



The Opportunity Youth Forum: Forging a National Network to Advance Equitable Systems Change

2019 Evaluation Report for the
Aspen Institute Opportunity Youth Forum

*Prepared for: The Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions
December 2020*

EQUAL
MEASURE

FINDING
PROMISE
FUELING
CHANGE



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2011, The Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions (The Forum) launched the Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund “to leverage momentum of the opportunity youth movement, including the call for community-based solutions, coming out of the White House Council on Community Solutions.”¹

Since then, the Forum (now called the Opportunity Youth Forum) has supported a network of communities through a number of funded projects—including efforts focused on improving education and employment connections, youth entrepreneurship, and data use—to mobilize a national movement. As of 2019, the OYF Network has expanded to include 27 collaboratives across 17 states—each “seeking to scale multiple reconnection pathways that achieve better outcomes in education and employment for opportunity youth.”²

In 2020, Equal Measure conducted an evaluation to explore the status of the Network, and the communities in which they operate, to better understand areas of strength and opportunities for additional focus and learning. This report details Network-wide evaluation findings drawn from data collection among 23 of 27 communities participating in the OYF Network in 2019. The quantitative data in this report was collected through a self-assessment administered to OYF Network communities in spring 2020. This survey expanded upon data from the 2015–2017 OYF evaluation by exploring more nuanced aspects of collaborative capacity, systems change, and the values that drive these efforts. The qualitative information in this report was collected through the same assessment and interviews with leads from the collaboratives. Taken together, the evaluation findings reveal insights into the OYF Network’s capacities and the systems collaboratives are working to change.

Grounding Systems Change Efforts in Core Values

Equity, youth-led change, and community power are core values and strategies embedded in the OYF work. Collaboratives are incorporating these values into their infrastructure and processes, as well as into their efforts to change local systems. Every collaborative is explicitly acknowledging racial equity and community disparities in its planning. In addition to incorporating racial equity as a critical factor in setting the opportunity youth agenda, collaboratives are building diverse partnerships reflective of the communities they serve and making strides to diversify their decision-making ranks.

Championing—and identifying champions of—equity

Collaboratives are helping stakeholders shift how they understand and discuss racial disparities. Stakeholders are beginning to grasp the challenges that affect various racial, ethnic, gender, or age groups, and understand the need to target strategies to address racial disparities. Collaboratives continue to seek out stakeholders committed to authentic change and are making efforts to identify partners that share the values of diversity and equity.

Engaging youth in meaningful change

Collaboratives are incorporating youth into their work, through planning, meetings, work groups, and decision-making. Most have structures in place to engage youth in shaping, refining, and supporting implementation of the opportunity youth agenda. Youth are less active in broader systems change work, such as informing policy and funding decisions.



Building Capacity Matters

The OYF evaluation focused on, and measured, two interrelated elements central to the OYF theory of change:

1. Collaborative Capacity:

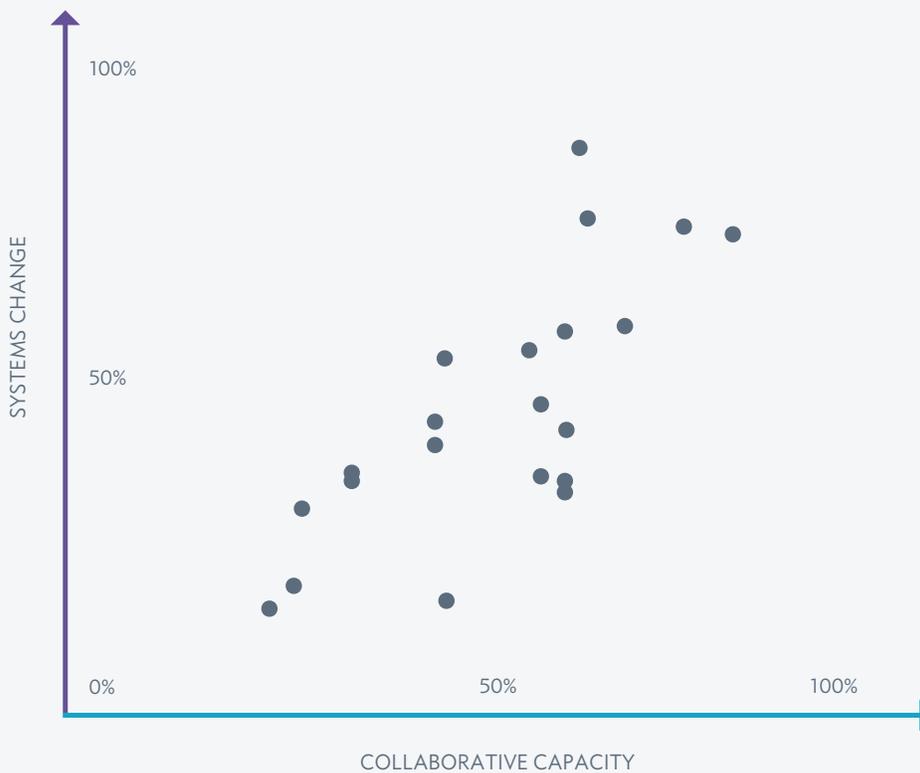
The infrastructure and processes necessary for the collaborative to carry out its opportunity youth agenda; and

2. Systems Change:

“Shifts to the systems that hold a problem in place”³ —in this case, disconnected pathways and inequitable conditions that prevent young people from achieving education and employment outcomes.

The figure below illustrates the relationship between each OYF community’s collaborative capacity and evidence of systems change, as measured by the 2019 self-assessment. **Collaboratives with greater capacity tend to see greater evidence of the systems changes necessary for opportunity youth to succeed.** These findings reinforce the need to invest in and build the collaborative muscle to create systems that promote opportunity youth success.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY FIGURE 1
Greater Collaborative Capacity is Associated
with Greater Evidence of Systems Change



Values reflect the % of indicators reported as strong evidence by each collaborative.

● = collaborative



Developing Collaborative Capacity

Collaborative capacity—the infrastructure and processes necessary for the collaborative to carry out its opportunity youth agenda—varies across the Network. While some collaboratives new to the OYF Network are just beginning to establish the processes necessary to carry out their work, others have well-established processes with robust infrastructure. Examination of the relationships between collaborative characteristics and overall capacity suggests that collaboratives and backbones that have had opportunity youth efforts for a longer time have slightly greater capacity than those with less experience focusing on opportunity youth. Rural collaboratives generally had lower capacity than urban or other sites. Most notably, collaboratives with larger backbone organization budgets devoted to opportunity youth efforts were statistically more likely to have greater capacity than collaboratives led by less-resourced backbones.⁴

Trends in collaborative capacity point to areas for future development, technical assistance, and learning. While capacities vary across the Network, a picture of OYF collaborative capacities is emerging.

Strength in convening power

Findings reveal strength in collaboratives' convening power and the diversity of their members, particularly among the systems and organizations represented at the collaborative table. For the most part, a diverse array of sectoral and organizational representatives are shaping and implementing the collaboratives' agendas. Community member and employer engagement, however, are lagging relative to other partners.

Promising data practices

Collaboratives are demonstrating strong data capacity in key areas, most notably in their use of data to communicate their vision. They are using data as a call to action, leading conversations about opportunity youth—the number, where they live, and their needs—to bring attention to the urgency of improving education and career pathways. Data are also used in pursuit of equity. Collaboratives are taking great effort to ensure that the data they use reflect the diverse perspectives and experiences, and highlight inequities for key stakeholders.

Building relationships to raise awareness

Consistent with prior OYF evaluation findings, collaboratives have been successful in engaging stakeholders one-on-one, but have less consistently reached and activated audiences beyond the collaborative. Building on their diverse network and relationships, collaboratives have brought attention to opportunity youth needs, even creating space for young people to share their stories with policy makers. Broad-based communications efforts—such as marketing, media, or brand awareness campaigns—were far less common, and point to areas where additional resources may be needed.

Struggling to raise resources

Collaboratives have worked hard to raise funds that advance their agendas, although resource development emerged as the lowest-rated capacity across the Network. Partner support for backbone organizations and collaboratives has been largely in the form of dedicated personnel and in-kind resources, while financial commitments have been less common. This finding points to ongoing challenges backbone organizations of all types encounter; it is easier to attract funds for “the work”—programs, organizations, or initiatives—than for “infrastructure.” Limited resources and sufficient personnel pose direct challenges to collaboratives' abilities to affect systems levers like data, narrative change, and policy.



Shifting Systems to Support Opportunity Youth

The OYF Network serves as a collective of communities working towards systems change to better re-engage and support opportunity youth. A look at how systems change in 2019 varied across different types of collaboratives suggests that larger collaboratives and those with more staff dedicated to opportunity youth efforts — as well as collaboratives and backbones that have focused on opportunity youth for a longer period of time — are more likely to report greater systems change. Urban collaboratives also generally reported greater systems change than rural or other sites. Most notably, collaboratives with larger backbone budgets dedicated to opportunity youth, as well as collaboratives with consistent staffing and backbone arrangements since the OYF's launch, were statistically more likely to report greater evidence of systems change than collaboratives with less-resourced backbones or new or re-structured collaboratives.⁵

Despite variation across the Network, systems change findings highlight areas of progress, while revealing where collaboratives may need to focus additional efforts. Key features of the systems collaboratives are working within include the following:

Programs and organizations that address opportunity youth needs

Programmatic changes—changes to partner services and offerings that directly serve opportunity youth— have been most prominent among systems changes across the Network. Many partners have heightened their focus on opportunity youth needs, established internal equity goals, and begun to shift how they deliver services, including changing intake and referral processes, integrating services to provide more seamless programmatic experiences, and increasing communication among program staff. These changes reveal that partners are attuned to improving services for opportunity youth and building collaborative muscle to address gaps in their services and relationships.

Strong relationships that can advance policy change efforts

Collaboratives have laid a strong foundation for policy change through one-on-one connections with policy makers, with some making headway in important policy conversations. For years, many collaboratives have worked closely with policy makers to influence local or state policy agendas, and some have seen recent returns. Policy changes in a handful of communities across the Network have demonstrated that collaboratives can build public will and activate public policies that create new opportunities, increase accessibility, and improve program quality at scale.

Limited, yet promising opportunities to leverage funding

Funding changes, which may take the longest to accomplish among the systems changes, were least common across the Network. The ability to leverage public dollars shows promise for achieving community-wide change, with public funding for opportunity youth-focused efforts outpacing private dollars. Backbone organizations, however, were more likely to receive operational funding from private sources. Funding trends point to the potential for philanthropic resources to continue to help collaboratives build their capacity which, in turn, can multiply the impact of those investments by leading to large-scale systems change. Communities that have leveraged public funds have seen new dollars flow to opportunity youth-supportive efforts, although funding behaviors—such as funders aligning decisions with a collaborative's goals—have yet to change in many communities.



Looking Ahead

The Opportunity Youth Forum is poised to build on its success in transforming systems changes for opportunity youth. Increased public attention in 2020 to structural inequities in education and workforce opportunities—the focus of the OYF since its inception—provides an opportunity for collaboratives, and the broader Network, to strengthen their visibility as critical players in the movement for educational equity and racial justice. With this context as the backdrop, the evaluation findings point to a number of opportunities for the Forum to support collaboratives' systems change efforts.

Build collaboratives' strategic communications capacity to influence policy change

Changing public policies to support education and career pathways for opportunity youth is a critical component of “shifting the conditions that hold problems in place.”⁶ While a few collaboratives—including South King County, Los Angeles, Boston, and Hartford—have swayed public policy change, all collaboratives have real interest, strengths, and capacities to take on this work. Collaboratives have forged relationships with decision makers, public officials, and policy makers to lay the groundwork for an opportunity youth policy change agenda, and many have shared their “case” with these key decision makers. Complementing these relationships with more robust communications and advocacy efforts could lead to more favorable policy conditions for collaboratives and opportunity youth.

Advise on ways to embed young people in more advanced systems changes such as data, communications, policy change, and funding

Young people are at the crux of the work across the OYF Network, and have not only informed the work of many collaboratives, but have led powerful efforts to improve programs and pathways into education and employment. Many partners' organizational cultures are oriented toward young people and their strengths and assets. The areas where youth involvement was lower mirror the capacities and systems changes that were less common overall—data, communications, policy change, and funding. Collaboratives may need more guidance on how to operationalize youth engagement in these aspects of systems change.

Continue to invest in building the capacity of the OYF collaboratives to collect and use data

Since the 2015–2017 evaluation of OYF that recommended further development of infrastructure and capacity to share and use data across partners, the Forum has invested in several data-focused initiatives, including Equity Counts and Data for Impact, which includes the Rural and Tribal Data Enhancement Grants. These initiatives have developed consistent ways to measure opportunity youth success, a framework for using data, and targeted capacity building—including in communities that have less access to reliable data. Findings show strengths in data use, such as understanding youth needs and communicating a vision for opportunity youth. Data were less likely to be used for assessing or improving the health of the collaborative—two roles that are frequently de-prioritized due to competing demands and limited capacity. These findings provide insight into how collaboratives and communities are prioritizing their data use, and point to areas for potential focus as the Forum further develops its data capacity building efforts.

Help collaboratives attract funding that builds collaborative capacities

Garnering funding for the backbone, as well as larger systems change efforts, continues to pose challenges for collaboratives. Given the continuing COVID-19 pandemic and devastating economic repercussions, funding for opportunity youth efforts may become even more challenging, despite an increase in the number of young people who will need help and the number of education and employment systems that become increasingly tenuous. Collaboratives are uniquely situated to tend to a diverse array of community needs, and have the potential to amplify investments through data-driven approaches that improve education and career pathways that are sustainable and at scale. Now more than ever, they need help in making the case for investments in capacity and the need to support young people as they navigate uncertain landscapes.



INTRODUCTION

In 2011, The Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions (the Forum) launched the Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund (now called the Opportunity Youth Forum) to “to leverage momentum of the opportunity youth (OY) movement, including the call for community-based solutions, coming out of the White House Council on Community Solutions.”⁷

Since then, the Forum has supported a network of communities through a number of funded projects—including efforts focused on improving education and employment connections, youth entrepreneurship, and data use—to mobilize a national movement. As of 2019, the OYF Network has expanded to 27 collaboratives across 17 states, each “seeking to scale multiple reconnection pathways that achieve better outcomes in education and employment for opportunity youth.”⁸

This report details Network-wide evaluation findings drawn from data collection among 23 of 27 communities participating in the OYF Network in 2019. The report focuses on collaborative capacity across the Network, as well as the status of the “systems changes” necessary to advance community-wide outcomes for opportunity youth.

The quantitative data in this report was collected through a self-assessment administered to OYF Network communities in spring 2020. This survey expanded upon data collected during the 2015-2017 OYF evaluation by exploring more nuanced aspects of collaborative capacity, systems change, and the values that drive these efforts. The qualitative information in this report was collected through the same assessment and interviews with leads from the collaboratives.

On the following pages, we describe the characteristics of the communities, collaboratives, and backbones that compose the OYF Network, as well as collaborative capacity across the Network, and the state of the systems in which these collaboratives operate. The report closes with considerations for how the Forum for Community Solutions and its partners can further support Network members to build their capacity and increase their impact through systems change.

27 OYF COMMUNITIES AS OF 2019

- Atlanta, GA
- Austin, TX
- Baltimore, MD*
- Boston, MA
- Chicago, IL
- Del Norte County, CA
- Denver, CO
- Detroit, MI
- Flint, MI
- Greenville, MS
- Hartford, CT
- Hopi Reservation, AZ
- Jasper, TX*
- Los Angeles, CA
- Maine, Southern Rural
- Newark, NJ
- New Orleans, LA*
- New York, NY
- Oakland, CA*
- Philadelphia, PA
- Phoenix, AZ
- San Augustine, TX
- San Diego, CA
- San Francisco, CA
- San Jose/Santa Clara County, CA
- South King County, WA
- Tucson, AZ

**Did not participate in the 2019 assessment*



THE NETWORK AT A GLANCE

Opportunity Youth in the OYF Network

Of the 3.4 million 16 to 24-year-olds living in OYF Network communities in 2017, 12%, or about 414,000 young people, were disconnected from work and school. The rates of disconnection were even higher among some racial and ethnic subgroups, with 31% of American Indian youth, 20% of Black youth, and 13% of Hispanic youth disconnected from school and work, compared to 8% of white youth.⁹ With the COVID-19 pandemic unfolding during the writing of this report, rates of youth disconnection are estimated to have doubled in the last six months.¹⁰

The OYF Common Measures—developed as part of the Forum’s Equity Counts initiative—provide further understanding of the opportunity youth landscape by examining disconnection from each segment of the education-to-work pipeline. Based on these rates across the OYF communities in 2017, among all 16 to 24-year-olds, we see the following rates:

- » High school disconnection: 14%
- » Postsecondary disconnection: 21%
- » Workforce disconnection: 11%¹¹

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF OPPORTUNITY YOUTH IN OYF COMMUNITIES, 2017

GENDER

| | |
|--------|-------|
| Male | 54.2% |
| Female | 45.8% |

AGE

| | |
|-------|-------|
| 16-19 | 24.6% |
| 20-24 | 75.4% |

RACE/ETHNICITY

| | |
|-----------------------------------|-------|
| Hispanic, any race | 38.2% |
| Black or African American | 31.9% |
| White | 19.1% |
| Two or more races | 3.0% |
| American Indian or Alaskan Native | 2.2% |
| Other race | 0.5% |

INCOME LEVEL

| | |
|------------------------------|-------|
| 200% of poverty line or less | 60.6% |
|------------------------------|-------|

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

| | |
|----------------------------|-------|
| Less than high school | 26.1% |
| High school diploma or GED | 48.9% |
| Some college | 17.4% |
| College degree | 7.6% |

NATIVITY

| | |
|-------------------------|-------|
| Born in another country | 13.4% |
|-------------------------|-------|

CHILDREN

| | |
|---------------------------------|------|
| Opportunity youth with children | 4.7% |
|---------------------------------|------|

Source: American Community Survey data, 2017



Collaboratives across the OYF Network have been working to lower these disconnection rates, and reconnect opportunity youth to education and employment. In 2019, the partners across the OYF Network served approximately 67,000 youth—both opportunity youth and youth at risk of disconnection. Of these youth, about 46,000 were 16 to 24-year-olds who are not in school and not working (“opportunity youth”).¹² Although collaboratives directly served these youth through a variety of programs and services provided by partner organizations, the systems change efforts across the OYF Network affect all 414,000 opportunity youth. While siloed data systems and limited collaborative and partner capacity pose challenges to accurately capturing opportunity youth outcomes, a subset of collaboratives reported opportunity youth outcomes among partners in 2019.

TABLE 1:
Outcomes for Youth Served by a Subset of
Collaboratives in 2019*

| NUMBER OF YOUTH WHO | ALL YOUTH | OPPORTUNITY YOUTH |
|---|-----------|-------------------|
| Earned a high school diploma or equivalency | 5,879 | 4,475 |
| Enrolled in postsecondary education | 6,589 | 3,284 |
| Obtained employment | 9,695 | 3,896 |

*Note: Between 9 and 13 collaboratives, of 23 total, reported these data, depending on the outcome.



Characteristics of OYF Network Communities, Collaboratives, and Backbone Organizations

The 2019 OYF Network represents a diverse set of 27 communities¹³ bringing cross-sector partners together to improve education and employment outcomes for opportunity youth. While partners involved in the Network share a common vision, the communities in which they operate, the collaboratives leading this work, and the backbone organizations coordinating these efforts vary greatly.

COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS

Communities served by Network collaboratives spanned the United States, from coast to coast and across urban and rural geographies. The location of these collaboratives helps create a strong, diverse cohort of learning opportunities, and provides an important context to the work—while their goals are the same, communities must tailor their strategies to the local context.

Collaboratives primarily focused their opportunity youth efforts on a single county or city, rather than a more targeted set of neighborhoods or a broader region spanning multiple counties. Seventy percent (16 collaboratives) described their geographic scope as a single city or county. However, the nature of these cities and counties varied greatly, not only in their geographic locations across the country, as seen in Figure 2, but also in their population size and density.

While the Network remained mostly urban, a growing number of rural or small-town communities recently became members. A clear majority of the Network served urban areas: nine communities were described as only urban and eight communities included urban areas. However, four collaboratives served only rural or small-town communities, and five additional communities served rural or small-town areas as part of their broader geographies.

FIGURE 1
The Majority of Collaboratives Worked in Urban Areas

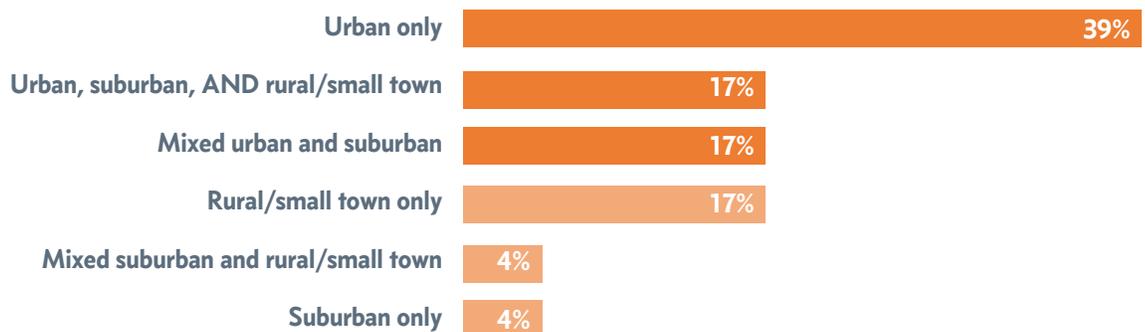




FIGURE 2
OYF Collaboratives Participating in the 2019 Evaluation



COLLABORATIVE CHARACTERISTICS

Communities in the Network are served by cross-sector collaboratives working to connect youth to education and employment opportunities. The variation across these communities is reflected in the range of collaborative ages, sizes, and areas of focus.

Age of Youth-focused Collaborative Efforts: Across the Network, collaboratives have spent a median of seven years focusing their work on opportunity youth. Nearly three out of four collaboratives (74%) have focused on opportunity youth efforts for 5 to 10 years. The remaining collaboratives are split evenly between those with less than five years of experience focusing their efforts on opportunity youth (13%) and those with more than ten years of experience (13%).

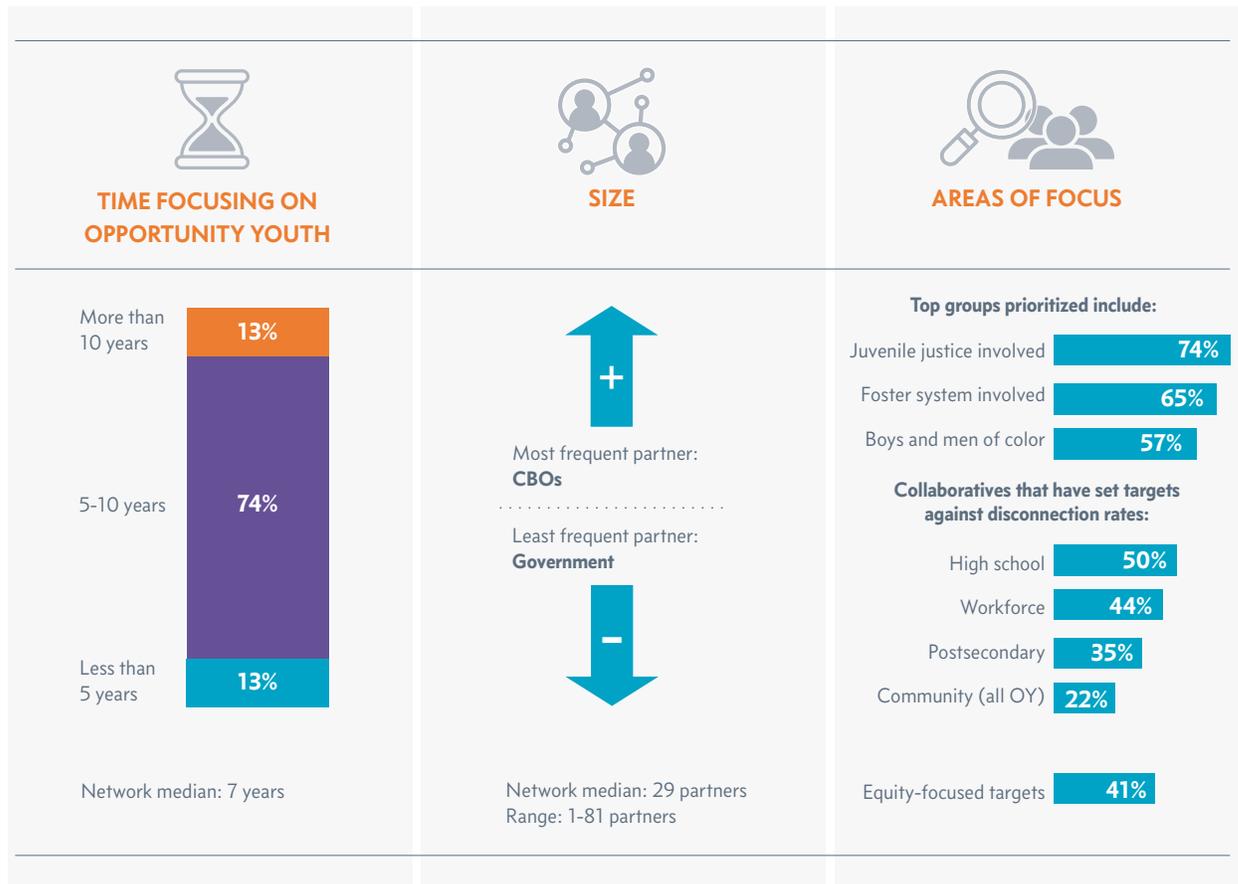
Collaborative Size: On average, collaboratives included 29 partner organizations; however, the number of partners varied widely across collaboratives, with one collaborative identifying 81 organizations as partners. This wide variety in collaborative breadth reflects the diversity of geographies and partnership environments present in the Network. Collaboratives most often engaged community-based organizations, with 14 community-based organizations engaged in communities across the Network, on average. Government institutions—of which there are fewer relative to other partner types—were the least likely to be engaged, with 3.8 participating in collaboratives, on average.



Areas of Focus: Depending on the needs of their communities, collaboratives often focused on specific populations and reconnection to particular segments of the school-to-work pipeline. In 2019, at least half of collaboratives reported actively prioritizing at least one of the following: youth involved in the juvenile justice system, foster youth or youth transitioning out of foster care, and boys and men of color.

Setting measurable targets is another way to focus the work of the OYF collaboratives and track progress. While all collaboratives will set targets in 2021 using Common Measures data, as of 2019, 50% of collaboratives had already set numerical targets for their high school disconnection rate goals. Fewer had set targets for workforce disconnection (44%), postsecondary disconnection (35%), or the overall community disconnection rate (22%). Furthermore, nine collaboratives (41%) had set equity-focused goals for youth outcomes based on race or ethnicity. This can be a way to hold collaboratives accountable to achieving equitable outcomes.

COLLABORATIVE CHARACTERISTICS SNAPSHOT



BACKBONE CHARACTERISTICS

Backbone organizations are a critical component of the collective impact model, providing a structure and team to coordinate the work of the collaborative.

Backbone organizations varied widely across the OYF Network, in type, size, and organizational resources.

The opportunity youth-related work of most backbone organizations (61% of backbones) happened as part of a broader community initiative, such as cradle-to-career education or workforce-focused initiatives. Over three-quarters of backbones (78%) also serve as a funder or grantor in their communities.



Types of Organizations That Serve as OYF Backbones:

Various types of organizations have assumed the role of OYF backbones in their collaboratives. While about **one in three backbones are community-based organizations**, a smaller percentage are community foundations (17%), workforce investment boards (13%), or intermediary organizations (13%). Other types of backbones include Chambers of Commerce, cross-organizational partnerships, and educational institutions.

Budget Size: Backbones vary widely in both total organizational budget and the amount of that budget that is dedicated to opportunity youth.

Backbones have a median organizational budget of \$8.3 million and a median budget specifically for opportunity youth work of \$500,000 (Figure 3). However, there is a very wide range across organizations: total budgets ranged from \$130,000 to \$80 million, and opportunity youth dedicated budgets ranged from \$43,000 to \$4.3 million.

Staffing: Paralleling variations in budget, **the number of staff that backbones dedicated to this work varied greatly.** Backbone organizations had between two and 200 full-time-equivalents (FTEs) working for them, and they dedicated 0.5 to 17 FTEs specifically to opportunity youth-related work (Figure 4). The roles of staff focusing on opportunity youth primarily related to programmatic or pathways work, and collaborative facilitation and leadership. Backbones dedicated a much smaller number of staff time to policy, fundraising, data, and communications. Many collaboratives highlighted the benefit of staff who can dedicate time to systems change levers—including data, policy, and communications—while others lamented being understaffed in these key areas.

Years Focused on Opportunity Youth Efforts: Backbones have spent a similar amount of time focusing on opportunity youth as their overall collaboratives. Whereas collaboratives spent a median of seven years, backbones have spent a median of six years. A majority (70%) have spent 5-10 years. Those who have spent less than five or more than ten years are relatively evenly split, with 17% spending more than 10 years and 13% spending less than five.

FIGURE 3
Most Backbone Organizations Have Budgets of Under \$1 Million for Opportunity Youth-focused Work

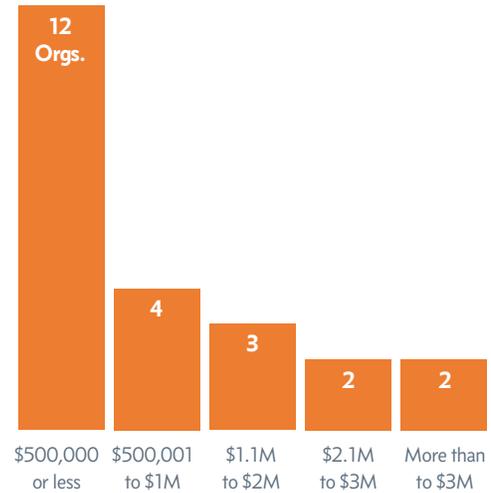
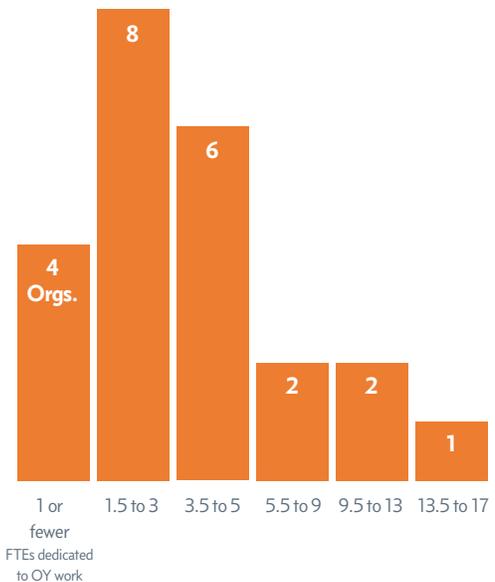


FIGURE 4
Most Backbone Organizations Have Five or Fewer Staff Dedicated to Opportunity Youth Efforts





BACKBONE CHARACTERISTICS SNAPSHOT

|  TYPES OF ORGANIZATIONS |  BUDGET |  STAFF |  TIME FOCUSING ON OPPORTUNITY YOUTH |
|---|---|---|--|
| <p>Community-based organizations 30%</p> <p>Community foundation or funder 17%</p> <p>Intermediary 13%</p> <p>Workforce investment board 13%</p> <p>Other organizations include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chambers of Commerce • Partnerships • Educational Institutions | <p>TOTAL BACKBONE</p> <p>Network median: \$8.3 M</p> <p>Range: \$130,000 to \$80M</p> <p>OPPORTUNITY YOUTH-SPECIFIC</p> <p>Network median: \$500,000</p> <p>Range: \$43,000 to \$4.3M</p> | <p>TOTAL BACKBONE</p> <p>Network median: 22 FTEs</p> <p>Range: 2-200 FTEs</p> <p>OPPORTUNITY YOUTH-SPECIFIC</p> <p>Network median: 3 FTEs</p> <p>Range: 0.5-17 FTEs</p> | <p>More than 10 years 17%</p> <p>5-10 years 70%</p> <p>Less than 5 years 13%</p> <p>Network median: 6 years</p> |

Understanding the ways in which communities, collaboratives, and backbone organizations differ provides important context to understanding the OYF Network’s capacity and observed outcomes. The diversity of these collaboratives—across their geographies, age of their partnerships, differing focus areas, and varied level of available resources— informs the levels of capacity and systems changes that will be explored in the next sections.



Organizing for Systems Change

Since the Network's inception, an underlying assumption of using the collective impact model to connect opportunity youth to education and career pathways is the belief that disconnected and inadequate systems are at the source of youth disconnection. To successfully engage and re-engage young people, systems of individuals, programs, organizations, policies, and resources must change. And by investing in the development, learning, and support of cross-sector collaboratives to change these systems, youth outcomes — connection to education and workforce pathways — will improve.

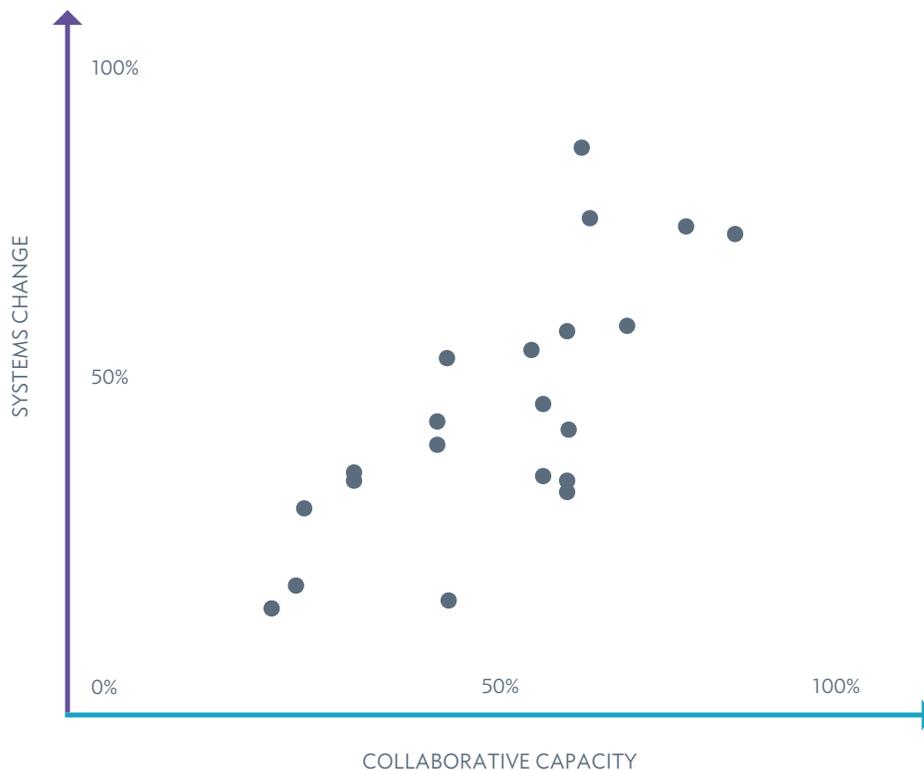
The OYF evaluation focused on, and measured, two interrelated elements central to the OYF theory of change:

1. Collaborative Capacity: The infrastructure and processes necessary for the collaborative to carry out its opportunity youth agenda; and

2. Systems Change: "Shifts to the conditions that hold a problem in place"¹⁴ —in this case, disconnected pathways and inequitable conditions that prevent young people from achieving education and employment outcomes.

Figure 5 illustrates the relationship between each OYF community's collaborative capacity and evidence of systems change, as measured by the 2019 self-assessment. Collaboratives with greater capacity tend to see greater evidence of the systems changes necessary for opportunity youth to succeed. These findings reinforce the need to invest in and build the "collaborative muscle" necessary for creating systems that promote success for opportunity youth.

FIGURE 5
Greater Collaborative Capacity is Associated with Greater Evidence of Systems Change



Values reflect the % of indicators reported as strong evidence by each collaborative.

● = collaborative



A NOTE ABOUT METHODOLOGY

Findings in this report are drawn from the 2019 OYF self-assessment and interviews with collaborative leads. The self-assessment focused on four areas: 1) Community and Opportunity Youth Collaborative Characteristics; 2) Collaborative Capacity; 3) Changes in Programs, Organizations, and Systems (i.e., Systems Change); and 4) Youth Outputs and Outcomes.

The assessment of collaborative capacity and systems change asked collaboratives to rate the presence of a number of indicators on a scale from 0 to 3 (0=does not describe us, 1=somewhat describes us, 2=describes us well, and 3=describes us very well).

In the previous OYF evaluation, we only asked whether an indicator was present. Using the four-point scale in this assessment allows us to examine indicators with more nuance and detail, as well as to set a “quality standard” for capacity and systems change.

In analyzing the data, we looked at both: 1) strong evidence of an indicator, meaning the indicator was rated a 2 or a 3, (“well” or “very well”); and 2) some evidence of an indicator, where the indicator was rated a 1 (“somewhat”).

Most percentages reported throughout this report refer to the percentage of collaboratives or indicators that met the “strong evidence” threshold. We use this threshold to establish a standard for determining the extent that a capacity or systems change is fully in place. Occasionally, we provide data on the percentage of communities or indicators that had “some” evidence for additional context or to acknowledge where collaboratives or communities are beginning to make changes.



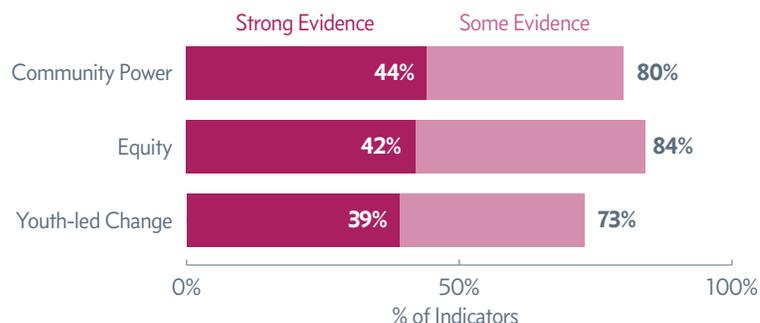
GROUND THE WORK IN EQUITY, YOUTH-LED CHANGE, AND COMMUNITY POWER

Equity, youth-led change, and community power are core values and strategies embedded in the OYF work. Collaboratives are incorporating elements of these priorities into their infrastructure and processes, as well as into their efforts to change local systems that affect opportunity youth. Collaboratives show strengths in integrating a community power-building framework into the vision for their work, as well as explicitly acknowledging racial equity and community disparities. Youth were highly involved in collaborative efforts and have influenced programs, organizations, and pathways. Opportunities for growth include greater involvement of community members in collaborative work and more equity-focused narratives and media coverage. Youth were less active in broader systems change work, such as policy and funding decisions.

Equity, youth-led change, and community power are core values of the OYF and are embedded across its efforts to build collaborative capacity, improve local systems, and build pathways to reconnect youth to education and employment. They serve as priorities in how collaboratives organize for action as well as what successful systems change includes.

A unique and differentiating feature of the Network, communities share these values and are taking action to embed them in their work—78% of indicators of equity, youth-led change, and community power within collaborative capacity and systems change work were reported as at least somewhat present among all OYF communities, while 41% were strongly present. The difference between these rates may suggest that collaboratives share these priorities, but are still determining how to fully operationalize equity, youth-led change, and community power activities.

FIGURE 6
Most Indicators of Community Power, Equity, and Youth-led Change Were Present across Communities, with Strong Evidence Reported for about 40% of Those Indicators





Community Power

Community-led solutions are at the crux of the work of the OYF Network and the most strongly present among the three cross-cutting priorities, with 44% of indicators showing a robust presence. The Network aims to build the power and influence of those who have historically been excluded from opportunity, building local leadership that can lead to positive change.

Incorporation of community power into the vision for opportunity youth work is a strength of the OYF Network.

Fifty-seven percent of collaboratives reported strong incorporation of a community power building frame—i.e., building the power of marginalized communities and those most affected by the systems they seek to change—into their vision for opportunity youth work. Having this strong vision is the first step to embedding community power throughout the work of the collaborative. Furthermore, 74% of collaboratives noted that the general public was at least somewhat knowledgeable of their vision. Fewer collaboratives reported that community members were actively involved in the collaborative's work (44% reported strong evidence), or in assessing the collaborative's progress (30%). Increased engagement of residents and community stakeholders that are not part of or representing organizations is an area to further build.

Equity

Equity is also a critical value of the OYF, from inclusion and participation in setting the opportunity youth agenda to a goal of equitable outcomes, including reducing racial and ethnic gaps in disconnection rates. Forty-two percent of equity indicators across capacity and systems change were strongly in place in the Network.

Every collaborative in the Network acknowledged racial equity or other community-specific disparities in its planning (100% reported at least some evidence of this).

Not only is equity acknowledged as a critical factor in setting an opportunity youth agenda, but roughly half of collaboratives (52%) reported strong evidence that their membership reflects the diversity of the community. Fewer collaboratives, however, noted diverse decision-makers within the collaboratives (44% noted this as a strength), pointing to opportunities to build more diverse leadership and ensure equity and inclusion in decision makers roles.

Many collaboratives have seen a shift in how stakeholders understand and discuss racial disparities, and continue to seek out stakeholders committed to authentic change. More than half (57%) of collaboratives reported strong evidence that stakeholders discussed challenges that affect various racial, ethnic, gender or age groups, and almost half (48%) shared that stakeholders understood racial disparities and the need to target strategies. One collaborative spoke of the need to be intentional about engaging employer partners that are truly invested in diversity and equity.

“... are they really interested in providing jobs to Black and Brown and opportunity youth? Do they have pathways carved out for individuals who might have been justice-involved? Is that work environment really going to be conducive to opportunity youth? We don't want to put youth in work environments where they are going to feel degraded, siloed, and not necessarily warm and receptive, just to meet a target demographic for a larger corporation. So, we really are looking to make sure that we are currently partnering with employers that are really, really interested, invested in diversity and equity, and it's not just a tagline.”



Youth-led Change

Thirty-nine percent of the indicators of youth-led change were strongly evident across the Network. Building the leadership of opportunity youth so they can inform and lead efforts for systemic change has been a critical piece since the start of the OYF Network. It is based on the belief that solutions for opportunity youth must include and be led by youth themselves. Across communities, youth are involved in the work of the collaboratives in a variety of ways—such as informing the larger vision and agenda, designing new programs, assessing existing ones, collecting and analyzing data, and sharing their stories with the broader public.

Nearly all collaboratives incorporate youth into their work; however, there is room to improve collaborative capacity to do this more fully and frequently. Nearly all collaboratives reported incorporating youth, in at least some way, into their work—involving them in planning, meetings, work groups, and decision making. However, only about one-half of collaboratives report doing this “well” or “very well.” More than 90% of collaboratives noted that they had structures in place to engage youth in shaping, refining, and supporting implementation of the opportunity youth agenda, but only 44% reported doing this “well” or “very well.”

Youth input is more commonly integrated with organizational, programmatic, and pathway systems changes than with public policy or funding decisions. For example, almost six in ten collaboratives (57%) had strong evidence of integrating opportunity youth recommendations into program and pathway design. Del Norte and Detroit used human-centered design processes to engage youth in re-envisioning programs and pathways. Youth voice was much less likely to be integrated into systems further removed from direct programming and pathways—such as public policy and funding decisions—where 26% and 9% of collaboratives, respectively, reported strong evidence of youth influence. Examples of communities with success in engaging youth in public policy change include:

- » In Hartford (via its Youth Leadership Program), youth met with state leaders, federal officials like Sen. Blumenthal, and other decision makers to discuss key issues affecting opportunity youth in the region.
- » In Maine, a Young People’s Caucus is helping “*shift policy and practice with [youth] at the forefront.*” The Caucus convenes youth to bring their concerns, perspectives, and recommendations to state agencies and legislatures.

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN DATA AND LEARNING

Although most collaboratives used data to better facilitate their opportunity youth work, youth engagement in data and learning processes was still rare for most collaboratives. Less than half of the collaboratives involved youth in participatory research and/or data gathering efforts “well” or “very well” (39%), and significantly fewer in reviewing, reflecting on, and making sense of its data (13%).



BUILDING CAPACITY TO CARRY OUT THE OPPORTUNITY YOUTH AGENDA

Collaborative capacity refers to the infrastructure and processes necessary for the collaborative to carry out its opportunity youth agenda. A look at the capacity of collaboratives across the Network reveals strength in collaboratives’ convening power and the diversity of their members. Data use—a priority for the Network—shows promise, although individual strengths vary greatly. Findings about communications capacity are consistent with the prior OYF evaluation, as collaboratives have been successful in engaging stakeholders one-on-one, but have less consistently used communications methods that reach broad audiences. Resource development, particularly financial support for the backbone organization, was the lowest-rated area of capacity across the Network.

Sufficient capacity is necessary for collaboratives to carry out the opportunity youth agenda in their communities. While the structure of collaboratives across the Network varies, core capacities ensure partners can work together to change systems within and beyond their communities.

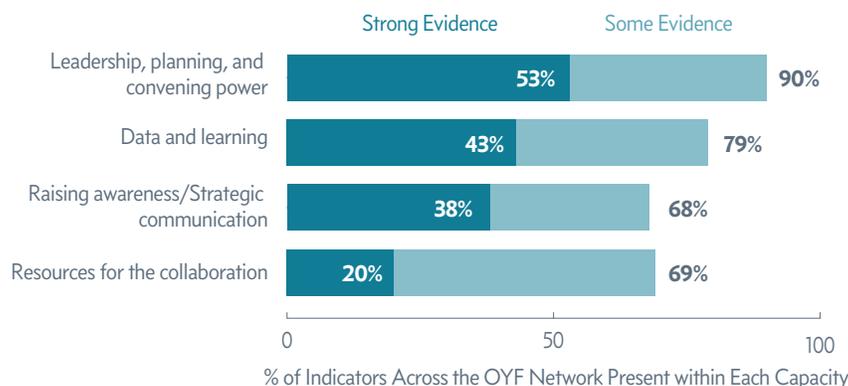
Collaborative capacity varied across the Network, with some collaboratives just beginning to establish the processes necessary to carry out their work and others having well-established processes with robust infrastructure. Examination of the relationships between collaborative characteristics and overall capacity suggests that collaboratives and backbones that have had opportunity youth efforts for a longer time have slightly greater capacity than those with less experience focusing on opportunity youth. Rural collaboratives generally had lower capacity than urban or other sites. Most notably, collaboratives with larger backbone organization budgets devoted to opportunity youth efforts were statistically more likely to have greater capacity than collaboratives led by less-resourced backbones.¹⁵

The evaluation investigated four capacities across the Network:

- » Leadership, Planning, and Convening Power
- » Data and Learning
- » Raising Awareness/Strategic Communication
- » Collaborative Resources

The strength of each capacity, measured by the percentage of indicators present within each capacity, appears in Figure 7. A more detailed look at each capacity follows in this section.

FIGURE 7
Leadership, Planning, and Convening Power Was the Strongest Capacity across the OYF Network





Leadership, Planning, and Convening Power

At their core, collaboratives require sufficient leadership, planning, and convening power. A primary function of collaboratives, the ability to convene diverse stakeholders around a common agenda, ensures that the necessary partners are brought together and organized to fulfill the collaborative's vision. Among the four elements of collaborative capacity, collaborative leadership, planning, and convening power is where the Network demonstrated greatest strength; 90% of these indicators were at least somewhat present in the collaboratives, while about half (53%) were rated as strong. These findings suggest that, as a group, collaboratives across the Network are developing essential capacities for facilitating the work in their communities.

Collaboratives have successfully engaged a variety of sectors and representatives from diverse organizational levels. A key and foundational aspect of collective impact work, collaboratives reported consistent engagement of representatives from necessary sectors and systems in their communities. Collaboratives had, on average, 29 partners. Partners most often represented community-based organizations, followed by K-12 educational institutions and higher education institutions. Community members and employers were less frequently engaged. Leaders from a range of sectors were also actively engaged in the opportunity youth agenda. In addition to sector leaders, members from a variety of organizational levels—from executives to front-line staff— were actively involved in collaboratives' work. While convening diverse groups around a common agenda can be difficult, collaboratives have used a number of tactics to align stakeholders with their vision. In Tucson, the collaborative uses the Theory of Aligned Contribution with its network partners to assist with collaborative goal setting. Partners collectively looks at goals and targets to assess how individual organizations can contribute to overall progress.

While collaboratives have had success in convening partners to execute their opportunity youth agenda, they have less frequently instituted mechanisms for holding themselves accountable to those efforts.

A critical component of collaborative efforts, accountability ensures that partners fulfill their responsibilities and share responsibility for their work together. Similarly, collaborative accountability to the public ensures that the collaborative maintains transparency and is meeting its commitment to the community. Across the OYF Network, few collaboratives have established formal processes for ensuring partner and community accountability.

- **Partner Accountability.** Just over one-third of collaboratives (39%) reported that the provision of internal updates on the progress of partners and work groups was a strength, while even fewer (22%) reported a strength of clearly articulated roles and responsibilities for carrying out its agenda—an essential ingredient for ensuring strategic and coordinated efforts.
- **Public Accountability.** Consistent with the data on partner accountability, 39% of collaboratives reported strong evidence of accountability to the public reporting on their plan of action and progress, while even fewer communicated a measurable goal with the community or had community members involved in assessing the collaborative's progress (30% reported strong evidence).

INCORPORATING YOUTH VOICE

Collaboratives recognize the role youth must play in setting the direction for their work. Ten collaboratives (44%) reported strong evidence of structures in place to engage youth in shaping, refining, and supporting the implementation of the opportunity youth agenda.



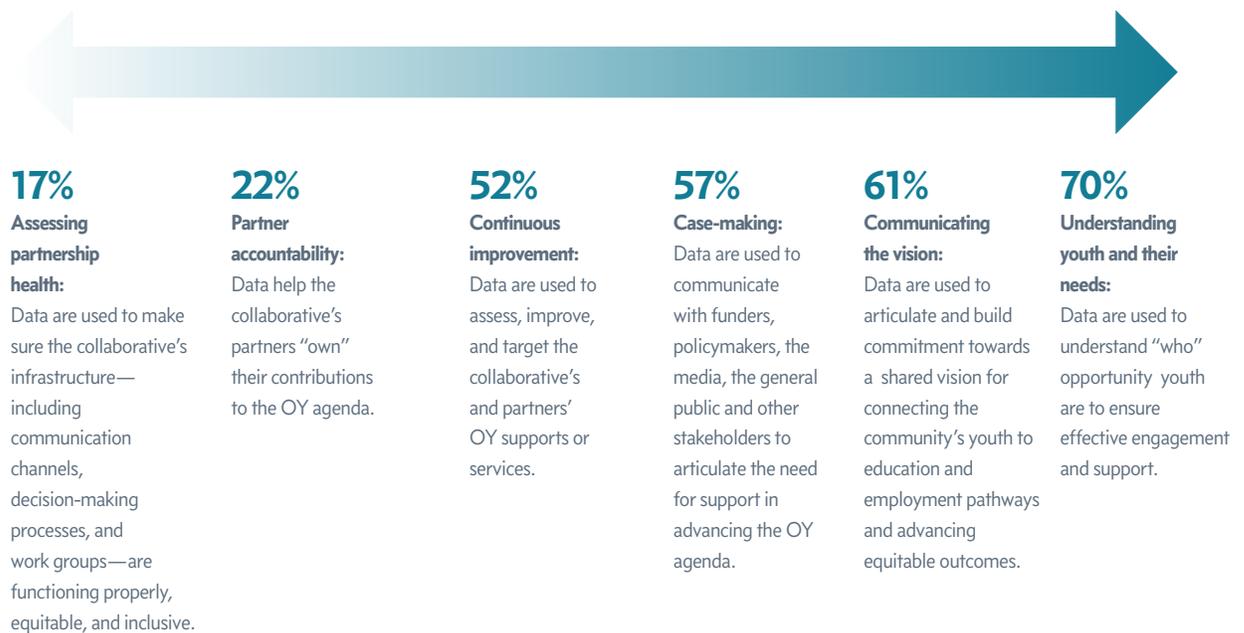
Data and Learning

Collaboratives recognize the need to use data to inform strategies, assess and improve progress, and drive decisions among partners and stakeholders influencing programmatic, policy, and funding decisions. An earlier OYF evaluation revealed that collaboratives at all levels of experience with data are eager to enhance their capacity, and investments through the Forum’s recently launched Data for Impact Initiative have sought to further equip collaboratives for effective data use.¹⁶ In 2019, collaboratives reported mixed success with developing data and learning capacity, although Network-wide data point to strengths in using data for understanding youth needs and communicating the collaborative’s vision.

Collaboratives’ data use varied across the Network—they have placed less emphasis on data used for internal purposes, such as partner accountability and assessment of the partnership’s health. The majority of collaboratives reported strong use of data for understanding youth and their needs (70%) and communicating their vision (61%). Far fewer are using data for partner accountability or to assess the partnership’s health. Figure 8 illustrates the percentage of collaboratives that reported strong data use among each of the six data uses of the Data Use Framework developed through the Forum’s Equity Counts initiative. Collaboratives have had much success in using data to understand the needs of their youth—including primary barriers, key demographics, and the communities they live in. Most collaboratives are also well-equipped to use data to communicate their vision. In Philadelphia, sharing a set of opportunity youth data (from Census and ACS data) with the community boosted organizations’ interest in identifying strategies to reduce the youth disconnection rate. The collaborative in San Augustine produced data dashboards on education and employment to share with schools and other public entities. These tools have helped community members develop a shared understanding of the challenges facing local opportunity youth.

Trends in data use mimic trends in other aspects of collaborative capacity, with data playing a less prominent role in internal accountability or to assess partnership health—areas within collaborative capacity that were rated lower overall.

FIGURE 8
Collaboratives are Using Data to Understand Youth Needs and Communicate Their Vision with Their Communities*



*Percent of collaboratives that reported “strong” evidence of each data use.



“...It’s amazing how much feedback we get from people saying, ‘oh wow, I kind of heard it but I never really knew it until I actually visually looked at it in this dashboard...”

About half of collaboratives reported bringing strong equity practices to their data efforts. An important part of collaboratives’ data use, applying an equity lens to data collection, review, and use, has been a focus of the OYF Network since its onset. Collaboratives are taking great effort to ensure that the data they use—and the approach they take to interpreting and sharing those data—is inclusive of diverse perspectives and experiences, and that data help uncover and highlight inequities within and across systems. Importantly, 45% of collaboratives rated using data to address inequities among population subgroups as a strength. Similarly, 44% reported partners’ use of disaggregated data to uncover disproportionate outcomes as a strength. These practices serve as examples of the need to understand and address the unique needs of various youth populations. The Hartford Data Collaborative combines data from more than 25 partner organizations into one data system to examine the total services provided and outcomes reached. The data system combines data from multiple systems, allowing for unduplicated counts of youth served and is also disaggregated by race, gender, and ethnicity.

Limited staff capacity and access to data are affecting collaborative data use. Collaboratives reported needing stronger data capacity to do their work more effectively. While 78% and 70% of collaboratives reported they had at least some of the data and personnel necessary to do their work, respectively, only about a third met the threshold for strong capacity in these areas. Importantly, 14 (61%) collaboratives have an individual dedicated, in part, to opportunity youth data work (the average FTE dedicated to data among these collaboratives was .9 staff), while another nine (39%) do not have any personnel dedicated to this function. The benefits of such staff are clear. In San Francisco, a dedicated staff member facilitates working with partners to go beyond data collection and help assess impact. Philadelphia, as well, has recently increased its data capacity by hiring a staff member with experience in data analysis software. This skill set will enable the collaborative to better and more deeply use the information they already collect. Capacity issues related to data may be particularly pressing for smaller collaboratives. As one collaborative lead reflected, *“certainly, when we get to the smaller organizations, it’s staffing, having time and attention to getting the data in. ...Smaller organizations that might not have a full-time staff person to focus on data, training those staff that might be more frontline workers and assuring that they’re appropriately getting the information in.”*

Collaboratives have an opportunity to strengthen the role of youth in evaluation and data efforts. While many collaboratives involved youth in meetings and incorporated youth-informed decision-making processes and agenda setting, fewer collaboratives involved youth in assessing collaborative progress or interpreting the collaborative’s data. For example, only 13% of collaboratives reported a strength in regularly and directly engaging young people in reviewing, reflecting on, and making sense of data. In Santa Clara County, youth engagement fellows interview young people from across the community and share their findings with a Young Leaders Council, creating a youth-to-youth feedback loop that identifies priorities for the collaborative’s governance team.



Raising Awareness and Strategic Communication

Communications capacity is vital to helping collaboratives communicate their vision, bring attention to opportunity youth needs, and engage partners and stakeholders in efforts to change systems. OYF Network members have had success engaging partners one-on-one, although broad-based communications efforts, such as marketing campaign strategies, were not as common and were less developed.

Collaboratives were best poised to engage in communications activities one-on-one with policy makers and other stakeholders. Collaboratives have excelled in laying a strong foundation for their communications work through building relationships with policy makers. Sixty-five percent of collaboratives reported a strength of reaching out to decision-makers—including public officials and policy makers—to build relationships in support of their opportunity youth policy change agendas. In Phoenix, a Leadership Council is convened to advance the work of the Opportunities for Youth Initiative. The Council includes political champions, with local elected officials including U.S. congressmen, state senators, and county and city leadership. The backbone organization speaks to The Council about opportunity youth issues to help elevate goals and initiatives through their government agency. In addition, more than half (57%) of collaboratives rated themselves strong at sharing data and/or research with key decision makers to make a case for policy changes.

While the majority of collaboratives reported some progress in sharing public-facing reports or data to raise awareness about opportunity youth in their communities, only about a third engaged in substantive activities focused on strategic communications. More than two-thirds (70%) of collaboratives reported at least some success in releasing publications and other products that leveraged recent data on the local opportunity youth population, while many more are preparing to do so (30% did this “well” or “very well”). The Flint and Genesee Opportunity Youth Coalition is working with local partners to develop a data dashboard to collectively track community outcomes for opportunity youth, as part of a campaign to increase awareness and engage more partners. A quarter of collaboratives (26%) rated themselves strong at garnering attention about opportunity youth-related issues in the local media, while fewer produced opportunity youth-focused public reports throughout the year (17% did this “well” or “very well”).

Opportunities exist for collaboratives to engage youth in public-facing communications efforts. About a third of collaboratives reported strong evidence of youth using strategic storytelling to communicate and elevate issues to the public (35%) or contributing to the collaborative’s communication efforts with the public (26%). As one collaborative noted, it “uses the Youth Advisory Council to tell our story to the powers that be around here. They would go to the Mayors Workforce, the [workforce] board meeting, and tell the opportunity youth story.” Such efforts have proven effective in helping policy makers understand the opportunity youth experience and how public policy can support youth through these experiences.



Collaborative Resources

Collaboratives rely on in-kind and financial support to help build their capacity to facilitate the work in their communities. Raising resources for collaborative efforts, particularly backbone support and other infrastructure necessary to carry out the opportunity youth agenda, has been a challenge for OYF Network members, and 2019 was no different.

Raising resources to advance the opportunity youth agenda has been challenging for most collaboratives, with backbone support especially hard to come by. Continuing a theme from the 2015–2017 evaluation, raising financial resources to support the work of the collaborative remains a challenge across the Network. As illustrated in Figure 9, collaboratives were most likely to receive support from partners in the form of personnel dedicated to its overall mission. While partner engagement demonstrates commitment and can offset capacity challenges, it rarely compensates for the staffing needed to carry out the collaborative’s vision. Several collaborative leaders discussed the challenges of being under-staffed, noting the difficulties in affecting systems levers like data, narrative change, and policy without the funding or staff to do so. In the words of one collaborative leader who put it bluntly, *“most funders want to fund direct service... They don’t want to fund the backbone thing.”* Additionally, several collaborative leaders remarked that *sustaining* funding has been a challenge, noting that operational support is more likely to be available at the beginning of a new funding relationship, but not in later years success in raising funds, which was more likely to come from private, rather than public, sources. Median funding received by backbone organizations for opportunity youth work in 2019 from private sources was \$263,000, compared to \$186,000 from public sources. Public sources most commonly included WIOA, TANF, SNAP, and a variety of state and city or county sources. In addition, collaboratives were more likely to report that their backbone organizations received operational funding from private sources than public ones (78% vs. 52%¹⁷). These findings reinforce previous evaluation findings about the reliance of backbone organizations on private sources to support their collective impact operations.

FIGURE 9
Collaboratives Were More Likely to Receive Personnel and In-kind Support Than Financial Resources





SYSTEMS CHANGE

Systems change “shifts the conditions that hold problems in place.”¹⁸ An analysis of the seven elements of systems change assessed across the OYF Network reveals a distinct pattern in the types of systems changes most common across the Network in 2019. Programmatic changes were the most common among communities, while public policy and funding changes—arguably the most challenging but with the potential for the greatest community-wide impact—were much less common. These findings point to the long arc for many of these changes, and reveal that collaboratives may need additional multi-year support in tackling these complex aspects of the systems in which they operate.

Systems change refers to “shifts to the conditions that hold a problem in place.”¹⁹ The OYF Network serves as a collective of communities working towards systems change to better re-engage and support opportunity youth. A look at how systems change in 2019 varied across different types of collaboratives suggests that larger collaboratives and those with more staff dedicated to opportunity youth efforts – as well as collaboratives and backbones that have focused on opportunity youth for a longer period of time – are more likely to report greater systems change. Urban collaboratives also generally reported greater systems change than rural or other sites. Most notably, collaboratives with larger backbone budgets dedicated to opportunity youth, as well as collaboratives with consistent staffing and backbone arrangements since the OYF’s launch,

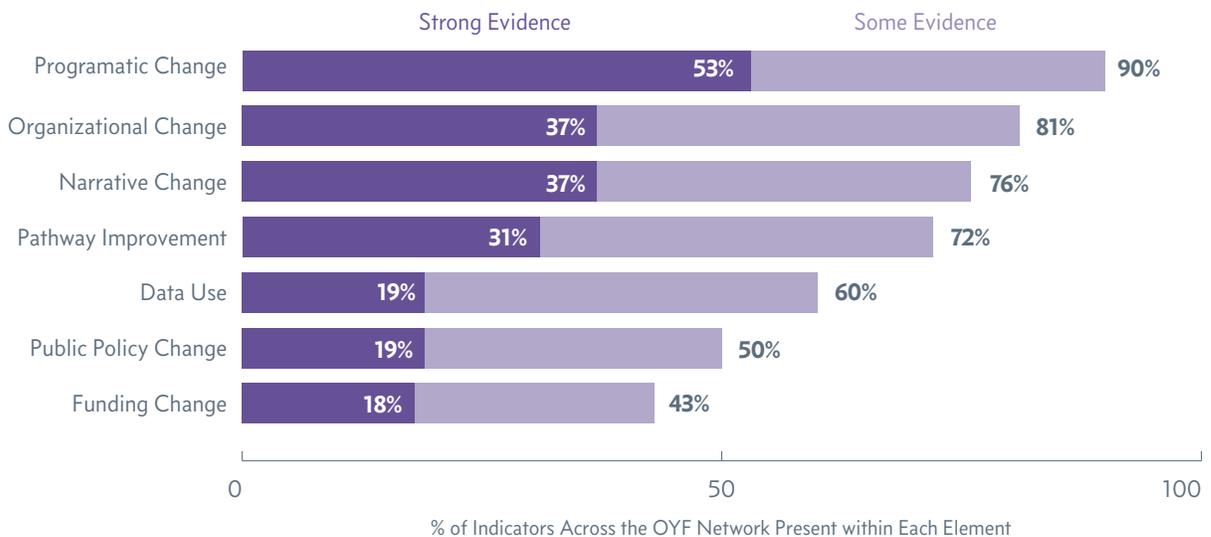
were statistically more likely to report greater evidence of systems change than collaboratives with less-resourced backbones or new or re-structured collaboratives.²⁰

This evaluation investigated seven elements of systems change that, when taken together, reflect the conditions necessary to produce equitable education and career outcomes for opportunity youth.

- 1. Programmatic Change
- 2. Organizational Change
- 3. Narrative Change
- 4. Pathway Improvement
- 5. Data Use
- 6. Public Policy
- 7. Funding Change

Figure 10 illustrates a clear pattern among these elements across the OYF Network, each of which is discussed in more detail in this section.

FIGURE 10
The OYF Network Has Seen Robust Evidence of Programmatic and Organizational Changes, While Public Policy and Funding Changes are Still Emerging





Programmatic Changes

Programmatic changes refer to changes made within organizations to programs and services that interact directly with opportunity youth. Collaborative partners excelled in making programmatic changes necessary to support opportunity youth; nearly all indicators being at least “somewhat” present. More than half of the indicators of programmatic change (53%) across the entire OYF Network were rated as strong by the collaboratives, and at least some evidence of the changes for 90% of these indicators. Collaboratives noted the relative ease of implementing programmatic changes, with one backbone staff member remarking, *“Something really simple, like expanding the length of a program in recognition of how difficult it is to reconnect ... That’s a very simple, but also meaningful change that agencies have the power to make and can make pretty easily.”*

Partner collaboration was a prominent feature of programmatic changes across OYF communities.

More than three-quarters of collaboratives (78%) reported strong evidence of communication among frontline staff from different partner programs. In addition, 61% of collaboratives reported strong evidence of new programs or improvements among existing programs based on conversations with other partners. At the Hopi Reservation, partners with the school district and an organization that does youth park service, preservation, and restoration work collaborated to expand options for youth to explore career paths and connect to postsecondary opportunities. Together, this part the classroom.

Many programmatic changes have been informed by youth input. About half of the collaboratives in the OYF Network included the voices of opportunity youth in the design of programs that serve them “well” or “very well.” Almost half of collaboratives (48%) reported a strength of soliciting recommendations from opportunity youth to inform program and pathway design, while 57% of collaboratives reported integrating opportunity youth recommendations as a strength. Multiple collaboratives, including Del Norte, Hartford, Denver, and Newark ensure youth input on programs and pathways through leadership training programs. Atlanta’s youth council conducted peer interviews and listening sessions, which led to specific program changes, including increasing follow-ups with participants, facilitating connections to employers, and streamlining application processes.

“Youth voice is very important – not just you have them show up for a focus group or interview and they never hear from you again, but you take the information and try to figure out a way to come up with some solutions, showing them that there is a different approach when they are involved in the process.”

While programmatic changes were common across the Network, neither programmatic monitoring and evaluation nor data collection were prominent features of collaboratives’ programmatic strategy. Fewer than half of the collaboratives reported success in monitoring the implementation and quality of their services for opportunity youth, or that program-level data was collected by organizations (44% reported doing this “well” or “very well”). These findings, which reflect the lowest-rated indicators among all “programmatic change” indicators, are aligned with lower data capacity ratings of partner accountability, and suggest that partners are prioritizing making programmatic changes, but have not yet fully instituted mechanisms for assessing the effectiveness of those changes.



Organizational Changes

Organizational changes are necessary to improve how programs and services are delivered to opportunity youth. In 2019, collaborations saw some types of changes emerge as areas of strength, while others proved more challenging. Across the Network, collaboratives reported strong evidence on 37% of the organizational change indicators, while more than 80% of those indicators were at least somewhat present in the OYF communities.

Partners are making progress in changing their organizational cultures to better meet opportunity youth needs, although have had less success in changing how they work with other organizations. Progress among organizational change measures took the form of two distinct changes—those reflecting changes to the way an organization operates and those that reflect changes in how organizations work with one another. Across the Network, partners were more likely to make changes to their own organizational cultures and processes than to how they work with one another.

- **Success in Changing Organizational Culture.**

Partners across the Network are demonstrating their commitment to opportunity youth by changing internal practices. Ninety-one percent of collaboratives reported that local organizations have had at least some success in adopting equity-focused goals or policies. More than half of collaboratives (57%) noted that local organizations incorporated a youth development framework into their culture and programming “well” or “very well,” and almost half of collaboratives noted that local organizations have a culture attentive to the needs and assets of opportunity youth (48% reporting strong evidence).

Austin Community College provides strong examples of such changes, as it has shifted policies to ensure that financial holds are not a deterrent to students continuing their postsecondary journey. The institution has also changed its student intake process to keep opportunity youth out of remedial education as much as possible, and ensured that mental health, housing and food security resources are available to students through its Student Success Center.

Of note, human-centered design principles have emerged as a way for organizations to think differently about their programming. In Del Norte County, organizations are designing programming to respond to youth most affected by systemic issues and health inequities, and then involving those youth in the collaborative’s efforts to build healthy communities. In Detroit, a human-centered approach at the Reengagement Center for Opportunity Youth has led to a “triage” approach, where youth meet with a career coach on intake to plan their individual course of action.

- **Early Signs of Increasing Collaboration across Organizations.**

Cross-organization collaboration has been more challenging. One aim of the OYF since its inception is for collaboratives to help partners work together more effectively and address the “disconnection” among organizations to ensure youth receive seamless, complementary services. Getting organizations to work together differently, however, can pose a challenge, and evaluation results shed light on this. Ten (44%) collaboratives reported strong evidence that partner organizations developed joint programs or services to better serve opportunity youth. Seven collaboratives (30%) noted strong evidence in seamlessly “handing off” opportunity youth from one organization to another, while six collaboratives (26%) reduced repetitive or redundant processes across organizations “well” or “very well.”

One strategy collaboratives are deploying to better coordinate services across organizations is use of a “referral hub.” Philadelphia is creating a centralized referral network to increase the number of opportunity youth accessing re-engagement opportunities and ensure better handoffs between programs. The Philadelphia Youth Network—the backbone organization in Philadelphia—reports the referral network has led to better city-wide understanding of social services. Phoenix has had success with its re-engagement center referral system by expanding access to its education partners, enabling access for youth who are at-risk of disconnection.



Narrative Changes

Narrative change, including raising the visibility of a shared opportunity youth agenda and an asset-based narrative in the OYF communities, is an area where collaboratives have made some headway, but still have work to do. Over one-third of the communications and narrative change indicators (37%) were rated as strongly present by the collaboratives, with about three-quarters of the indicators (76%) at least somewhat present.

Collaboratives indicated several important shifts in the narrative about opportunity youth, while pointing to opportunities to further shape the narrative and community perceptions. As discussed previously, there is evidence that local organizations have strong, youth-focused cultures, and partners have begun to address opportunity youth needs. However, findings point to a need to further elevate the opportunity youth agenda and continue to help stakeholders and community members view opportunity youth as assets to the community. Collaboratives reported strong evidence of the following indicators associated with narrative change.

65%

Stakeholders used **language of “opportunity youth”** (instead of “disconnected” or “dropout”).

52%

Partners discussed challenges of opportunity youth at the **systemic level** rather than of individual failings.

44%

Community and/or civic leaders elevated the **strengths of opportunity youth**.

39%

The narrative about opportunity youth in the community is focused on **assets, contributions, aspirations, and skills** (rather than deficits).

39%

Civic leaders **championed the collaborative’s work**.

35%

People outside of the collaborative **saw opportunity youth as leaders and as decision makers**.

“The narrative is changing, most definitely. They’re using the term ‘opportunity youth’... at high levels. I’m talking mayor and the city manager and the county judge and you’re starting to hear that term.”

While collaboratives have begun to change the narrative among stakeholders, there is room to more deeply activate stakeholders toward actions that improve opportunity youth outcomes.

Strategic communications and will-building among the public and key stakeholders such as employers are growth areas, and relatively low evidence of these types of changes may be the result of low communications capacity described in the prior section of this report. Only 30% of collaboratives reported strong evidence of urgency about opportunity youth outside of the Network and less than a quarter of collaboratives (22%) reported strong evidence that employers viewed opportunity youth as part of local talent development. While few communities reported strong evidence that local media highlighted stories of structural barriers facing opportunity youth (13% reported strong evidence of this), efforts in Chicago highlight the important role media can play to advance a narrative on behalf of opportunity youth. In 2019, the Chicago Tribune highlighted opportunity youth in a six-month exposé featuring Thrive Chicago and other opportunity youth-serving organizations.



Pathway Improvements

Pathway improvements point to opportunities to create and integrate more high-quality pathways for opportunity youth into education and the workforce among local systems. Less than a third of the pathway improvement indicators (31%) were strongly present in the OYF Network, though 72% of indicators were at least somewhat present.

Collaboratives reported stronger evidence of systems-level scaling than of systems alignment and integration.

Systems-level scaling showed promise, as the majority of collaboratives reported that at least some existing opportunities with a proven track record, as well as pilot programs, were expanded or replicated to reach more opportunity youth. Tucson expanded a program providing supports to youth experiencing homelessness by extending eligibility to youth enrolled in online education programs.

INCORPORATING YOUTH VOICE

Thirty-five percent of collaboratives reported strong evidence that there was ongoing and embedded inclusion of youth voice and perspectives in developing, monitoring, and refining pathway systems, supports, and policies, while 78% reported at least some evidence of engaging youth in these activities.

Systems alignment and integration—essential avenues for scaling pathways—are beginning to emerge across the network. Systems alignment, such as communication across sectors (e.g., juvenile justice, foster care, health, and education) and co-located services, was also relatively less common (30% and 13% of collaboratives, respectively, reported strong evidence of these), although some sites have seen success in this area. In these cases, two or more “systems” collaborate to close gaps in services or programming to ensure youth can more seamlessly move from one system to another, often providing overlapping or complementary support that better meets youth needs or helps them prepare for movement from one system to another.

- **Improving pathways for youth in the juvenile justice system**

In Greenville, the community built the infrastructure for the Youth and Drug court to interact with the school system, postsecondary institutions, and employers, creating an alternative to young people being incarcerated.

In Denver, a collaborative partnership has been developed between city agencies, Denver Public Schools, local nonprofits, and the courts to improve the juvenile justice system.

In San Francisco, Roadmap to Peace (RTP) has collaborated with justice systems partners to develop pipelines from “custody to community.” RTP case managers work with incarcerated participants, mostly young men, in custody and then in the community to create as seamless a transition as possible.

- **Improving pathways to postsecondary education**

In Del Norte County, a summer workforce program enrolls high school students in community college, providing an introduction to college and enabling students to access the services they would receive as a community college student.

In San Augustine, the collaborative is harnessing pre-existing matriculation agreements between the school district and local community colleges. High school students may take college-level coursework for specific certificate programs at a reduced cost, and earn the certificate. If the students then enroll in a local community college, they receive credit for those courses previously taken.



- **Improving pathways into the workforce**

In New York City, workforce development providers are now operating in 12 transfer high schools to keep youth on track for future employment. Though other community-based organizations provided supports in these schools previously, workforce development providers had not been present until recently.

Los Angeles Opportunity Youth Collaborative's Foster Youth at Work Initiative partnered with LA County Workforce, Development, Aging and Community Services to report on foster youth enrollment in paid work experiences. The Operational Agreement—which received signatures from the Department of Children and Family Services, the seven workforce development boards, the LA County Office of Education, and the Department of Probation—will guide county collaboration to promote foster youth employment and education persistence. The initiative will help create a pipeline of work-ready foster youth with the skills to take advantage of postsecondary education and self-sufficient employment.

Collaboratives have taken steps to promote program quality. An important element in improving pathways is not just creating those pathways, but ensuring that those pathways offer quality options for young people. While this aspect of pathway improvement is still emergent, some collaboratives have seen strong progress in this area – six collaboratives (26%) reported that systems instituted quality benchmarks or standards for opportunity youth programs; and five (22%) shared that systems serving opportunity youth tied funding to program quality. Philadelphia Youth Network's Career Development Framework aligns training providers, systems leaders, and employers with common language and vision for young peoples' trajectories along an employment path. The Philadelphia Department of Human Services included the Career Development Framework in its Out of School Time RFP, and it was also included in the Philadelphia Works summer youth employment programming RFP.

Data Use

The collection and use of data to improve systems and opportunity youth outcomes is an emergent area of systems change. While data capacity is essential to fulfilling the collaborative's agenda, use of data also manifests as an important element of systems change. Improved data use within systems can often serve as a precursor for better system integration, or may demonstrate the final process in integrating systems or pathways. In the words of one collaborative member, *"[Data alignment between the school district and community college] will lead not only to improved tracking and data sharing, but we hope also to much greater curricular and administrative alignment between the city's two largest educational institutions."* Across the Network, 19% of the data indicators associated with systems change were rated strongly by collaboratives, while 60% were at least somewhat present.



Network members have begun establishing common indicators and definitions among partners. Shared definition and metrics are necessary to use data effectively across organizations or systems. Network members reported relatively inconsistent data definitions and indicators, with 35% (eight collaboratives) reporting strong evidence that the same opportunity youth data indicators are tracked within key systems, while 26% (six collaboratives) reported that the same indicators are tracked across different systems. Only 22% (five collaboratives) reported strong use of common definitions across systems, with the same number reporting strong evidence that local organizations use the same data system to track opportunity youth participation across programs within a system or across systems.

“The local community, schools, public entities, etc. ... It is truly the first time these groups shared data in the same room to look at goals for the community.”

Communities are in the early stages of integrating data to identify joint solutions for serving youth. About one-third (35%) of collaboratives reported strong evidence that partners used data to inform continuous improvement of their programs, and fewer (17%) that data is shared among partners to improve services within the same system; just two collaboratives (9%) rated data sharing among partners in different systems as strong. Efforts in Boston demonstrate potential for how partners from different systems can collaborate in their review of data. Boston Public Schools and Bunker Hill Community College came together to identify common issues for opportunity youth. This will lead not only to improved tracking and data sharing, but they also hope to achieve greater curricular and administrative alignment between the city’s two largest educational institutions.

FIGURE 11
System Use of Opportunity Youth Data is Nascent





Local systems have yet to prioritize opportunity youth data for decision making, although some collaboratives have been instrumental in creating tools and processes for data-based decision making. While collaborative use of opportunity youth data was high (see Collaborative Capacity section), use of these data within community systems was uncommon. Given that the majority of communities across the Network are still laying a foundation for sharing and using data across systems, it is not surprising that opportunity youth data has yet to play an important role in local system decision making. Only 26% of collaboratives see strong evidence that that local systems are currently using data for this purpose (although 65% reported some evidence of this), and fewer (9%) that this data drove policy decisions.

Despite a nascent picture of data-based decision making, bright spots in helping to establish data systems and tools to compile, streamline, and help analyze data have emerged. In partnership with the Hartford Data Collaborative, Hartford's data warehouse connects data from over 25 partner organizations and generates insights for program development and strategy. Santa Clara's Resource Link data system helps collect and process data pertaining to students returning to school. The reporting helped the schools better understand the student populations. Similarly, the Boston collaborative is creating user-friendly, accessible data dashboards to assist schools in assessing attendance and decreasing chronic absenteeism.

Public Policy Change

While building relationships with policy makers emerged as a strength across the Network, only 19% of the indicators of public policy change were strongly present in communities. However, collaboratives noted at least some progress on half of the indicators of policy change in their communities and are adapting strategies to their local contexts.

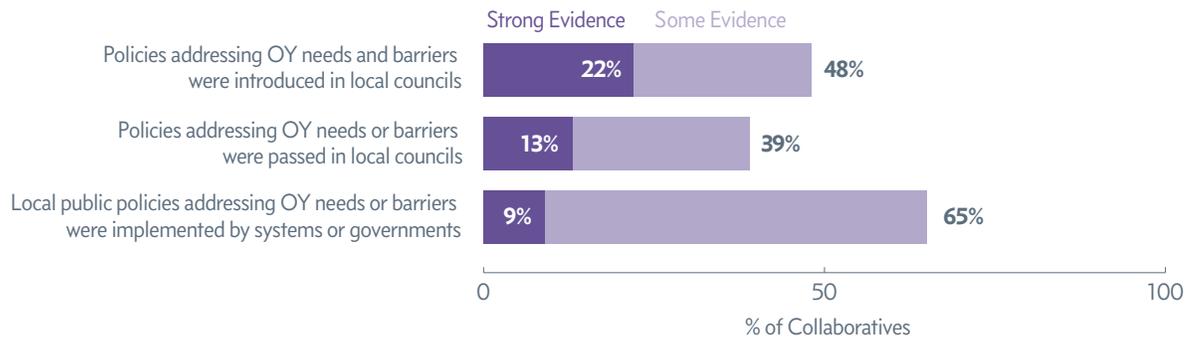
Public policy change was emergent for most collaboratives, with few seeing strong evidence of new local policies supporting opportunity youth introduced, passed, or implemented. Less than half of collaboratives (48%) reported that new policies addressing opportunity youth needs and barriers were introduced in local councils, while fewer reported that favorable policies were passed or *implemented* by government systems. Local context influences public policy change strategies. One collaborative noted that policy change is not likely given the "*political climate*," so has turned to helping the local community and organizational leaders—employers, training providers, schools, and colleges—understand the barriers that opportunity youth face. Figure 12 illustrates the level of success collaboratives have had with each "stage" of policy change, including introduction of policies, passing of policies, and implementation.



Several collaboratives have created space for youth to share their stories and experiences with policy makers.

Collaboratives are recognizing the value of young people informing policy work. In 2019, a quarter of collaboratives (26%) reported strong youth influence in decisions about public policy change. In Detroit, the Youth Advisory Council, consisting of foster youth and adjudicated youth, convened to inform collaborative partners' work by offering their perspective and experiences. Similarly, the Council convenes to speak to local decision makers, including the Mayor's Workforce board. San Diego, as well, provides space to listen to youth needs and goals helping them develop policy proposals and system redesign to create a "future where they and all youth have what they need to be happy, healthy, and prepared to reach their potential."

FIGURE 12
Collaboratives are Taking Steps to Introduce, Pass, and Implement Local Policies That Benefit Opportunity Youth



Despite the emergent nature of policy change across the Network, some collaboratives have seen public policies shift to better support opportunity youth. While public policy implementation was rated relatively low overall, some collaboratives have seen new policies addressing opportunity youth needs pass in their communities or states. These policies point to important progress being made in shaping youth outcomes and underscore the long-term benefit of building relationships and public will to advance policy efforts. Highlights of these policy changes include:

- In Maine, Governor Janet Mills signed LD 821, a Resolve to Review Caseloads for Child Welfare Caseworkers, sponsored by Rep. Colleen Madigan of Waterville and passed unanimously by the legislature. The legislation requires the Maine Department of Health and Human Services to review child welfare caseloads and develop standard caseload recommendations with input from caseworkers and the Public Consulting Group.
- Boston reported that, in 2019, the state legislature passed the Student Opportunity Act, the official policy response to the 2015 findings of the Foundation Budget Review Commission, which found that the state's education aid formula was significantly underfunding schools, particularly those that serve students with barriers. The legislation will provide \$1.4 billion in new aid to students over the next seven years, much of which is directed at students from low-income neighborhoods and English Language Learners.
- A significant policy win in San Francisco, supported by the Roadmap to Peace collaborative, was the closure of Juvenile Hall. RTP's connections to City Hall leadership, as well as its use of youth voice and narrative, played a role in this policy change.



Funding Changes

Systems-level funding investments in opportunities and pathways for opportunity youth in the OYF communities is another emergent area of systems change. Only 18% of the indicators of funding change were strongly evident in communities, demonstrating a need to continue to help funders think differently about investments in opportunity youth-supportive causes.

Public funding for opportunity youth outpaced private funding. Although funding-related systems changes were emergent across the Network, most collaboratives could raise or influence the allocation of funds on behalf of opportunity youth. Notably, more than 70% of collaboratives reported they have influenced the direction or allocation of public funding for opportunity youth workforce programs. The largest amount of public funding went to workforce programs focused on opportunity youth—more than educational or other types of programs—primarily from sources like WIOA. Overall, communities seem to have better access to local private funders; 87% of collaboratives reported that there are private funders in their community supporting opportunity youth efforts, whereas only 61% of collaboratives noted the presence of city or county public funds focused on opportunity youth in their community. Despite the greater presence of public funders, however, the public sphere offers a great deal more resources. For example, the King County Council allocated new funds (via a sales tax on transportation construction) to education issues, and of this, advocates secured \$110 million towards a King County Promise which includes an explicit focus on opportunity youth.

“We have struggled in this area. There is very little philanthropy invested in our opportunity youth space and almost none is directed toward public systems, and when it is, it is broader than opportunity youth.”

FUNDING FOR OY PROGRAMS

MEDIAN PUBLIC FUNDING

| | |
|-----------|---------------|
| \$1.5M | \$200K |
| Workforce | Postsecondary |
| \$260K | \$200K |
| K-12 | Other |

MEDIAN PRIVATE FUNDING

\$150K

Despite public and private funding streams for opportunity youth work, few collaboratives found new or increased funding streams. About a quarter of collaboratives (26%) reported strong presence of new public or private funding dedicated to opportunity youth in their communities in 2019. In Del Norte County, private funding provided by The California Endowment was leveraged by the community college system, tribal funding, and schools to implement workforce programs and opportunities throughout the year. Similarly, *increases* in existing funding, public or private, were reported strongly evident by only 26% and 30% of collaboratives, respectively. Aligning funders in various ways was even more challenging. Only 17% of collaboratives reported strong evidence that public and private funders collaborated to fund local systems; still fewer (9%) that two or more systems jointly applied for new funding. Similarly, few collaboratives (13%) saw strong evidence that funders prioritized work aligned with the collaborative’s goals when making funding decisions, although 44% reported some evidence of this prioritization. Each of these findings suggest the need for collaboratives to continue to help funders, public and private, see the value in investing in their efforts.



CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF THE OYF NETWORK

The evaluation findings show that the OYF collaboratives have strong capacity in leadership, planning, and convening power. The collaboratives are set up well for the work—structures are in place and a diverse array of sectoral and organizational representatives are actively involved in shaping and implementing the collaboratives' agendas. The relative strength of programmatic changes across the Network suggests a sequence to tackling systems changes, as the process for changing programs and organizational practices is more straightforward than changing public policy and funding structures. Findings from the 2019 evaluation shed light on the challenges of collective impact work and provide direction for the Network's future focus and learning. Below, we highlight several inter-related considerations for the Forum to advance the Network, many of which build on current efforts already underway.

Build collaboratives' strategic communications capacity to influence policy change. Changing public policies to support education and career pathways for opportunity youth is a critical component of "shifting the conditions that hold problems in place."²¹ While few collaboratives swayed public policy change in 2019, they have real interest, strengths, and capacities to take on this work. Collaboratives have forged relationships with decision makers, public officials, and policy makers to lay the groundwork for an opportunity youth policy change agenda, and many have had opportunities to share their case with these key decision makers. Complementing these relationships with more robust communications and advocacy efforts could lead to more favorable policy conditions for collaboratives and opportunity youth. Actions for the Forum may include:

- **Continue to Develop a National OYF Policy Agenda**

Although the policy landscape varies across contexts, many systemic barriers affect young people in communities across the Network. The Forum began in late 2019 to establish such an agenda, and continues to dialog with Network members about national-level policy topics. As part of these efforts, they are creating a Network-wide working group to identify and address the most pressing policy barriers for opportunity youth, and use local experiences to inform these efforts and test local solutions. In addition to this work, it may help to have a series of more focused policy agendas—such as those that affect rural or tribal communities, youth involved with the justice system, or barriers to employment—may also help activate other national partners and funders who don't identify as "opportunity youth" advocates, but whose passions intersect with the same injustices opportunity youth face.

- **Provide a Communications and Policy Toolkit**

Tools that advance the policy agenda can offset collaborative capacity needs. Communications and policy toolkits—complete with data, talking points, and press release templates—can help collaboratives elevate and align critical policy issues locally and nationally.



Advise on ways to embed young people in more advanced systems changes such as data, communications, policy change, and funding. Young people are at the crux of the work across the OYF Network and have not only informed the work of many collaboratives, but have led powerful efforts to improve programs and pathways into education and employment. Many partners' organizational cultures are oriented toward young people and their strengths and assets. The areas where youth involvement was lower mirror the capacities and systems changes that were less common overall—data, communications, policy change, and funding. Collaboratives need guidance on how to operationalize youth engagement in these aspects of systems change.

- **Promote a Model for Strong Youth Engagement**

New and long-standing collaboratives need support in operationalizing how youth engagement can move from input to leadership in areas like data interpretation, communications, and policy change. Released by the Forum in 2018, *Including All Voices: Achieving Opportunity Youth Collaboration Success Through Youth and Adult Engagement*²² provides a framework for youth engagement in systems change efforts. The Forum may consider using this model as a guide for technical assistance, capacity building, or training to help sites integrate young people into systems change efforts. Grounding support for collaboratives in this framework can help collaboratives develop shared language for youth engagement, reinforce what “strong” youth engagement looks and feels like, and promote consistent implementation of best practices across the Network. Work already launched by the Forum in 2020 includes continuing to convene youth leaders from across the national Network to co-design effective practices, designing a solicitation aimed at advancing healing-centered efforts across the Network, and partnering with Opportunity Youth United to center the voices of young adults in policy advocacy, fundraising, and data.

- **Spotlight and Incentivize Effective Youth Leadership Strategies**

As collaboratives progress toward more advanced systems changes, they may need examples of how young people can continue to play a key role in or lead these efforts. Recent work by the Forum that builds on a long history includes bi-monthly meetings of youth leaders that have focused on sharing effective engagement strategies, including lessons learned. Young adults from across the Network have partnered with the Forum to co-design a youth town hall aimed at showcasing the best and most effective practices driving local opportunity youth efforts. Recently, as part of the national convening, young adults co-hosted forums in partnership with adults to showcase a range of responses to COVID-19, including story-telling sessions aimed at addressing the multiple issues spurred by the pandemic. In addition to continuing to highlight successes during its semi-annual convenings and other events, the Forum could showcase successful youth engagement and leadership approaches through a variety of elevation strategies such as press releases, podcasts, blog posts, and even annual youth leadership awards to collaboratives that exemplify this core value.

Continue to invest in building the capacity of the OYF collaboratives to collect and use data. Since the 2015-2017 evaluation of OYF, which recommended further development of infrastructure and capacity to share and use data across partners, the Forum has invested in several data-focused initiatives, including *Equity Counts* and *Data for Impact*, which includes both *Rural and Tribal Data Enhancement Grants* and *Systems Improvement Grants*. These initiatives integrate four targeted strategies of grantmaking, technical assistance and learning, assessment and measurement, and policy and advocacy to build collaborative data capacity—including in communities that have less access to reliable data. Findings show strengths in data use, such as understanding youth needs and communicating a vision for opportunity youth. Data were less likely to be used for assessing or improving the health of the collaborative—roles that are frequently de-prioritized due to competing demands and limited capacity. These findings provide insight into how collaboratives and communities prioritize their data use and point to areas for potential focus as the Forum further develops its data capacity building efforts.



- **Continue to Invest in Data Infrastructure for Small, Rural, and Tribal Collaboratives.** We applaud the Forum’s investment in rural and tribal communities, where existing data is often flawed and thus not actionable for developing concrete strategies. These data efforts with rural and tribal communities should continue to ensure equity across the Network.
- **Provide Guidance for Internal Partnership Assessment.** While many collaboratives use data as communications and case-making tools, few use data to look inward. Monitoring collaborative health and accountability, however, are critical to long-term success. Consider how the Forum might offset data capacity challenges by facilitating these processes—can a discussion guide or a facilitated meeting generate reflection for collaboratives? Can the OYF self-assessment be positioned as a tool for continuous improvement? Are there other resources that can be deployed at scale to help collaboratives become more attentive to their own health?

Help collaboratives attract funding that builds collaborative capacities. Garnering funding for the backbone, as well as larger systems change efforts, continues to pose challenges for collaboratives. Given the continuing COVID-19 pandemic and devastating economic repercussions, funding for opportunity youth efforts may become even more challenging. Collaboratives are uniquely situated to tend to a diverse array of community needs, and have the potential to amplify investments through data-driven approaches that improve education and career pathways that are sustainable and at scale. Now more than ever, they need help in making the case for investments in capacity and the need to support young people, as they navigate uncertain landscapes.

- **Elevate the Role of Backbone and Collaborative Capacity in Transformative Change.** The Forum can play a critical role in translating the challenges backbone organizations and collaboratives face in raising funds to support their work, a challenge directly tied to funders’ common desires to prioritize short-term “projects” or “programs” over infrastructure. The Forum is uniquely positioned to help funding partners understand that collaboratives facilitate systemic changes that have the potential to affect young people at a very large scale, and transform systems to a much greater extent than directing funds to a single program. It is time to change the narrative about the capacity, general operating support, and infrastructure needed to change—in the words of one partner—“*systems built to persist.*”
- **Activate Local and National Funders for Multi-Year Support.** Through its Leadership Council, the Forum plays a critical role in connecting collaboratives to local and national funders that understand and value systems change work for opportunity youth. The events of 2020 have highlighted the need for systemic and equitable change—work that takes many years. Collaboratives across the Network have valued the role the Forum played in providing multi-year grants during the Network’s launch. The time is now for funders to not only consider investing in collaborative capacity, but to support collaboratives for the long-haul as they build on the foundations they have laid for long-term systems change. In 2020, the Forum did continue to work with national funders to both provide short-term, COVID-19-related emergency funding to many OYF communities, but also launched new multi-year, 6-figure annual competitive regrants from national funders, and have secured new funders to continue such work into 2021.



ENDNOTES

1. <https://aspencommunitysolutions.org/opportunity-youth-forum/>
2. Ibid.
3. Kania, John, Kramer, Mark, and Peter Senge (FSG), *The Waters of Systems Change*, May 2018.
4. T-test, $p < .10$
5. T-test, $p < .10$
6. Kania, John, Kramer, Mark, and Peter Senge (FSG), *The Waters of Systems Change*, May 2018.
7. <https://aspencommunitysolutions.org/opportunity-youth-forum/>
8. Ibid.
9. Calculations based on 26 OYF geographies using 2017 ACS data.
10. *A Decade Undone: Youth Disconnection in the Age of Coronavirus*. Measure of America, Social Science Research Council, 2020. <https://measureofamerica.org/youth-disconnection-2020/>
11. "Workforce disconnection" includes only young people who have a postsecondary degree. For more information about the OYF Common Measures, see: <https://aspencommunitysolutions.org/report/equity-counts-tracking-opportunity-youth-outcomes/> and <https://aspencommunitysolutions.org/report/equity-counts-development-of-common-measures/>
12. Number of youth and OY served is based on what was reported by 22 and 20 communities in the 2019 self-assessment, respectively. Many noted these numbers were likely undercounts.
13. As noted in the Introduction, 23 of 27 collaboratives completed the 2019 self-assessment reflected in this report.
14. Kania, John, Kramer, Mark, and Peter Senge (FSG), *The Waters of Systems Change*, May 2018.
15. T-test, $p < .10$
16. <https://aspencommunitysolutions.org/data-for-impact>
17. N=23, including two communities that did not report sources of funding.
18. Kania, John, Kramer, Mark, and Peter Senge (FSG), *The Waters of Systems Change*, May 2018.
19. Ibid.
20. T-test, $p < .10$
21. Kania, John, Kramer, Mark, and Peter Senge (FSG), *The Waters of Systems Change*, May 2018.
22. <https://aspencommunitysolutions.org/report/including-all-voices/>

EQUAL
MEASURE

FINDING
PROMISE
FUELING
CHANGE