



In 2013, the Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions started the Opportunity Youth movement to mobilize support for Opportunity Youth, 16–24-year-olds who are disconnected from school and work. Boston won a place among these communities. Convened by the Boston Opportunity Agenda and the Boston Private Industry Council (PIC), the Boston Opportunity Youth Collaborative (OYC) works to reduce the rate of youth disconnection in the city.

The OYC focuses on opportunity youth who have a high school credential and coordinates with the Youth Transitions Task Force, an aligned coalition convened by the PIC that focuses on high school dropout prevention and re-engagement. Our research indicates that there are even more disconnected young adults in Boston with a high school diploma than those without.

The OYC addresses gaps in postsecondary education and training pathways to high-quality careers, using research, systems change strategies, and targeted program implementation. Initially a convening of more than 80 stakeholders working directly with opportunity youth, the OYC has evolved to a table that includes philanthropy, research, government, community agencies, and institutional partners. To learn more about our collaborative and its history, please see our 2018 report, [New Directions](#).

The following are the OYC's shared goals and target priorities to advance these goals. We hope that Governor Healey's transition team will consider them as they develop their priorities for Jobs and the Flourishing Economy and Thriving Youth and Young Adults.

Core Goals

1. Connect Opportunity Youth—young people ages 16 to 24 who are out of school and out of work—to education, training, employment, and career pathways.
2. Pursue an equity-minded approach to advancing system reforms through shared data, youth voice, action research, and collective advocacy.
3. Create new education and training capacity for high school graduates who do not go on to college.
4. Use data to identify effective strategies that can be scaled up.
5. Align education, workforce, and career exploration programs with one another to prevent young people from becoming disengaged in the first place.

Target Priorities

Start with the most immediate need, next steps for those who are currently disconnected:

- 1. Develop the on-ramps and guides to help young adults identify and progress along career pathways:**
 - a. Build capacity for outreach, assessment, and referrals to job training, employment, and college.
 - b. Provide on-ramps to help young adults succeed in career pathways, including:
 - career exploration programs to inform career choices by exposing young people to a variety of occupations
 - pre-apprenticeships to prepare for competitive training programs
 - c. Support the integration of education and workforce development.
- 2. Identify and remove barriers to young adults' participation in education and training:**
 - a. Expand multi-tiered, culturally responsive mental health support for young adults and students, while promoting self-awareness and developing social skills within the classroom.
 - b. Address socio-economic barriers that prevent young adults from progressing on their pathways, including homelessness, childcare, and food insecurity.
- 3. Increase availability of high-quality occupational training programming for opportunity youth:**
 - a. Develop more training programs and innovative pathways that engage high demand employers and prepare young adults to succeed at the workplace.
 - b. Ensure sustained investment in training programs that lead to career tracks with good paying jobs.
 - c. Align job training, industry certificates, apprenticeships, and college credentials into stackable, accelerated progression.

Empower young people to have a voice:

- 4. Expand opportunities for youth and young adult leadership in policy and programming decisions related to opportunity youth:**
 - a. Build and sustain a Governor's Youth Council, including youth and young adults of racially and economically diverse backgrounds, to bring lived experience to policy decisions.
 - b. Increase availability of programs that allow youth and young adults, whether in-school or out-of-school, to get informed and participate in shaping the agenda and generating solutions.
 - c. Incorporate formal and informal opportunities for opportunity youth to develop their leadership skills, train in various forms of advocacy, and collaborate to impact change.



- d. Promote collaboration among youth champions to inform best practices and build on each other's success.

Work with key institutions to keep youth engaged and making progress:

- 5. Expand access and support to postsecondary pathways and programming that helps opportunity youth access, navigate and complete college:**
 - a. Expand funding of Community Colleges to provide more scholarships and wraparound support for low-income first-generation students.
 - b. Promote persistence coaching by college staff and community programs to support opportunity youth and first-generation students as they transition into college and navigate through to completion.
 - c. Provide targeted loan and debt forgiveness for first generation students and returning stop-outs at community colleges and state universities.
 - d. Fund innovative support and incentive models such as the City University of New York's (CUNY) Accelerated Study in Associates Program ([ASAP](#)), that are proven to increase graduation rates for low-income first-generation students at community college. A rigorous evaluation of ASAP found that the program nearly doubled the three-year graduation rates for low-income students who began in developmental education courses at CUNY.

- 6. Redesign high schools to provide engaging curriculum and empowering environments, particularly for students who are not responding to traditional academic instruction:**
 - a. Expand engaging curricula that values lived experience, promotes understanding of personal assets and their value on the labor market.
 - b. Provides multi-disciplinary curriculum that engages diverse learning styles, including technical skills training, workplace learning, the arts, and community service learning.
 - c. Foster supportive school climates with an anti-racist, healing-centered, trauma-sensitive approach.
 - d. Expand early interventions and positive alternatives to punitive disciplinary measures.
 - e. Increase re-engagement capacity and grow alternative education options designed to accelerate the academic achievement of off-track students and provide career and college connections.
 - f. Increase maximum age for reimbursing high schools per pupil costs to 25 years of age.