



## Youth Workforce Development

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Youth unemployment has been a cause for [concern](#) in the United States for years. Youth unemployment [costs society](#)—through the loss of talent and costs of social supports and subsidies. Jobless young people are more vulnerable to a range of challenges, including the [ills](#) already plaguing their communities: high rates of unplanned pregnancy, unstable housing, substance abuse, and crime (as both victim and perpetrator). This has become a crisis for young, low-income people of color. A recent [study](#) reports that the employment rates actually decreased for black males (14 percent) and Latinos (21 percent) from 2005 to 2015 (going in the opposite direction of the overall trend in youth employment).

The stark consequences of youth unemployment, especially among youth of color, elevate the importance of workforce development programming that provides good options for young people. In this document, you will find an overview of “what works” for youth workforce development. As you will see below, this resource highlights critical strategies and best practices, spotlights exemplars, and identifies additional resources to support local practitioners’ efforts to develop and implement workforce development programs for young people in their communities. This is not an exhaustive survey of the information in the field, but it will provide practitioners with a portal to the knowledge that exists.

## Key Components of Workforce Development Approaches

Research and experience have identified key components for effective workforce development approaches. These approaches support the workforce programs that equip young people with the credentials and skills they need to secure employment with opportunities for career advancement in their local labor market.

Research has consistently verified evidence-based components for effective workforce development programs: combined academic and technical training, including a focus on [employability skills](#); comprehensive social and other support services (e.g., counseling, housing supports, job placement, academic advising); connections to employers; and understanding [viable](#) employment opportunities in the local labor market. Early [work experiences](#) (e.g., paid employment, internship, or work-based learning) are especially critical for young people. The most effective place-based programs have significant and sustained employer engagement.

These components are embedded in career pathways, an integrated education and training approach that can be found in many different youth workforce programs. In general, [career pathways](#) integrate academics, training, work experience, and wraparound support services that provide an accelerated path to credentials or diplomas in demand in the local labor market. Thirteen federal agencies, including the Departments of Education, Labor, and Health and Human Services, signed a [joint letter](#) endorsing comprehensive career pathways systems as effective education and workforce development approaches.

## Examples of Youth Workforce Development Programs

There are a variety of workforce development programs for youth that differ by type of provider, program design, and target population, but include the commonly established components. These examples are by no means an exhaustive list of evidence-based programs for youth and young adults.

There are several national, evidenced-based programs that can be replicated in other local communities.

- [Conservation and Service Corps Programs](#)
- [Jobs for America's Graduates \(JAG\)](#)
- [Job Corps](#)
- [National Guard Youth Challenge Program](#)
- [ServiceWorks](#)
- [Year Up](#)
- [YouthBuild](#)
- [Youth Corps and Workforce Partnerships](#)

There are also prominent national designs that up the ante on employer engagement by integrating workforce development in the employer's workplace.

- [Pre-Apprenticeship Programs](#)
- [Social Enterprises](#)
- [Transitional Jobs](#)

The bulk of workforce development opportunities for youth are place-based, local programs developed independently or in collaboratives of community-based organizations, schools and community colleges, and agencies.

- » [Latin American Youth Center](#) (LAYC) in Washington, DC, offers a workforce development program for opportunity youth, largely high school dropouts, that includes a 12-week job readiness class, career exploration workshops in high-demand service and production industries (e.g., retail, finance, health care and construction), the National Retail Federation's [National Professional Certification in Customer Service](#), GED preparation classes, job placement, and intensive case management, including support to earn postsecondary credentials after completing the program.
- » [Long Beach Unified School District](#) (LBUSD) in California has adopted the [Linked Learning](#) model, an approach to college and career preparation that integrates college-focused academics, technical skills training from 42 different pathways in the state's high-demand industries, and intensive student supports. Since adoption of the Linked Learning model, graduation rates and college readiness have increased, as have scholarships offered to LBUSD graduates.

- » [Our Piece of the Pie, Inc.](#) (OPP) is a community-based organization in Hartford, CT, that runs [Pathways to Success in Community Colleges](#), a unique collaboration with community colleges and local industry that embeds workforce development and career planning in the educational experience at the community college. The program also includes postemployment support for workplace success. The OPP Pathways to Careers program is funded in part through a Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) youth contract with the local workforce board.
- » [SkillUp Washington Industry Manufacturing Academy \(IMA\)](#) is an intensive, 11-week, employer-driven program that includes career readiness screening, safety training, and manufacturing training. The safety training includes OSHA 10/MSDS training. Graduates earn an IMA certificate that has been endorsed by employers in the region's manufacturing industry and can earn up to 28 college credits from the Seattle College District in a range of manufacturing-related certificates.

- » [WorkReady Philadelphia](#) offers enriched summer employment programming through a six-week (120-hour) paid work experience encouraging development of 21st-century skills through work-based learning. The experience challenges youth to understand the correlations between work experience, skill attainment, and high school completion, and how those variables impact college and career success. WorkReady Philadelphia is supported by WIOA youth funds, as well as city, school district, business, and other community-based organizations. [Philadelphia Youth Network](#), a local intermediary, manages the campaign and provides oversight to WorkReady's year-round and summer employment programs.

## Funding for Youth Workforce Development

The federal government is a significant funder for youth workforce programs.

- » [WIOA](#) requires that a significantly higher proportion of Title I workforce funds be spent on out-of-school youth than did its predecessor, the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). Workforce investment boards will be dedicating \$140 million more to serve out-of-school youth. The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) provides an [analysis of key provisions of the WIOA](#); note especially Appendix C, which details changes in Youth Workforce Investment Activities.
- » The [Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006](#) (Perkins IV) funds secondary and postsecondary career and technical education programs across the nation. The [Perkins Collaborative Resource Network](#) provides resources for funding career and technical education programming for youth and adults.
- » The Congressional Research Service recently summarized employment and job training programs for [vulnerable youth](#).

» Three recent federally funded grant programs support workforce programming for youth:

- [Summer Jobs and Beyond: The Career Pathways for Youth](#) program invests \$20 million in funding to support stronger alignment toward unified local systems to connect youth ages 16 to 24 to summer and year-round work opportunities. The program requires that workforce boards partner with reengagement centers where they exist.
- The interagency [Performance Partnership Pilots for Disconnected Youth](#) initiative gives communities the flexibility to test innovative results-based strategies to improve employment and education outcomes for disconnected youth.
- The [Youth Career Connect](#) program supports efforts to build work experiences and career pathways programs for students in high school.

» To stay up-to-date on youth workforce development funding opportunities:

- The [Employment and Training Administration](#) provides information on current U.S. Department of Labor education and training funding opportunities.
- [Youth.gov](#) provides an updated list of federal funding announcements, including an excellent list of potential [sources of funding for summer youth employment programs](#).
- [National Clearinghouse on Families and Youth](#) compiles funding opportunities from federal agencies, private foundations, and corporations.
- The [2016 Summer Opportunities Resource Guide](#) was developed by the National Summer Learning Association in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Education, the White House, and Civic Nation to highlight funding opportunities to support youth education, employment, and meal programs in the summer months.

## The Evidence Base for Youth Workforce Development Approaches

There is a great deal of research about the importance of youth employment and workforce development programming to (re)connect youth and young adults to employment opportunities. The research highlighted below represents a sample of recent studies, briefs, and reports from leading experts in the field across a number of important topics, including recent trends, evidence of effectiveness, and promising practices.

### Trends in youth employment and the economic impact of disconnected youth

- [Employment Status of 16-24 Year Olds](#)
- [The Plummeting Labor Market Fortunes of Teens and Young Adults](#)
- [The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth](#)

### Landscape of workforce development and evidence of effectiveness

- [Building a Comprehensive Youth Employment Delivery System: Examples of Effective Practice](#)
- [What Works for Disconnected Young People](#)
- [Evidence Scan of Work Experience Programs](#)
- [PEPNet Guide to Quality Standards for Youth Programs](#)
- [Toward a Better Future: Evidence on Improving Employment Outcomes for Disadvantaged Youth in the United States](#)

## Promising and successful principles, practices, and innovations

- [Creating Pathways to Employment: The Role of Youth/Industry Partnerships](#)
- [Guideposts for Success](#)
- [Key “Soft Skills” That Foster Youth Workforce Success: Toward a Consensus Across Fields](#)
- [Providing True Opportunity for Opportunity Youth: Promising Practices and Principles for Helping Youth Facing Barriers to Employment](#)
- [Youth Unemployment Challenge and Solutions: What Business Can Do Now](#)
- [Resources on Professional Development for Youth Service Professionals](#)

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Many researchers and national intermediaries have produced a wealth of tools and resources for workforce development programming for youth and young adults. The tools and resources below are grouped across topics of interest, including program development, employer engagement, collaborative efforts, and intermediaries.

### Developing Workforce Development Programs

- [Career Pathways Toolkit: A Guide for System Development](#)
- [Leading High School Transformation for College and Career Success: A Guide for Developing a System of Linked Learning Pathways](#)
- [Opportunity Youth Employment Toolkit](#)
- [Serving Out-of-School Youth under WIOA](#)
- [Employability Skills Framework](#)

### Employer Engagement in Workforce Development

- [100,000 Opportunities Initiative](#)
- [Connecting Youth & Business: A Toolkit for Employers](#)
- [Employment Pathways Project](#)

### Workforce Collaboratives Providing Work Experience for Youth

- [Boston, MA, Division of Youth Engagement & Employment](#)
- [Worksystems Inc. \(Portland, OR\) Youth Investments](#)
- [Capital Workforce Partners \(Hartford, CT\) Year Round Youth Employment](#)
- [Workforce Development Council of Seattle—King County \(WA\)](#)

## National Organizations Providing Resources for Workforce Development Strategies for Youth

- [Aspen Forum for Community Solutions](#), with technical assistance from Jobs for the Future, supports the [Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund](#), a funding collaborative that invests in community-based programs that improve education and employment outcomes for opportunity youth in 21 communities across the country.
- [Center for Law and Social Policy](#) disseminates research, policy, and best practices for improving the lives of vulnerable populations, including opportunity youth. It serves as the convener for a national network, [Communities Collaborating to Reconnect Youth Network](#), that disseminates this work among community partners.
- [Civic Enterprises](#) advances education initiatives and strategies for improving economic mobility for the most income-disadvantaged Americans. Critical to this effort is their work to reduce the dropout rate and increase graduation rates for America's youth through [GradNation](#) and [American Graduate](#).
- [Forum for Youth Investment](#) works with stakeholders to advance state and federal policy and funding strategies to make sure young people, especially opportunity youth, are "ready for life." FYI provides technical assistance for [Opportunity Youth Network](#), which works to connect opportunity youth to education and employment pathways.
- [Jobs for the Future](#) is a national nonprofit working for educational and economic opportunity for vulnerable populations. JFF provides technical assistance to several community networks, including [Opportunity Works](#) and [Learn and Earn to Achieve Potential \(LEAP\)](#).
- [Grads of Life](#) provides tools and resources to help employers customize training, mentoring, and pathways to build a talent pipeline of youth ages 16-24.
- [National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth](#) provides resources for providers who connect youth with disabilities to meaningful employment opportunities.
- [National League of Cities](#) provides guidance on policy and best practices for improving the lives of children, youth, and families in their communities. NLC's work for opportunity youth includes toolkits and other resources, plus sponsorship of the [Dropout Reengagement Network](#).
- [National Youth Employment Coalition](#) is a network of organizations providing education and employment programming for young people, particularly opportunity youth. The Coalition helps set standards for quality programming, tracks and promotes policies, and builds program capacity.

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