



## CREATING PATHWAYS TO EMPLOYMENT

THE ROLE OF INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIPS IN PREPARING LOW-INCOME YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULT FOR CAREERS IN HIGH-DEMAND INDUSTRIES

By Terry Grobe, Nancy Martin, and Adria Steinberg | June 2015

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to recognize the generosity of the funder of this work, the Rockefeller Foundation. We thank our contributors Fred Dedrick, Mamadou Ndiaye, Navjeet Singh, and Elicia Wilson of Jobs for the Future and the National Fund for Workforce Solutions, as well as Sophie Besl and Nomi Sofer for editorial support and Rochelle Hickey for graphic design.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
Youth Unemployment Crisis	2
Addressing the Skills Gap	2
The Youth/Industry Partnership Initiative	3
<b>THE YOUTH/INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIP SITES: EMERGING MODELS</b>	<b>4</b>
SkillWorks	5
Workforce Solutions Collaborative of Metro Hartford	5
SkillUp Washington Collaborative	5
Southwest Alabama Workforce Development Council	6
Bay Area Workforce Funding Collaborative	6
Central Iowa Works	6
<b>LEARNING FROM THE YOUTH/INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE</b>	<b>7</b>
The Role of Community Providers	8
The Role of Employers	10
The Role of Workforce Intermediaries	11
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>ENDNOTES</b>	<b>14</b>



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The United States is in the midst of a youth unemployment crisis that is having a negative impact on young adults' success in the workplace and depriving employers of a prepared workforce. A full 6.7 million American youth (ages 16-24), 17 percent of that age group, are neither in school nor working.<sup>1</sup> At the same time as this population of “opportunity youth” struggles to enter the labor market, many employers are struggling to identify skilled workers for high-demand sectors.

The National Fund for Workforce Solutions, in partnership with Jobs for the Future, and with support from the Rockefeller Foundation launched the Youth/Industry Partnership Initiative (YIPI), designed to learn as much as possible in an 18-month timeframe about how employer-led industry partnerships, such as those in the National Fund communities, could contribute to addressing this dual crisis and to generating improved outcomes for older youth and benefits to participating employers. Specifically, how can industry partnerships be harnessed to create employment pathways aligned with employer needs that offer a clear sequence of education coursework, training credentials, and job placement in high-demand sectors? YIPI provided support to three National Fund collaboratives to investigate this question.

The key learning emerging from this initiative is the importance of a collective, place-based effort that is driven by employers and industry partnerships and relies on community providers and education/training providers, as well as local workforce intermediaries, to build high-quality employer-connected pathways. Each stakeholder plays key roles in connecting young adults to employment—all parties must work closely together in order to advance better outcomes.

- > **Community providers** play key roles in identifying, recruiting, and supporting young adults so they can enter, persist, and succeed in pathway programming. Community agencies also help youth build their professional skills and provide continuing support for young adults once they enter employment.
- > **Employers** play vital roles in providing information on key skills required to enter and advance in the sector. They also contribute by advising on and participating in program and curriculum design and offering on-the-job training and opportunities for entry-level jobs.

- > **Workforce intermediaries** provide the connecting functions by brokering relationships among agencies, training institutions or programs and employers, and identifying which sectors hold the most promise for training and supporting older youth.

The YIPI project was designed as a learning initiative to generate lessons for the field and create appetite for additional research and development. The emerging work at the YIPI sites to create high-quality employment pathways is proving that the National Fund for Workforce Solutions' employer partnerships and similar national ventures hold the potential to both address our youth employment crisis and generate our next-generation skilled workforce for employers.

# INTRODUCTION

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Jairo, a recent high school graduate from Hartford, CT, came to Our Piece of the Pie (OPP) because he had heard an OPP presentation at his school. Unsure of his life post-high school, Jairo thought the Pathways to Manufacturing program sounded like a good opportunity. He looked forward to earning a certificate from Asnuntuck Community College, gaining work experience and, hopefully, landing a job. Raised by a single parent in Hartford, Jairo looked at what he saw around him in his community and decided that he would “do better” for himself and for his mother, a cancer survivor who Jairo said was all the motivation he ever needed to help him stay on track in the program.

It wasn't always easy. Jairo got up at 5:00 a.m. every morning and took two buses to get to the program. He remembers learning very quickly that “this wasn't high school. We had to be organized and stay on track of everything every day.” OPP supported Jairo with a number of his needs including food, transportation and counseling. OPP provided access to OPP counselors and college faculty, lunch during the day, bus tokens and bus transportation from OPP's Hartford youth center to Asnuntuck's campus in Enfield, located 20 miles away. These supports helped Jairo to prepare for tests so he could obtain a number of certifications and credentials. Through the program, Jairo earned an Advanced Manufacturing Machine Technology Certification from Asnuntuck Community College, as well as OSHA 10 Certification, National Retail Federation Customer Service Certification, and a Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Workforce Readiness Credential. He also completed a 120-hour subsidized internship with a local manufacturer.

At the conclusion of the Pathways to Manufacturing program Jairo had the opportunity of full-time employment at \$18 an hour, or he could continue with his manufacturing education.

## YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT CRISIS

Across the country, young people such as Jairo are struggling to find an entry point into today's labor market. Most are not as fortunate as he was. They graduate from or leave high school hoping to get a job, but instead find themselves facing a labor market that offers few opportunities to those without credentials or work experience.

The United States is experiencing a youth unemployment crisis that is having a negative impact on far too many of our young people and, at the same time, threatens to deprive American employers of a skilled workforce now and into the future. The first decade of the 21st century, which included the Great Recession, left young people ages 16-24 negatively affected by a shrinking labor market.<sup>2</sup> In fact, youth employment rates are at an all-time low since World War II, with only half of youth and young adults holding jobs.<sup>3</sup> Employment among teens declined from 44 percent in 2000 to 24 percent in 2011, with rates lower among teens in households with lower incomes than in those with higher incomes. During the same period, the employment rate for young adults ages 20-24 declined from 72 percent to 60 percent.<sup>4</sup> The current labor market makes it very difficult for youth and young adults to obtain jobs, even in industries traditionally open to them, such as service and retail.

Labor market measures clearly indicate that American youth and young adults are in critical need of job opportunities. Such measures also indicate that the consequences of the current lack of opportunity are life-long, diminishing their future ability to meet the demands of a dynamic labor market.<sup>5</sup> With few opportunities to explore careers and learn through experience about the world of work, youth and young adults often know very little about career options and lack work-readiness skills. This puts them at a disadvantage in competing for jobs with adults with more experience. Unemployment also deprives them of the connections critical to successful job searches in the future.<sup>6</sup>

The most challenged group of American young people are those who are neither enrolled in school nor stably attached to the labor market. This group constitutes approximately 17 percent of the 16-24 year old population. About half of these youth have high school

credentials but are then unable to find work and are neither in college nor employed. The other half has yet to complete high school.<sup>7</sup>

This group of disconnected youth, a group now regularly referred to as "opportunity youth" because they are seeking opportunity and because they represent an incredible opportunity to the nation if we make the choice to invest in them, can benefit from continuing their education and developing the skills needed for successful entry into the workforce. A recent survey demonstrates that opportunity youth are eager to learn, receive training, and work. A full 85 percent of opportunity youth recognize the importance of having a good education and good job, and more than three-fourths consider it their personal responsibility to attain both.<sup>8</sup>

## ADDRESSING THE SKILLS GAP

The large number of opportunity youth is symptomatic of a significant and long-standing question faced by employers and civic leaders: where is the source of the future skilled workforce that will fuel the economy? In many areas of the country, employers are already struggling to identify skilled workers to fill entry-level vacancies in high-demand sectors. Middle-skill jobs (primarily in computer technology, nursing, and high-skill manufacturing), which require some postsecondary technical education and training—and will account for nearly half of all new job openings from 2010 through 2020—are in particularly high demand.<sup>9</sup> In fact, a full two-thirds of employers indicate they have difficulty filling job vacancies due to applicants with insufficient experience and substandard work habits.<sup>10</sup>

This skills gap has led many economic and political leaders to look to sectoral industry partnerships, such as those fostered by the National Fund for Workforce Solutions. Such industry partnerships depend on the sustained engagement and leadership of a group of employers in a sector who identify specific, shared needs for worker skills, certifications, and credentials, and then collaborate with education and training providers to make sure their programs align closely with actual industry demand. Such partnerships are successful when they provide employers with the best possible candidates for specific employment

opportunities. Most frequently these are adults with some work experience. Finding young people with these qualifications is more challenging, and therefore many industry partnerships have traditionally served only a small percentage of young adults.

## THE YOUTH/INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE

In response to this challenge, the National Fund, in collaboration with Jobs for the Future, and with support from the Rockefeller Foundation, launched the Youth/Industry Partnership Initiative (YIPI). The intent of the 18 month project was to understand in more depth the combination of partners and aligned educational and training services and workplace experience that would constitute effective pathways to employment for young people struggling to enter the labor market in occupational areas with growth potential. The initiative created the opportunity to bring together the knowledge about developing a talent pool generated by the National Fund over its eight-year history with the knowledge developed at Jobs for the Future from more than a decade of work in cities to address the assets and needs of marginalized young people. The initiative sought to identify the essential elements of “back on track” career pathways that help marginalized young people gain the opportunities they seek.

A number of National Fund sites applied to pilot new ways to bring young people into the high-demand sectors of their local workforce. The National Fund/JFF YIPI team selected three sites that evidenced growing interest in attracting and preparing young adults: SkillWorks (Boston, MA), Workforce Solutions Collaborative of Metro Hartford (Hartford, CT), and SkillUp (Seattle, WA). An additional three collaboratives, Southwest Alabama Workforce Development Council (Mobile, AL), Bay Area Workforce Funding Collaborative (San Francisco, CA), and Central Iowa Works (Des Moines, IA) were invited to participate in the initiative’s learning community. The initiative sought to learn how youth/industry partnerships could develop employment pathways leading to improved employment outcomes for youth and young adults and to identify the ways in which youth-focused pathways need to be designed and implemented in order to equip youth with the skills they need to connect to in-demand jobs and advanced technical training. The six communities were given the opportunity to share their learning as they built and strengthened pathways for older youth and explored how youth/industry partnerships might be harnessed to address both youth and employer needs.

# THE YOUTH/INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIP SITES: EMERGING MODELS

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The collaboratives supported through the Youth/Industry Partnership Initiative built diverse models. The work to engage and involve employers, develop strong and complementary roles for partners, and build on-ramps to adult career pathway experiences generated rich information about the benefits and challenges of working to improve employment outcomes for opportunity youth while meeting industry need. All of the participating communities had experience organizing and developing industry partnerships and were eager to expand employer-driven strategies to increase participation of un- or underemployed youth and young adults ages 18-24 in sector-based training. The collaboratives worked in partnership with employers and training providers with a focus on high-demand fields such as construction, advanced manufacturing, health care, and insurance.

# SKILLWORKS

## BOSTON, MA

SkillWorks is a twelve-year-old initiative to improve workforce development in Boston and in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The Boston site focused on increasing the number of young adults ready to enter high-demand fields through building the capacity of both its adult and youth training partners. This involved a two-pronged strategy: first SkillWorks placed a heightened focus on outreach, recruitment, and services provided to opportunity youth within partnerships that have previously mainly served adults to bring a greater number of young adults into their pathway programs. Second, SkillWorks supported increased training capacity and service enhancement to programs already primarily serving young adults. Through small, strategic grants, SkillWorks helped existing job training and postsecondary bridge programs improve outreach, recruitment, training, and service capacity with the aim of improving outcomes for older youth. In doing this work, SkillWorks collaborated with the Boston Opportunity Agenda and the Boston Private Industry Council, to take advantage of new programming for opportunity youth, such as Boston's ReConnection Center, which focuses on the part of the population who have attained a high school credential but are not attached to the labor force.

# WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS COLLABORATIVE OF METRO HARTFORD

## PATHWAYS TO MANUFACTURING INITIATIVE

Workforce Solutions Collaborative, the National Fund intermediary for Hartford, has worked closely with Our Piece of the Pie, a nonprofit with a mission of assisting urban youth ages 18-24 to become economically self-sufficient. OPP, in turn, partnered with Asnuntuck Community College and Capital Workforce Partners (the local workforce investment board) to develop a bridge program that would prepare youth to enter and succeed in the college's Pathways to Manufacturing Initiative (PMI). The bridge program offers a supported one-year preparatory experience that includes community college classes, academic

support (especially in math), and a range of other supports and services (e.g., workshops on financial literacy or work readiness, orientation day on campus, and access to job shadowing and internships). Once youth are enrolled in the manufacturing initiative, OPP and college staff work together to ensure youth's persistence and success. Designed to prepare urban youth to be competitive in the area's high-demand small manufacturing labor market, the PMI provides youth with OPP's extensive support services while they complete Asnuntuck's rigorous manufacturing training program, get credentialed, and enter careers in the region's manufacturing industry.

# SKILLUP WASHINGTON COLLABORATIVE

## YOUTH/INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE

SkillUp Washington, the National Fund intermediary in metro Seattle, developed a ten-week on-ramp to South Seattle College's Industrial Manufacturing Academy for opportunity youth ages 18-24. Youth were recruited through local housing, homeless, juvenile justice, and youth-serving organizations, as well as Adult Basic Education/GED preparation providers. The program included a challenge week designed to boost youths' readiness and strengthen motivation to complete the program, followed by five weeks of intensive, contextualized technical instruction and a final four weeks of paid work-based learning experience and assistance with job search and placement. The training component introduced young people to training in welding, composites, and other industry-required skills; youth earned credentials in Forklift, First Aid, CPR, and OSHA 10; and 13 college credits. The Industrial Manufacturing Academy On-Ramp program also leveraged two Washington State programs providing state education funds to support high school completion for students who still need to earn a high school credential: Open Doors, which supports education and case management services for off-track 16-21 year-olds; and High School 21+, competency-based diploma programming for students over 21 offered at all of the state's community and technical colleges.

In addition, three National Fund sites were invited to take part in the YIPI learning community.

## **SOUTHWEST ALABAMA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL**

### **YOUTH/INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE**

Southwest Alabama's Workforce Development Council has built a pathway to employment for young adults working closely with employers involved in the maritime industry. Working with an independent training agency, SAWDC recruits youth through high school career and technical education programs and One-Stop Career Centers and connects them to training in structural welding. When youth finish their training and a first certification, they work with a coordinator who assists them with placement in a first job and access to training towards more advanced or additional certifications.

## **BAY AREA WORKFORCE FUNDING COLLABORATIVE**

### **CAREER ADVANCEMENT ACADEMY**

Bay Area Workforce Funding Collaborative supports the implementation of two pilot programs that engage opportunity youth in career-oriented workforce training in high-demand industries. Working with a partner, Skyline Community College in San Mateo

County, the program targets students in California's continuation high schools where the youth have been identified as being at high risk of becoming disconnected young adults. These young people are afforded the opportunity to get Emergency Medical Technician training. The second program involves Skyline Community College and Goodwill Industries of San Francisco, San Mateo, and Marin Counties. This program offers young adults skills training in warehousing and logistics. Both the EMT and Warehousing programs incorporate effective practices for sectoral workforce training for young adults, including experiential learning, on the job experiences, receipt of stackable credentials, and partnerships with youth-serving organizations.

## **CENTRAL IOWA WORKS**

### **YOUTH/INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE**

Central Iowa Works has developed an effort to identify strategies that engage opportunity youth in employment opportunities within its workforce partnerships and help young jobseekers acquire skills to be successful in gaining employment. Partners designed a bridge program that offers instruction in digital and financial literacy, workplace readiness, and simulations and vision and perseverance and then assists young people to transition to further training in the fields of advanced manufacturing, energy and construction, and health care.

# LEARNING FROM THE YOUTH/INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE

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**N**ineteen-year-old April came to SkillUp Washington's Youth Industry Partnership Initiative as a brand new mother eager to gain new skills in order to land a job that would support her and her child. She had work experience in retail, but the pay was low, and she could not get full-time work. The industry certifications were the main attraction of the YIPI program because most of the jobs April was interested in required them.

Shortly after classes began, April's housing situation deteriorated, but she worked closely with a Workforce Development Specialist and was able to get into subsidized housing just as she started her internship. "If I had not had the help to get my housing and my life together while going to school, things could have worked out a lot differently," April said, adding, "Knowing so many people were willing to help me only made me want to try more." April worked hard during her internship at the office furniture dealership OpenSquare and was offered a full-time position with benefits at its conclusion.

From the start YIPI was designed as a learning initiative, testing the premise that industry partnerships in high-demand industries could be harnessed to build strong employment pathways that would address the needs both of employers and low-income young adults. Throughout the course of the initiative the YIPI sites tested the roles of key partners, the program design components, the needs of employers, and what assets and supports were most important in engaging employers to offer on-the-job experiences and entry-level jobs to young adults.

YIPI is generating early lessons on how to create employment pathways to prepare youth and young adults like April for careers in high-demand industries. Although provisional, this information can serve as a guide to communities exploring how to leverage existing employer consortia and harness key partners in order to build stronger pathways to employment for young adults.

## THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY PROVIDERS

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**“During my time with YouthBuild Boston, I was able to network and gain knowledge and skills I needed to get my job in carpentry. YouthBuild set up my interview, and my employer has a long history with the program. I’m now in school learning my trade and working full time.”**

*–YouthBuild Boston Participant*

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**“Without question, we are better off having youth-serving groups that are dedicated to and understand young people. Our Piece of the Pie is helping us with recruiting, preparing young people for our program, and providing our students with continuing supports. They make it less arduous than our having to work with youth independently, trying to determine if a particular kid is going to make it.”** *–Frank Gulluni, Director of Manufacturing Technology, Asnuntuck Community College*

Youth-serving community-based organizations like YouthBuild and Our Piece of the Pie are well positioned to identify and recruit youth for pathway programs. In addition, these programs, along with community colleges and other training providers play an important role in preparing young people to be productive

employees, supporting them through the many challenging circumstances they may face in their lives, and mitigating the risks to employers.

Employers who participated in and/or were surveyed during YIPI indicated that they rely upon trusted sources to identify young adults appropriate for open jobs and that they count on training and support providers in the community with whom they have relationships to provide them with skilled and work-ready employees. When problems arise, they also count on staff to quickly and skillfully intervene, help resolve the problem, and often keep the young person on the job.

## RECRUITING YOUTH FOR PATHWAY OPPORTUNITIES

Through working with youth-serving community-based organizations, the training providers affiliated with YIPI were more able to find and recruit interested young adults for their programs.

Recruitment occurred through multiple mechanisms: word of mouth, work with reengagement centers in the community, use of social media, street outreach, and incentives.

- ▶ In Boston, adult pathway programs that signed on to serve a greater number of young adults utilized the X-Cel Connection Center, a centralized outreach and referral center sponsored by a community-based organization focused on connecting 16–24 year-olds to further education, training, and jobs. In the same community, the Asian American Civic Association that offers an Energy Efficient Maintenance Skills program turned to The Boys and Girls Club of Boston, Boston Housing Authority, and Boston Center’s for Youth and Families to assist in recruiting young adults for their program.
- ▶ In Seattle, South Seattle Community College recruited young adults for their on-ramp to Manufacturing Academy by working with local community-based housing, homeless, juvenile justice, and youth-serving organizations, as well as WorkSource offices and ABE/GED providers.

An important part of recruitment is identifying youth and young adults who have the potential and ability to handle the rigors of the bridge programs, the training, work-based learning, and internships and employment. Our Piece of the Pie initially used an orientation day to

prepare participants for the program, but eventually refined its intake and assessment process to include multiple appointments with OPP staff to assess and prepare potential program participants. Similarly, Seattle's challenge week was primarily designed to assess and boost youth's motivation and persistence.

## PROVIDING AN ON-RAMP

Although young people are very interested in training for careers, some are not ready for the rigors of such a pathway. Community-based on-ramp programs can begin to prepare youth to be successful in employment pathways: helping them develop behaviors and attributes that will help them succeed both during training and on the job, giving them time and support to explore in-demand sectors, testing their aptitudes and interests, and determining their next steps (immediate job, further training or both).

- ▶ In Seattle, South Seattle Community College has built an on-ramp to the college's Manufacturing Academy for young adults. The program offers a challenge week that strengthens youth' readiness for the program, followed by five weeks of intensive contextualized instruction in industry-specific skills, followed by a four-week paid internships and assistance with job search and placement.
- ▶ In Hartford, OPP offers a bridge class designed to prepare students for entry into the Manufacturing program at Asnuntuck Community College. During the bridge phase OPP offers academic courses, especially in math, which Asnuntuck reported as a barrier to success for many students. The bridge program also includes courses in financial literacy, customer service, work readiness, and soft skills.

## PROVIDING KEY SUPPORTS

Community-based agencies offer critical social, emotional, academic, and career planning supports for young people in pathway programming.

- ▶ In Hartford, OPP staff provide intensive supports including youth development, individualized career and life planning, and emergency services. OPP also offers academic support and college retention services (tutoring and homework help, regular academic progress meetings), and workforce development services (career competency

development training, job shadowing, internships, job placement assistance, and retention support and job coaching). OPP and community college staff are in regular close communication throughout the program to ensure academic issues are addressed as soon as they arise. Youth-serving community providers like OPP are often very well-versed in the ongoing supports and stabilization services the young people need to persist and succeed in education and skills training programs. OPP, with its strong ties to the Hartford business community, was able to help get part-time employment for youth who needed it while completing the manufacturing program. In addition, OPP provided transportation to Asnuntuck Community College and even to internships at local companies, and worked with the college to provide lunch to students enrolled in the program.

## ASSESSING WORK READINESS

Community-based organizations and training providers play important roles in assessing young people's readiness for career programs and internships or jobs. Increasingly, such organizations have job developers or workplace development specialists on staff who talk with employers and understand what they expect from work-ready candidates.

- ▶ Our Piece of the Pie in Hartford uses a multiple measures assessment processes to assess suitability for the program (e.g., age, educational attainment, maturity, and ability to meet program demands and standards). Once enrolled in the program, youth work closely with a Workforce Development Specialist who assists them in connecting to job shadows and internships and then supports the youth in job placement and post-placement supports.
- ▶ In Seattle, a job development staff person within South Seattle Community College's On-ramps to Manufacturing Academy recruits employers and oversees the process of placing youth in paid internships. This staff person works closely with the training team to ensure each young person's readiness and fit for an internship placement. Once youth are placed in internships, program staff stay connected to employers to offer support and troubleshoot issues early so youth stay on the job and are successful during their placements.

## THE ROLE OF EMPLOYERS

**“The technical and professional skills I gained at Year Up set me up for an internship as a Junior Business Analyst at Cubist Pharmaceuticals. I thought I wanted to own a car shop. I never realized I’d be great in IT. I felt, for the first time in my life, that I had chosen the right path.**

**After graduating from Year Up, I moved to Orlando and started a job providing help desk support at ConvergeX. I was put on their number one account, NetApp, and worked hard to excel every day. My mentor at ConvergeX eventually left the company to work for NetApp, and reached out to me months later to join their team. I now work with the sales team as a Professional Service Engineer to help maximize their efficiency, specifically with storage and disaster recovery. I have been promoted eight times in eight months and travel around the country to work with organizations like the FAA and NSA. I think it’s pretty cool that I started as a Level 1 IT guy, and now I’m here.**

**Programs like Year Up are important because many of my peers want to do better, but don’t think they are good enough. Now I know that awareness is key, and success is a collective effort. It all comes down to opportunity. Not just getting one, but taking it.”**

*–Joe Teixeira, Year Up Boston*

Across the country, community colleges and other training providers, as well as youth serving organizations and high schools are seeing the importance of employer engagement and connection. However, it is challenging for employers to be approached by multiple organizations. And for the organizations, it is challenging to compete in approaching the same employers. YIPI illustrated a number of ways in which industry partnerships help to systematize such connections. It must be noted that some industry partnerships may not wish to prioritize any particular group of jobseekers. In this case, the partnership can still be enormously helpful, but intermediaries may need to identify specific employers (within or outside of the partnership) to find appropriate opportunities for work-based learning for young adults.

## LABOR MARKET INTELLIGENCE

Across the YIPI sites, employer and industry partnerships are a critical source of information that youth-serving organizations and training providers need to integrate into their pathway programs. Industry partnerships and their employer members can provide crucial information about high-demand industries, local labor market needs, and demand for entry level and mid-skill jobs. Ideally these partnerships also provide a better understanding of the likely career pathway within an industry, giving education and training providers better guidance on which competencies or credentials will put a new hire onto an upward trajectory within an industry. Without such information, organizations seeking to prepare young people for employment are not able to move beyond general workplace preparation.

All of the YIPI sites selected training programming using labor market data on growing sectors of their regional economies. In addition, close work with employer partners revealed which companies had large numbers of entry level and mid-skill high-wage jobs. Given the rapid growth of the small manufacturing industry in Connecticut, Our Piece of the Pie chose to form a partnership with Asnuntuck Community College because of its strong training program in advanced manufacturing despite the fact that Asnuntuck was not located in the city. As a result, Our Piece of the Pie found it necessary to provide transportation to and from the college for its participants.

## ADVISING ON SKILLS AND CURRICULUM

Industry partnerships play an important role in reviewing curricula offered by technical training programs at community colleges or in the community.

- The Building Trade Opportunities Partnership of Boston, comprised of trade associations representatives, general contractors, major subcontractors, and policymakers, advises YouthBuild Boston on curriculum and program practices aligned to industry needs. YouthBuild Boston reports that partnering with Building Trade Opportunities Partnership has significantly advanced their workforce development approach, increasing the breadth and depth of skills they now expect their students to acquire across YouthBuild Boston’s vocational training programs.

- The Manufacturing Advisory Group, convened by the Manufacturing Industrial Council in Seattle, identified a set of competencies that South Seattle College Manufacturing graduates should have and also recommended that a new pathway to the maritime industry be created in partnership with Vigor Shipyards.

## OFFERING EXPLORATORY JOB EXPERIENCES AND FIRST JOBS

With youth unemployment at an all-time high, it is critical for young people to get work experience as part of their preparation for employment pathways. Industry partnerships with multiple employers can help to ensure that young people get access to the workplace and, as they become ready, attain internships and first jobs. Strong involvement of employer partners offers young people many opportunities both within a workplace and across sector-related workplaces to learn about jobs in the industry, try out different experiences through internships, and enter a first job in the industry.

- In Seattle, South Seattle College's Manufacturing Academy was located near a large number of manufacturing companies. Young people often rotated through various departments in a company during their internship placement. They might get involved in shipping and receiving, office installation, and furniture refurbishing or recycling at Open Square, a company that assists small to large companies with office furniture and workspace installation. Seattle worked with a wide range of manufacturing companies, from aerospace (Boeing) to iPhone/iPad mounting manufacture (Ram Mounts), giving youth many choices in terms of companies and occupations they could explore.
- Similarly, Boston's work centered on increasing the connections between youth training programs and key employers. The network of programs offered choices within a number of growth sectors—energy efficient maintenance, clean energy, health care and construction—offering young people interested in connecting to career pathway training a number of entry points and training options.

## THE ROLE OF WORKFORCE INTERMEDIARIES

Successfully preparing young people for and supporting them in jobs in high-demand sectors involves many different entities, each with important roles to play. The least obvious but nevertheless critical “glue” role is played by workforce intermediaries such as the three involved in YIPI, SkillWorks, SkillUp Washington, and the Metro Hartford Workforce Solutions Collaborative. As these and many other workforce intermediaries have found, there is a lot of work involved in bringing together a disparate set of actors to create new opportunities for young adults.

## BROKERING RELATIONSHIPS

While employers may understand the need to develop a younger and more diverse workforce, they may not yet fully understand how to accomplish this goal. Similarly, community providers may have deep expertise in youth development and delivering support services, but they may lack the confidence or expertise to prepare young people in the full range of professional, technical and interpersonal skills needed for success in the labor market.

- Understanding the important role that employers play in building and implementing effective pathways, SkillWorks in Boston provided grants and technical assistance to a number of its youth program providers to help strengthen their connection to and relationship with area employers. In addition, the Year Up program in Boston, with its deep history of training young people for information technology and financial services jobs, has served as an important resource in assisting smaller community-based organizations to build their connection with local employers.
- In Seattle, SkillUp has found that it is important not only to make the right industry match for young adults, but to ensure that relationships with employers are strong enough to withstand any initial setbacks when a young person is not successful in his/her placement. A SkillUp Industrial Manufacturing Academy Navigator explained that when strong feedback loops are in place,

youth-serving organizations, training providers, employers, and industry partners are better able to communicate quickly and effectively and correct the course of a participant who threatens to fall off track. Partners who work together effectively to support the employers and the placements are also able to weather the event of a placement failure or two. In Seattle a young woman who finished the manufacturing on-ramp program took an unrelated job, but then contacted staff to let them know she had decided she wanted to work in the industry. The post-program placement staff person was able to place her in a full-time job in the company where she had completed her internship.

## FINDING THE RIGHT SECTORS

The three YIPI sites worked with industry partnerships in a range of sectors, including health care, insurance, construction, manufacturing, and logistics. In recruiting industry sectors and employers for YIPI, the National Fund/JFF YIPI team looked for sectors and companies with large numbers of well-paid entry-level positions and interest from human resource departments and supervisors in training and supporting older youth. In particular, they looked for employers with looming workforce development needs who recognize that recruiting youth to their industries is key to the success of their companies in the near term as well as the future.

- In southwest Alabama the ship manufacturer Austal USA has determined that 18-24 year-olds are the group most likely to enter jobs in their industry and have identified youth in high schools and community colleges as “high potentials” to enter in-demand jobs in the industry. Having decided to “hire down, skill up,” the company finds high potential trainees with baseline skills and offers Austal-specific pre-hire programs. Recognizing the many skilled jobs offered by Austal and other employers in the local maritime industry as well as the health care industry, the Southwest Alabama Workforce Development Council is now seeking to deepen its work with area employers to develop on-ramp pre-training programs for youth and young adults interested in these fields. Depending on region, there may be industries that are ripe for a partnership focused on employment training opportunities for the youth and young adult population.
- SkillWorks in Boston decided to connect with multiple sectors and to work with employers large enough to offer young people a range of training and employment opportunities. Through YIPI, Boston youth had a number of training options that they could connect to: construction, through YouthBuild Boston; information technology through Year Up; and clean energy training through JVS.

# CONCLUSION

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The YIPI experience is fledgling, yet it suggests what it may take to build an array of employer-connected training options and get many more disconnected young people on a path to good jobs and economic opportunity. The lessons of YIPI outline some of the challenges involved in getting productive employer involvement on a larger scale. It also suggests the complexity of building the capacity of training providers and effectively utilizing key community partners who can provide outreach, support services, and navigation assistance for young people to ensure their success along a pathway continuum.

Most importantly YIPI, though small in scale, demonstrates an important emerging alliance among workforce intermediaries, industry partnerships, educational institutions, and youth-serving agencies. Each of these players needs the assistance and support of the others in order to find and prepare the candidates, make the connections, provide the training and work-based opportunities, and organize the pathway to employment. Such collaboration can be enormously important as the economy recovers and the aging workforce retires. For some industries, such as health care, hospitality, and retail, the importance of youth, diversity, and Spanish-language skills in their “customer facing” frontline workforce will only increase. In addition, if the United States makes a strong commitment to expand new apprenticeship models, both opportunity youth and our economy will benefit: young adults will benefit from the investment in education and on-the-job training, and the economy will benefit from having a well-educated, stable, young workforce.

The building of this youth-serving alliance will take additional research and development, but the YIPI project has proven its potential to both address employer need for skilled talent and youth and young adult need for on-ramps, training, and continued supports to and through employment.

# ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> See: <http://www.nationalservice.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2012/white-house-council-community-solutions-launches-national-effort-put> and [http://www.serve.gov/new-images/council/pdf/econ\\_value\\_opportunity\\_youth.pdf](http://www.serve.gov/new-images/council/pdf/econ_value_opportunity_youth.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Sum, Andrew, Khatiwada, Ishwar, Trubskyy, Mykhaylo, & Ross, Martha. 2014. *The Plummeting Labor Market Fortunes of Teens and Young Adults*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.

<sup>3</sup> Sum, Andrew & McLaughlin, Joseph. 2010. *Dire Straits for Many American Workers: The Economic Case for New Job Creation Strategies in 2010 for the Nation's Teens and Young Adults*. Boston, MA: Center for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University.

<sup>4</sup> Sum et al. 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Sum et al. 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Harvard Graduate School of Education. 2011. *Pathways to Prosperity: Meeting the Challenge of Preparing Young Americans for the 21st Century*. Cambridge, MA: Author.

<sup>7</sup> Belfield, Clive R., Levin, Henry M., & Rosen, Rachel. 2012. "The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth." Accessed March 2015. <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED528650.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Bridgeland, John & Mason-Elder, Tess. 2012. *National Roadmap for Opportunity Youth*. Washington, DC: Civic Enterprises. Accessed March 2015. <http://www.civicerprises.net/MediaLibrary/Docs/Opportunity%20Youth%20National%20Roadmap%20Final%202012.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Kochan, Thomas, Finegold, David, & Osterman, Paul. 2012. "Who Can Fix the 'Middle-Skills' Gap?" *Harvard Business Review*. Accessed April 2015. <https://hbr.org/2012/12/who-can-fix-the-middle-skills-gap>

<sup>10</sup> Manyika, James, Lund, Susan, August, Byron, Mendonca, Lenny, Welsh, Tim, & Ramaswamy, Sreenivas. 2011. *An Economy That Works: Job Creation and America's Future*. New York, NY: McKinsey Global Institute. Accessed March 2015. [http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/employment\\_and\\_growth/an\\_economy\\_that\\_works\\_for\\_us\\_job\\_creation](http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/employment_and_growth/an_economy_that_works_for_us_job_creation)



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