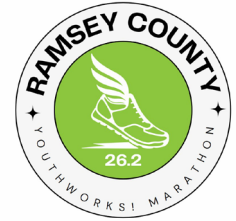
Next Steps

Pittsburgh plans to support youth action teams in several schools to implement aspects of its youth-designed career education framework. It will build business partnerships between at least three schools and at least three companies to provide career exploration and work-based learning opportunities for young people. The team also plans to build at least three schools' capacity to offer youth access to trainings and credentials and develop systems of evidence collection and data reporting related to career education across grades 9–12 that meets Pennsylvania Department of Education requirements.

Ramsey County, Minnesota

Overview

A survey commissioned by Ramsey County Workforce Solutions in 2022 revealed that Ramsey County's ecosystem had many resources and services available to traditional high school students, including summer internship opportunities, career and technical education, and support in finding first jobs. However, fewer opportunities existed for youth disconnected from school or work. As a community rich in programs and organizations and with an increase in state and federal funding to support the ecosystem, the community saw the need to coordinate more effectively. The current system – driven by varying funding opportunities and siloed by competition – resulted in many organizations creating their own programs, providing all components of programming for the same young people in the community. With the impending end of this infusion of federal [American Rescue Plan Act](#) funding, the ecosystem had to align to better leverage sustainable resources to support Ramsey County's most vulnerable young people.



Ramsey County joined the YSB Academy to build on its efforts to transform its youth workforce ecosystem into one that was aligned, offered high-quality employment services, and is cocreated with young people.

Key Youth Systems Building Partners

- [Ramsey County Workforce Solutions \(LWDB\)](#)
- [Youthprise](#)
- [Face to Face](#)
- [City of Saint Paul's Right Track Program](#)
- [Saint Paul Public Schools](#)
- [Saint Paul College](#)

The YSB Academy has provided us with an opportunity to codify a timeline for the many ideas and initiatives we have been discussing for years, including the development of a formal youth advisory board.

Accomplishments

Data

During the Academy, Ramsey County and its partners began identifying and implementing shared metrics across its partnerships to measure the collective impact of its coalition. The group reviewed previous work completed by a local family foundation to identify the most important metrics and strict education and employment data. This review included youth and young adults' connections to caring adults, their hope for their future, and their place in the community. Additionally, Ramsey County identified funding sources to support the comprehensive mapping of the existing youth workforce ecosystem.

Partnerships

During the Academy, Ramsey County documented partners' roles and responsibilities as part of the team's systems building efforts. The team also presented its proposed work and action plan to the larger community of potential ecosystem partners at the annual spring [Youth Works!](#) networking event, which included staff and leaders from high schools, colleges, community organizations, and employers. Additionally, the team identified how the existing [Workforce Innovation Board Youth Committee](#) can more actively engage in systems building rather than only fulfilling compliance roles set out in WIOA. The team began exploring how to fund a full-time position to focus solely on the ecosystem building efforts.

Youth Voice

Ramsey County began developing plans to offer Workforce 101 training for young people, followed by the opportunity to officially serve on a youth advisory board and be represented on the Workforce Innovation Board. County staff, with support from partners, had already begun developing the curriculum for these trainings and plan to engage young people to further build the structure and name of the youth advisory board.

Advice

- Ensure that partners come to the table without ego. The team is more successful when the shared priority is to provide opportunities for young people in the community, no matter who receives the credit.
- Ensure that the staff representing partner organizations bring the right lens and scope – those who can see the entire system and their organization's role in it.
- Seek additional funding to ensure that systems building work is sustainable.

Next Steps

Ramsey County plans to present its YSB Academy workplan to the Workforce Innovation Board and other executives across the partnership to garner ongoing commitment for the initiative. The team also plans to secure funding to complete its asset mapping efforts and develop and implement a staffing plan to coordinate its ongoing systems building efforts.

Riverside County, California

Overview

The Riverside County Department of Housing and Workforce Solutions (HWS) was formed in 2020 by the Riverside County Board of Supervisors. HWS integrated several county divisions to address homelessness more effectively, with the goal of creating a seamless service ecosystem within a single department. However, despite multiple access points, inconsistent cross-division communication led HWS units to work in silos. Riverside County also recognized that involving youth in decision-making and implementing programs was vital to supporting those seeking employment and stable housing. The Inland Empire region (i.e., Riverside and San Bernardino counties) has one of the highest enrollments of students experiencing homelessness in the state. By integrating youth voices into its programs and decisions, Riverside County hoped to ensure that youth felt heard and valued.

Riverside County joined the Academy to create more inclusive, effective support for youth experiencing homelessness. The county also intended to strengthen and align youth services across nonprofits, community-based organizations, and county systems. Its overall vision was to integrate workforce, housing, probation, and public social services to mobilize youth to enter the workforce and reduce youth homelessness and unemployment.

Key Youth Systems Building Partners

- [Riverside County Workforce Development Division \(LWDB\)](#)
- [Riverside County Continuum of Care \(CoC\)](#)

The YSB Academy catalyzed significant changes and improvements in our county that would not have been possible otherwise. One of the most impactful outcomes is the establishment of the Riverside County Youth Workforce and Housing Alliance (YWhA). Prior to the YSB Academy, Riverside County Housing Workforce Solutions' five divisions often worked in silos, but the YWhA has begun developing a seamless service ecosystem in which education, housing, social services, and employment agencies work collectively toward common goals.

Accomplishments

Data

Riverside County began developing a comprehensive youth community asset and fiscal mapping model for one of the county's districts – a replicable pilot that would effectively enhance youth support across the region. As a part of this process, the team finalized approvals and a budget to develop the model and pilot.

Partnerships

During the Academy, Riverside County's Workforce Development Division and CoC created the Riverside County YWHA to coordinate services for overlapping populations of youth served. The county crafted flowcharts of funding mechanisms, priorities, programs, and youth services to inform each division of the other's services and populations. The team also identified, contacted, and coordinated with partner agencies, such as Juvenile Justice and Integrated Service Delivery, to develop a universal application and screening using the [Whole Person Health Score](#). This led to streamlining interagency collaboration and funding allocation by standardizing data sharing protocols, referral processes, funding requests, and program evaluations. Increased awareness and policy alignment also led to cross-training plans for frontline staff and warm handoffs between divisions, ensuring more efficient, effective service delivery.

Services

Riverside County began integrating the Workforce Development Division into the CoC's Coordinated Entry System to offer youth workforce services and CoC housing resources. It identified the agencies and resources needed, chose a pilot site, obtained a site license, met to understand the process and procure training materials, and trained at the pilot site. The team also identified funding opportunities, explored policy flexibility to integrate services, and requested proposals for a program that would support young people involved in the justice system who were re-entering the workforce. Additionally, the team identified trauma-informed approaches and how to integrate them into its [Youth Opportunity Centers](#) by training new career coach staff, developing requirements, and monitoring service providers.

Youth Voice

Riverside County conducted focus groups with youth ages 18–26 – including working mothers with low income, re-entry populations, working young adults with a high school diploma or less, and former foster youth – on their work needs and challenges. The team plans to synthesize their findings to develop programs to better meet youths' actual needs and improve its services.

Advice

- Create a more vigorous support network by aligning key partners from education, housing, social services, healthcare, and employment agencies; this fosters a seamlessly coordinated, comprehensive approach in which each sector contributes its expertise and resources. Additionally, documenting and creating a navigation system to cross-train key collaborators will facilitate referrals.
- Incorporate youth voices into decision-making – through regular focus groups and advisory boards with youth representatives – to ensure that programs effectively respond to young peoples' needs and perspectives.
- Align and integrate services, and clearly document each key partner's responsibilities and services to eliminate confusion and overlap. Cross-training staff across multiple services ensures that everyone understands the entire system. Youth should experience a smooth, supportive transition from one service to another, with each touchpoint in the system working together to meet their needs.

Next Steps

Riverside County will continue integrating the Workforce Development Division into the CoC's Coordinated Entry System across multiple sites, expand its youth asset and fiscal mapping model to other county districts, and implement its youth focus group findings into program designs. The team will also seek additional funding to support youth employment and housing stability initiatives and prioritize services to shared Workforce Development Division and CoC clients.

Southeast Michigan

Overview

Southeast Michigan has long been associated with the automotive and manufacturing industries, and the workforce system has grappled with reshaping its image to evolve with industry advancements, community changes, and education expectations. Changes in mobility and the energy sectors continue to affect the region and future workforce demands, and area youth urgently need a system to help plan their career paths.

Consequently, Michigan has [pledged the goal of “Sixty by 30,”](#) meaning 60 percent of the state’s workforce will have college or postsecondary credentials by 2030. To achieve this goal, the state’s K–12 education system, college and postsecondary training providers, employers, and community organizations must find a common path for youth to remain competitive and attractive as new workforce talent.

Southeast Michigan joined the YSB Academy to create an inclusive lifelong talent and career development system that responds to labor market and industry demands. The team’s goals included increasing youth completion of Education Development Plans by 10 percent by 2026 and increasing postsecondary outcomes by 10 percent by 2026, including pre-apprenticeships, certification attainment, and college enrollment.

Key Youth Systems Building Partners

- [Southeast Michigan Community Alliance \(LWDB\)](#)
- [Workforce Intelligence Network](#)
- [Wayne Regional Educational Service Agency](#)
- [Melvindale Local Housing Commission](#)
- [Operation Refuge](#)

Our partnership and dedication to work together have expanded, and our national network of successful practice to draw upon has grown. The time to think, plan, and build momentum through the Academy and based on our meeting cadence was invaluable.

Accomplishments

Data

During the Academy, Southeast Michigan compiled data sources to which the team collectively had access. These sources related to youth, parents, K–12 schools, counselors, community organizations, and employers. The team focused on how it was using each data set, what gaps existed, and whether and how the data are shared with the larger field. The team also began categorizing the data related to career planning and systems building.

Partnerships

Southeast Michigan listed potential partners to engage in its systems building work and created a communication system with partner organizations' various boards to confer, create, and work together. The team reached out to local and national organizations to support and sustain its YSB goals. It authored a small pilot grant with one district and college to serve as its beta test for strategies. It also embedded its YSB Academy action plan into Southeast Michigan Community Alliance's (LWDB) overall strategic plan.

Services

During the Academy, Southeast Michigan identified various community resources and programs to address mental and physical health, education and training, housing and basic needs, employment, and other needs of young people. The team also began devising supports that go beyond [Education Development Plans](#) to reflect students' career goals and define paths toward achieving them. It planned to assess the career planning processes and resources at one high school with the intent to expand the model.

Youth Voice

Southeast Michigan already had a [High School Student Ambassador Program](#) to help build students' resumes, create leadership opportunities, and build on transferable skills while helping to educate the student population on the importance of setting their postsecondary education goals. Ambassadors were engaged at pop-up events, and schools hosted events for parents. During the Academy, Southeast Michigan expanded its Youth Ambassadors model and began to incorporate youth input and presence when planning workforce events. The team also engaged youth ambassadors at three high schools to provide peer support for post-secondary goals – with plans to expand throughout the county starting in fall 2024. In addition, it surveyed 147 youth to capture ideas for improving outreach and recruitment for programs and services.

Advice

- Be visionary but also patient with the process.
- Be a team player, work together, and support your team. Working on this type of systems building effort requires that you communicate with a large local team.
- Plan for sustainability early. Identify the key decision-makers and how to get their support.

Next Steps

Southeast Michigan plans to continue expanding its youth ambassador program, invite youth to join partner organizations' boards, and seek grant funds for continued career system creation. The team also plans to hold a youth summit, explore a youth pre-apprenticeship model, and expand its partnerships to include post-secondary institutions and providers.

Conclusion

Designing and building system-level approaches that engage and support young people in the workforce often requires coordinated efforts across many community partners. The lessons learned from the YSB Academy communities shed light on key drivers that other communities may consider when kick-starting their own efforts to provide quality career pathways for low-income and opportunity youth. These lessons also reflect the importance of collecting and sharing data across partners and mapping community assets to identify resources and gaps. Moreover, they show the importance of being patient and taking time to build strong, sustainable partnerships through MOUs and other agreements that extend beyond individual relationships.

Meaningfully engaging young people at each stage of the systems building process, exploring innovative work experience and early career exposure strategies, and investing in staff capacity to support partnership activities are crucial from the beginning. Ultimately, no one program can do this work alone. A true no-wrong-door approach that helps young people succeed in high-quality career paths requires a cross-section of workforce, education, human services, philanthropic, and private industry collaborators.



YOUTH SYSTEMS BUILDING ACADEMY

A Compendium of
Community Accomplishments

