

# Generation Work:

EQUIPPING YOUNG PEOPLE WITH IN-DEMAND  
EMPLOYMENT SKILLS AND CREDENTIALS

THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION



#### **ABOUT THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION**

The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private philanthropy that creates a brighter future for the nation's children by developing solutions to strengthen families, build paths to economic opportunity and transform struggling communities into safer healthier places to live, work and grow. For more information, visit the Foundation's website at [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org).

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## introduction

**A decade after the Great Recession, millions of job seekers in their late teens and twenties — especially young people of color and youth from low-income families — are still struggling to land and keep meaningful work, even as the economy improves.**

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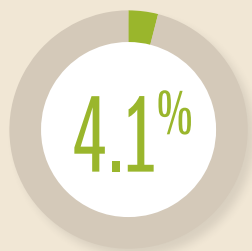
Traditional education and training models are failing to equip them with the skills and credentials necessary to secure good jobs that put them on a path to earning family-sustaining wages.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation launched Generation Work in 2016 to explore new ways of connecting these young people with the knowledge and experience they need to succeed in the job market. This multiyear, multicity initiative weaves together best practices<sup>1</sup> from the adult education and training field — in particular, a focus on demand-driven workforce development strategies — with positive youth development practices, such as mentoring and work-based learning, to better prepare young people ages 18–29 for work.

The Foundation is investing in local partnerships in five cities — Cleveland, Hartford, Indianapolis, Philadelphia and Seattle — as they plan, convene, build evidence and conduct the advocacy work needed to connect and scale promising practices across different education, training and human service platforms.

## INEQUITABLE OPPORTUNITIES

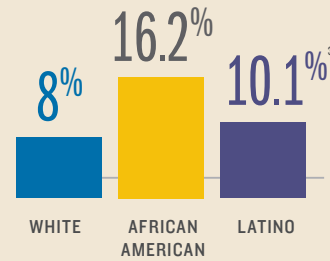
Baby boomers are nearing retirement, and the workers replacing them are increasingly diverse. Systemic inequities in the workforce, education and justice systems have left many in this younger generation, including young people of color and those from the lowest-income families, disconnected from the opportunities needed to secure meaningful careers or earn a competitive income.



Overall U.S. unemployment rate  
(as of January 2018)<sup>2</sup>



Unemployment rate for  
young people ages 16-24  
(as of July 2017)



While the local Generation Work partnerships aim to identify and promote opportunities for all young people, they understand the challenges these disparities present and are explicitly focused on the experiences and needs of young people of color who have been disconnected from the labor market.

## generation work: meeting business demands by providing positive support to young people

**For many years, the focus of education and job-training initiatives for youth and young adults has been on secondary school completion and postsecondary enrollment.**

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At the same time, workforce development policies and programs for young people have largely centered on remediating barriers to employment, such as drug use or justice system involvement, and developing general career-readiness skills such as resume building and interviewing. These strategies often operate in isolation and have struggled to equip young people with the specific skills and credentials employers need.

Generation Work takes a different approach.

The initiative marries deep employer engagement with positive youth development strategies to offer young people learning opportunities targeted toward the skills and abilities employers are looking for; emotional and motivational supports like mentoring programs; and work supports such as transportation subsidies and child care.

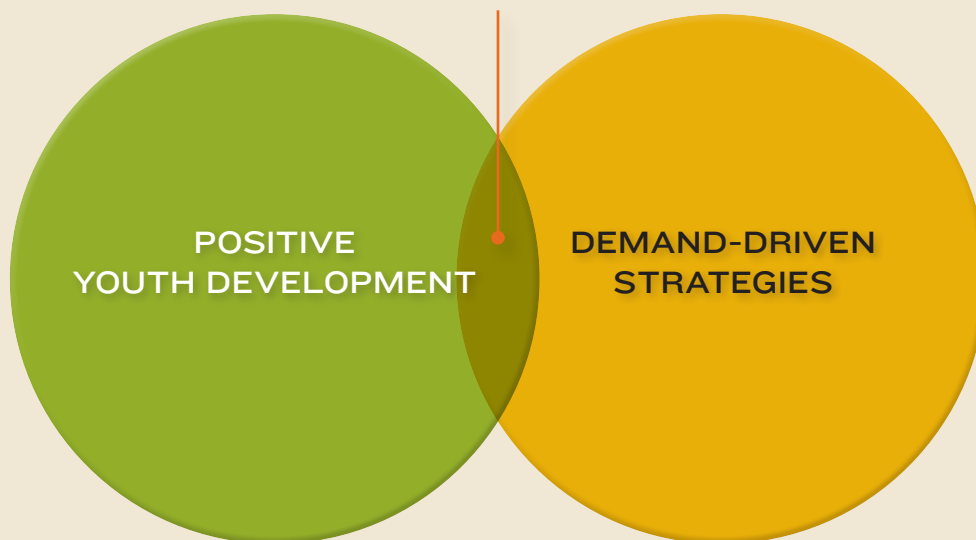
Though their individual strategies vary slightly, the five local partnerships are guided by a shared commitment to ensuring that:

- all young adults have the education, skills and connections with employers necessary to access quality training and employment;
- employers embrace a broad range of young people, not just those with college educations, and invest in their professional development; and
- workforce practitioners and public agencies adopt, scale and sustain a demand-driven approach for young adults within their networks.

With support from the Casey Foundation and several national organizations, the local partnerships will continue working over the next several years to build stronger relationships with employers and connect with young people through supportive strategies that position them for success in their local labor market.

**POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT (PYD)** is a framework for cultivating young people's assets and competencies to prepare them for success in adulthood, including in the workplace. The framework focuses on creating a supportive, safe learning environment that emphasizes skill development and linkages to school, family, work and community. PYD's whole-person approaches take into account the challenges many young people face, including experience with the justice system and trauma, as well as the responsibilities they may have, such as caring for families and children. The framework engages young people in activities that will support their success, such as volunteerism, job training and service learning. Most importantly, the PYD approach emphasizes strong relationships with caring adults — relationships that affirm young people and can help them navigate through their work and personal lives.

## GENERATION WORK



**DEMAND-DRIVEN STRATEGIES** involve building relationships with employers and other business leaders to understand the local employment landscape — including hiring and training requirements, work-based learning opportunities and worker retention and success — in high-growth industries. By forming deep relationships with these stakeholders and creating a shared sense of trust and understanding, organizations such as workforce boards, one-stop job centers, technical schools and nonprofits are in a better position to influence employers — and encourage them to adopt workplace practices that are more likely to attract, retain and develop the skills of young people from a variety of backgrounds.

## the five partnerships

**In designing Generation Work, the Casey Foundation sought a geographically diverse group of cities with varying partnership structures and entry-level labor market opportunities for youth and young adults.**

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Each partnership has unique challenges and opportunities, including different workforce development strategies, resources and local industry demands.

The Generation Work partnerships are seeking to integrate disparate services and engage multiple stakeholders — such as employers in the child care, hospitality, health care, manufacturing, transportation and logistics industries, as well as leaders in K–12 and charter schools, postsecondary education, public workforce, human services and labor unions — to better prepare young people for employment and connect them to job opportunities.

The five partnerships aim to support and sustain implementation of these integrated efforts by:

- braiding public and private funding streams to support a continuum of services;
- linking data across providers to better understand trends and outcomes within their programs and interventions;
- building the capacity of additional service providers to integrate positive youth development and demand-driven approaches in a meaningful way and scale the work over time; and
- advocating for public policies aimed at changing regulatory and funding environments in support of integrated services.

Throughout the eight-year initiative, the Casey Foundation is documenting what is working for young people, as well as the activities that drive integration and the different approaches each partnership is adopting with various workforce players.



In addition, Casey is supporting the local partnerships by:

- offering technical assistance in strategic planning and embedding a race-equity lens, as well as other cross-site learning opportunities;
- strengthening the capacity of partners as they seek to align organizations and systems to better serve racially and ethnically diverse groups of young people, connect young people with employment and expand available services and programs;
- investing in research and evaluation to help partners improve their approach and to build the case for systems-change and scaling efforts; and
- sharing lessons with a broader range of practitioners, policymakers and funders to help improve employment support for young people and inform how public and private dollars can be used to bolster the types of services that enable them to secure family-sustaining employment opportunities.

## **THE CHANGING LABOR MARKET**

The changes in our economy during the past few decades have made it tougher than ever for youth and young adults to connect to and grow along a career pathway. Forty years ago, a young person did not need a high school diploma to get a good manufacturing job that offered a reliable, decent income with benefits. But without postsecondary education and training today, doors to jobs that can sustain a middle-class family are tough to open.

At the same time, an increasing number of U.S. employers are changing the way they structure jobs, shifting to more part-time and “gig” positions.<sup>5</sup> As a result, many more American workers are scheduled and paid on an as-needed basis instead of having steady hours and earnings. These piecemeal arrangements can make it difficult for young people — including those with children — to cover household expenses, secure transportation, arrange for reliable child care and pursue training or education.

By providing young people with a comprehensive set of wraparound support services designed to help them balance school, work and family — all while developing a set of targeted skills and gaining hands-on experience — Generation Work aims to enable more young people to move beyond entry-level employment and into sustainable careers.

## CLEVELAND

In Northeast Ohio, the Generation Work partnership is pursuing its vision of a coordinated and accessible workforce system that blends positive youth development and demand-driven strategies to build quality career pathways for young people of all backgrounds. The initiative is designed to address the needs of young adults ages 18–29, with an initial focus on 18- to 24-year-olds receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and entering Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) programs. The partnership manages and supports a resource center, which integrates training, job-placement, mentoring and supportive services that help these young people connect to careers in growing industries.

### Core Partners

- *Towards Employment* is a workforce development practitioner that builds career pathways to successful, long-term employment while creating a talent pipeline for local businesses. It partners with Youth Opportunities Unlimited to provide services on behalf of the public one-stop career center, OhioMeansJobs|Cleveland-Cuyahoga County (OMJ|CC), at the Young Adult Resource Center (YRC).
- *Youth Opportunities Unlimited* helps teens and young adults succeed by providing educational and workforce opportunities, skills-development courses and access to career pathways. It partners with Towards Employment to provide services at the YRC.
- *The Cleveland/Cuyahoga County Workforce Development Board* operates OMJ|CC, which houses the YRC, and also administers WIOA funding. The Workforce Development Board also supports a very active standing subcommittee called the Youth Council.
- *Cuyahoga County* is a vital funding partner, administering state TANF funding and workforce development programming through its offices of job and family services and economic development.
- *The Fund for Our Economic Future* is a collaborative of foundations, corporations, universities, health care systems, private businesses and civic agencies that have come together to advance economic growth in Northeast Ohio.

## HARTFORD

Building on lessons learned from workforce development efforts in the manufacturing and, more recently, health care sectors, the Hartford Generation Work partnership is increasing the capacity of local education and training providers to engage with and meet the needs of both employers and young people within other high-demand industries.

## Core Partners

- *The United Way of Central and Northeastern Connecticut*, the lead partner, convenes and facilitates discussions across a range of public and private organizations working together to integrate positive youth and demand-driven workforce development strategies.
- *Capital Workforce Partners* is the local workforce investment board in charge of administering WIOA and other programs and initiatives to develop a skilled and educated workforce. It serves as the backbone for Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative.
- The city of Hartford's *Department of Families, Children, Youth and Recreation* administers publicly funded youth programming, from early childhood education to youth development to fitness.
- *Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative* convenes stakeholders, including funders, public partners and service providers, to improve employment outcomes for young people ages 16–24 by focusing on career pathways, youth engagement and data integration. Hartford's mayor serves as chair for Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative.
- The region's largest community foundation, the *Hartford Foundation for Public Giving*, brings together partners to share information, understand local issues and put resources behind effective solutions.
- *Our Piece of the Pie*, a community-based organization, runs the Pathway to Careers Initiative in partnership with local education and training providers. The program helps youth in Hartford to develop the educational, employment and personal skills necessary to succeed in manufacturing and other high-growth industries.
- *Workforce Solutions Collaborative of Metro Hartford* is a funders' collaborative focused on creating demand-driven, sector-based workforce partnerships for low-income adults. United Way serves as the backbone organization for this initiative.

## INDIANAPOLIS

The Indianapolis partnership is working to improve the effectiveness of the city's services for young-adult students with low literacy levels by embedding support services within the adult basic education system and providing seamless secondary education and employment development services. To do this, the partnership is adapting the coaching and employer-engagement model developed by The Excel Center of Goodwill of Central & Southern Indiana to expand its reach to more young people through adult basic education providers. The inclusion of high-quality coaching and employer-engagement strategies will allow adult education providers to better support young-adult students as they attain a

secondary credential, their high school diploma and/or industry-recognized certifications, and then transition to employment.

### Core Partners

- *Goodwill of Central & Southern Indiana*, the lead partner organization, runs The Excel Center, a network of adult public charter schools that provide education, training, support services and coaching to disconnected young adults.
- *Warren Township's Walker Career Center* is an adult basic education provider that prepares young people to get their high school equivalency diploma. The center is piloting the expansion of The Excel Center's coaching model.
- Workforce development board *EmployIndy* is charged with administering the federal Job Training Partnership Act and other initiatives that provide services and training to develop a skilled and educated workforce.
- *The Indiana Department of Workforce Development* administers publicly funded workforce development programming.
- *Conexus Indiana* promotes the growth of the state's manufacturing and logistics sectors by developing and implementing initiatives to meet the current and future needs of the industry.
- *The Indiana Family and Social Services Administration* integrates the delivery of social services.
- *Ivy Tech Community College* is Indiana's community college system.

### PHILADELPHIA

The Philadelphia partnership is working to improve employment outcomes for young adults by aligning funding, services and supports within the workforce system to increase the take up of demand-driven strategies. Leveraging their experience developing and implementing demand-driven and positive youth development strategies in health care, construction and customer service, the Philadelphia partnership is promoting the uptake of these practices through work-based learning and building capacity among additional service providers. Additionally, the partners are working with the city of Philadelphia to develop a policy framework that supports the integration of demand-driven and PYD strategies.

### Core Partners

- *The District 1199C Training & Upgrading Fund*, an educational trust fund, leverages its relationship with member employers to provide career coaching, case management and training and education programs. These programs help

young people gain the certifications and credentialing necessary for careers in the health care and human service fields.

- *YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School* helps young people ages 18–20 obtain a high school diploma and develop skills in the construction and hospitality fields by offering job-training and work-based learning programs in a community-oriented, supportive environment.
- *The Job Opportunity Investment Network* is a local collaborative composed of workforce development funders committed to increasing equitable access to family-sustaining jobs and careers for individuals in the Greater Philadelphia region.
- *The Philadelphia Youth Network* coordinates and supports a network of organizations that develop solutions and provide services designed to equip 12- to 24-year-olds with the skills and work experiences needed to become productive working adults.

## SEATTLE

In Seattle, a network of educational institutions, workforce development providers, community-based organizations and public and private partners is developing an integrated approach to help young people ages 18–29 in King County who are disconnected from school and work re-engage with educational and employment opportunities. The network seeks to build a system of cross-system referrals and partnerships focused on next-step employment and career pathways for young adults without secondary credentials, including (but not limited to) opportunities at Seattle-Tacoma (Sea-Tac) International Airport (the fastest-growing airport in the United States) and in the advanced manufacturing and aerospace industries. The partners are also working together to develop additional pathways with organizations affiliated with the Road Map Project, a collective impact effort focused on young adults in South King County. They are exploring opportunities to pilot and grow industry-specific, dual-enrollment high school completion pathways at Sea-Tac Airport and for registered apprenticeship programs in the manufacturing, construction-trade and health care industries.

### Core Partners

- *SkillUp Washington* is a collaboration of workforce funders hosted by Seattle Foundation, which serves as the partnership's convener.
- *Port Jobs*, a community-based workforce development organization, is based at the Port of Seattle and Sea-Tac Airport and provides career pathways in transportation, distribution and logistics.

- *South Seattle College's Georgetown Campus* provides manufacturing career programming and apprenticeship preparation.
- The nonprofit *Aerospace Joint Apprenticeship Committee* is a registered apprenticeship program for the aerospace and advanced manufacturing industries.
- *King County Employment and Education Resources (EER)* is a county youth service provider offering employment readiness and young-adult outreach and referral services. EER serves as the co-convenor of a regional learning community for dropout re-engagement providers.
- *Seattle Education Access*, a community-based organization, provides college navigation and access to postsecondary training for young adults ages 18–29.
- The backbone organization for the *Road Map Project*, *the Community Center for Education Results* co-convenes a regional learning community for dropout re-engagement providers.
- *Puget Sound Educational Service District* is one of nine regional educational agencies serving school districts and state-approved charter and private schools in Washington.
- *The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction* oversees Washington's K–12 system, including Open Doors Youth Reengagement, a dropout re-engagement program for students ages 16–21.
- *The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges* oversees Washington State's system of 34 public community and technical colleges.



## learning along the way

**The Casey Foundation is partnering with a team of national organizations to capture lessons learned; identify the appropriate benchmarks and outcomes for Generation Work; and build evidence on the effectiveness of combining demand-driven workforce strategies with positive youth development approaches.**

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These organizations are facilitating research and evaluation activities throughout the initiative to help the partnerships better use data and capture lessons to build the case for policy and systems changes to improve services for unemployed young adults.

- ▶ **THE ASPEN INSTITUTE WORKFORCE STRATEGIES INITIATIVE (ASPENWSI)** is conducting research to understand and document the employer-facing strategies used by the Generation Work partnerships. AspenWSI has worked to explore the local partnerships' efforts to engage participating employers in discussions designed to identify and share information about the value they and their young-adult participants provide to businesses and the work that local partners engage in to identify and promote jobs that are a good fit for young adults. Good-fit employers include those who provide opportunities to learn and have supportive supervisory, mentoring and scheduling practices that support a young adult's needs to balance work, school and family care responsibilities.
- ▶ **CHILD TRENDS** is conducting cross-site research and documentation regarding PYD strategies used by the Generation Work partnerships. Child Trends has developed an assessment instrument to help with the application of PYD strategies in youth and young-adult training, education and employment programs. Child Trends is also researching how PYD can be expanded to other organizations and institutions in the education and training sectors. Throughout the initiative, Child Trends will continue to research and publish on topics related to positive youth development.



- ▶ **MDRC** is conducting a multiyear evaluation that consists of two studies. The first is focused on understanding the systems-change process — what and how systems-level changes were brought about, and how program and service delivery has changed as a result of these actions. The second will examine the experiences and outcomes of young adults enrolled in programs that incorporate both PYD and demand-driven workforce practices.

The Casey Foundation and its partners hope to use what they learn from the work of local partnerships — how they’re collaborating to blend PYD with their employer-engagement strategies while intentionally addressing racial and ethnic disparities in the workforce — to bring about renewed, more effective ways to support our nation’s young people.





## looking ahead

**Although the five local Generation Work partnerships are still in the early stages of implementation, some common lessons and themes have begun to emerge from their work.**

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- ▶ Early efforts to integrate positive youth development principles into workforce training are showing promise in both supporting young people and meeting the needs of employers. But making this shift has required additional time and coordination, as well as an intentional focus on relationship building. The PYD frame represents a new way of working for most human service and workforce development systems. For it to be effective, all parties — including providers, young people and employers — must know that their needs are understood and their goals will be respected and met. Cultivating relationships built on compatible goals and trust is crucial and requires sustained effort.
- ▶ The connection between a young person's development and a business's bottom line might not always be clear, so the partnerships work with employers to help them understand the ways their businesses can benefit from engaging with, and investing in, young people who may not fit the profile of typical hires. In some cases, partners are learning that their young-adult participants are similar in many respects to the employees that businesses already hire yet struggle to develop and retain.
- ▶ Establishing a shared set of metrics to track progress toward systems-level change helps ensure strategies are connected to results. Improving services for employers and young people, shifting the policy landscape and cultivating sustainable funding sources take time. Without common measures to track progress, it's easy to focus on the shorter-term activities related to participant outputs and lose sight of longer-term goals.

While it was a challenging process, the five local Generation Work partnerships ultimately arrived at a similar set of metrics to track progress toward systems alignment and leadership, program quality, employer engagement, scale and the development of a supportive policy and funding environment. The Casey Foundation hopes that, over time, these measures will help to keep the partnerships focused on their systems-change work and the ways it is making a difference for young people, despite competing institutional and programmatic demands.

- ▶ Engaging in intentional conversations about racial and ethnic equity and inclusion requires practice and patience. Different partners, whether funders, employers or direct-service providers, have different levels of understanding of the systemic and institutional barriers young people of color face — and some might not even be ready to acknowledge that equity is an issue that needs addressing. Therefore, the work has to happen on both ends. Partners must continue developing a shared language and perspective among key actors within their local labor market, while simultaneously preparing young people for workplaces that may not always embrace diversity.
- ▶ As the work of the initiative continues to take shape, the partnerships are recognizing the need to anticipate and manage change. They are adapting their strategies to the evolving economic landscape and establishing policies and practices that help maintain momentum and cultivate staff capacity.

Through Generation Work, the Casey Foundation ultimately seeks to develop multiple pathways to work that are supported by diverse networks of training and employment stakeholders. These stakeholders will be skilled in meeting the needs of all young job seekers and have strong connections with business leaders in high-growth industries.

The Foundation and its partners will continue to gather and share lessons gleaned from the initiative for other localities seeking to implement similar approaches. For more information about Generation Work or Casey's other economic-opportunity efforts, please visit [www.aecf.org/work/economic-opportunity](http://www.aecf.org/work/economic-opportunity).

## ENDNOTES

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