

# A Snapshot of the 2021 Opportunity Youth Forum: Boosting Capacity to Drive Equitable Systems Change

## ABOUT THE OYF NETWORK

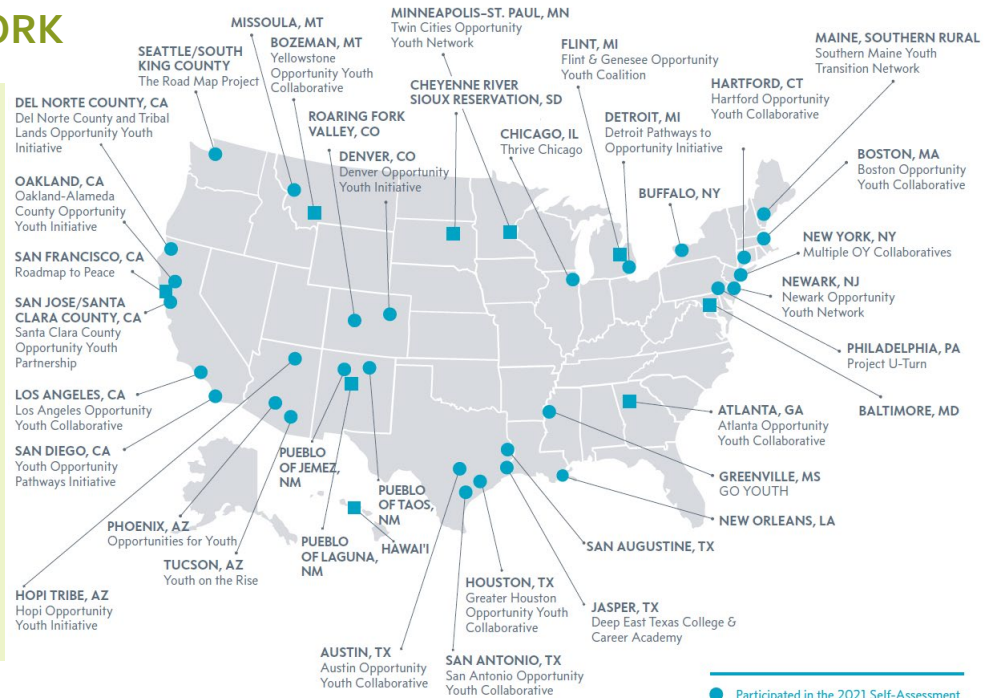
The OYF network is home to

# 5.9 million

16 to 24-year-old youth

**657,000 (11%)** were opportunity youth, who are not in school and not working, in 2019. The rate has likely increased since then.

*Based on 2019 ACS data (to be updated with 2021 ACS data)*



● Participated in the 2021 Self-Assessment

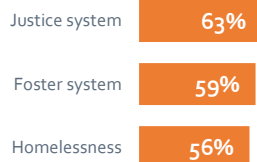
## COLLABORATIVE CHARACTERISTICS

Collaboratives vary in focus area, size, and experience, adapting to meet the unique needs of their communities.



AREAS OF FOCUS

Collaboratives prioritized youth involved in or experiencing:



SIZE

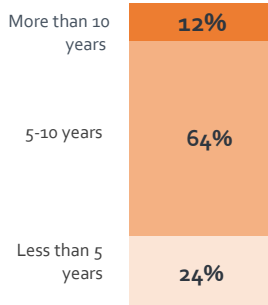
Network median: 14 partners  
Range: 6-120 partners

**91%** of collaboratives included partners from at least three of the following sectors:

- higher-education
- community-based organizations
- government
- K-12 education



TIME FOCUSING ON OPPORTUNITY YOUTH

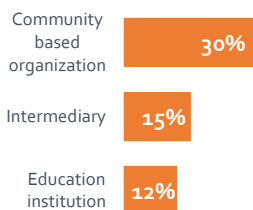


## BACKBONE CHARACTERISTICS

Backbone organizations are a critical component of the OYF network, providing a structure and team to coordinate the work of each collaborative.



TYPES OF ORGANIZATIONS



Other organizations include:

- Workforce investment board
- Community foundation or funder
- Cross-organizational partnership



BUDGET

**BACKBONE BUDGET**  
Network median: \$3.2M  
Range: \$0 to \$67M

**BUDGET DEDICATED TO OY**  
Network median: \$400,000  
Range: \$0 to \$15M



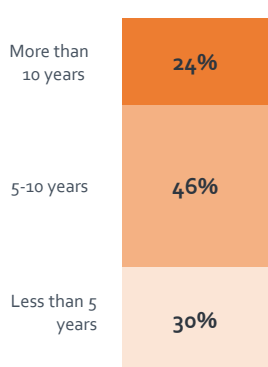
STAFF

**BACKBONE STAFFING**  
Network median: 12 FTEs  
Range: 1 to 135 FTEs

**STAFFING DEDICATED TO OY**  
Network median: 3 FTEs  
Range: 0.5 to 10 FTEs



TIME FOCUSING ON OPPORTUNITY YOUTH

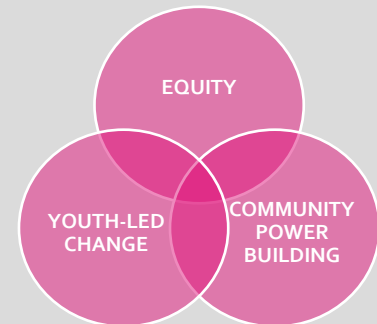


## CORE VALUES

Equity, youth-led change, and community power building are foundational to OYF.

Collaboratives advanced in equity from 2019 to 2021:

- Naming racial equity and/or community-specific disparities in planning processes
- Reflecting the demographic diversity of their communities
- Disaggregating data to address inequities
- Focusing equity and assets in narratives and local media work



While pandemic restrictions limited direct engagement in 2020 and early 2021 – making youth-led change and community power building more challenging – collaboratives re-engaged with youth throughout 2021.

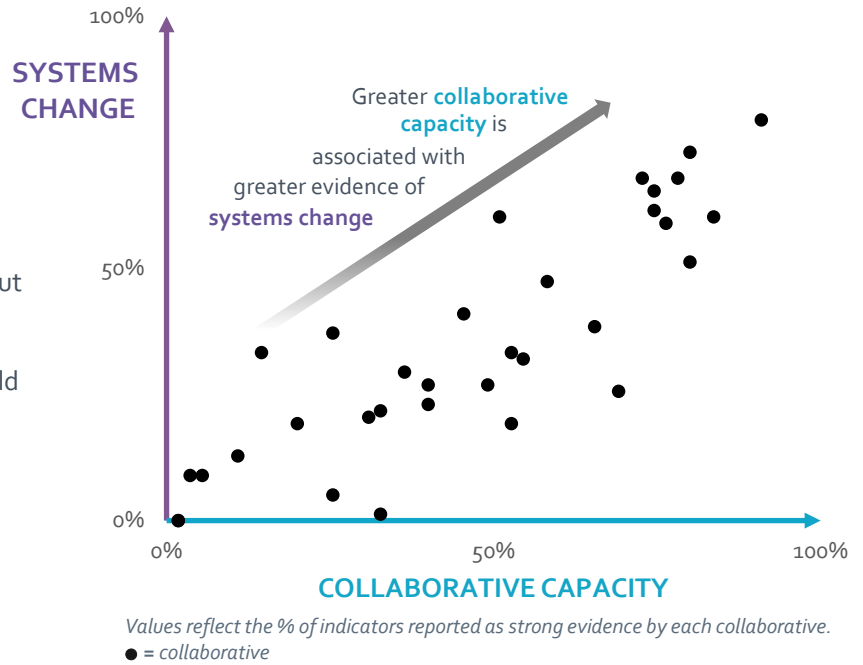
In 2021 the OYF network began to identify practices related to **belonging, meaning, wellbeing, and purpose** that can help counter the impacts of structurally racist systems for youth.

# ORGANIZING FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE

The 2021 evaluation examined two dimensions of communities in the OYF network:

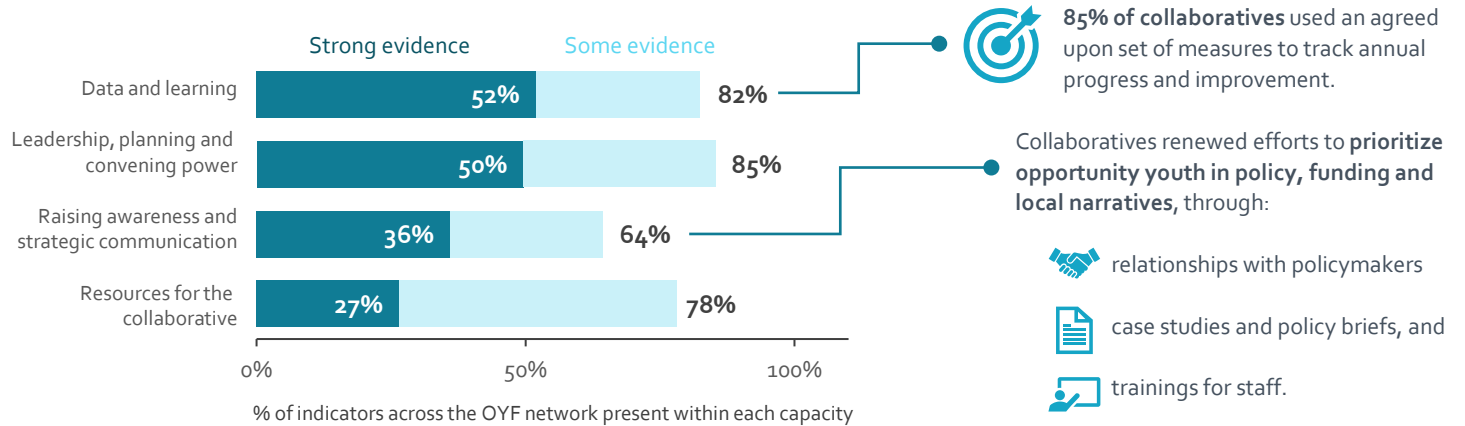
- 1) Collaborative capacity:** the infrastructure and processes necessary for the collaborative to carry out its opportunity youth agenda
- 2) Systems changes:** "shifts to the conditions that hold a problem in place"—in this case, disconnected pathways and inequitable conditions that prevent young people from achieving education and employment outcomes

\*FSG, *Water of Systems Change*: [https://www.fsg.org/publications/water\\_of\\_systems\\_change](https://www.fsg.org/publications/water_of_systems_change)



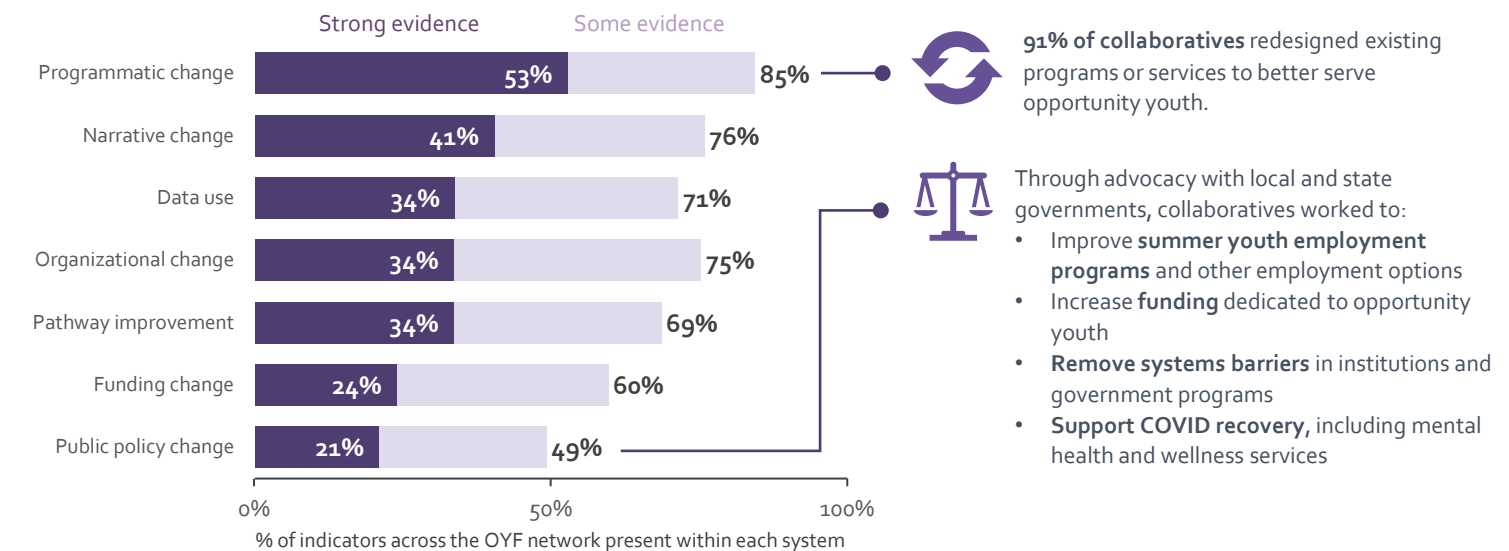
## COLLABORATIVE CAPACITY

Data and learning became the highest scoring capacity in 2021, reflecting the time and energy put into building data capacity across the network.



## SYSTEMS CHANGES

Programmatic changes on behalf of opportunity youth remained most evident, with increased focus on policy and funding changes, when comparing 2020 and 2021.



**Methods.** Findings come from the 2021 OYF Self-Assessment. Thirty-three collaboratives answered questions about their collaborative capacity and systems changes. The Assessment included indicators grouped into four types of capacities and seven types of systems changes, assessed on a four-point scale.

For more information about the OYF network: <https://www.aspencommunitysolutions.org/opportunity-youth-forum/>