Site Summary Appendix
March 2017

Boston is implementing the postsecondary/career bridging component of the Back on Track Model for their Opportunity Works programming; enriched preparation is not addressed through Opportunity Works, but efforts that align with that part of the model already exist in Boston through other initiatives. Opportunity Works focuses on connecting youth ages 20 to 24, who are out of school and out of work, to “robust college and career pathways.” The Opportunity Works program leverages existing community programs that were already offering bridging and first year support opportunities. It contracts with some community programs to hold seats for Opportunity Works youth in existing programs, and it connects youth with other programs through a pre-assessment and warm referral process. Finally, it provides a supplementary service of connecting youth to part-time employment opportunities to support their participation in the program. The primary new element that Opportunity Works brings to Boston is the Connection Center. The Connection Center conducts outreach to find the disconnected youth, establish warm, caring relationships with them, and connects them to bridging opportunities appropriate to their interests and skill levels. The Connection Center also creates more connectivity across existing youth-serving programs by providing them with a place to refer youth who were not accepted into their specific program but could benefit from similar services.

Opportunity Works operates in Boston through a collaborative called the Boston Opportunity Youth Collaborative (OYC). Within this 80 -organizational member collaborative, which started in 2013, other initiatives support youth completing their high school diplomas and help youth who have entered college succeed. Thus, Opportunity Works plugs the gap in the middle of the youth services continuum. The backbone of the collaborative is a joint effort of the Boston Opportunity Agenda (BOA) and the Boston Private Industry Council (PIC). Dozens of organizations participate in setting the agenda for the work of the collaborative, but five are contracted to provide Opportunity Works services. Funding from Social Innovation Fund (SIF) is matched with funding from a variety of foundations.
Throughout this document the term "coaches" is used to refer to the frontline staff who work directly with the youth, but the official titles of these individuals are college readiness advisors, success coaches, and youth employment specialists. The term "leadership" is used to refer to the individuals in leadership positions that work in the backbone organization and in funded partner organizations, including the Asian American Civic Association (AACA), College Bound Dorchester (CBD), X-Cel Education, Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción (IBA), and Jewish Vocational Services (JVS). The term "voluntary partners" is used to refer to the organizations and the individuals who work there who provide services to youth participating in Opportunity Works but who do not receive funding from the SIF grant. Voluntary partners include representatives of Year Up and Bunker Hill Community College.

Context

The PIC and the BOA, both public-private partnerships, have a long history of working together to improve the lives of youth in Boston. In 2004, the PIC organized the Youth Transitions Task Force marking the beginning of the active movement to lower the dropout rate and bring out-of-school youth to the center of school reform. They began by educating the community about the severity of the problem through convenings and data analysis. They worked with the community to find the dropouts and re-enroll them in alternate education programs. After about 3 to 4 years, they opened the Re-engagement Center as an action research project, which focused on reaching out to youth who had dropped out of high school on their terms and figuring out which re-enrollment options would work best for them. The work of the district and the Youth Transitions Task Force around dropout prevention and recovery continues today, and has led to a 53 percent decrease in the dropout rate.

In 2013–14, a data review by the BOA indicated that the high school dropout rate had decreased dramatically, and those dropping out were being re-engaged at a high rate. Their numbers also indicated that youth who went on to college were completing college at a fairly high rate (as compared to national statistics). But, leadership stated that youth were "leaking out of the pipeline, not making the transition from high school to postsecondary to completion." The BOA identified those youth as needing to be the focus for the next initiative.

The BOA brought together the PIC with some other interested groups before the Aspen funding (the pre-SIF dollars) was announced. Everyone agreed there was an issue that needed to be addressed whether they had funding or not. They realized that services and supports for the 20-24-year-old age group were completely different than the ones available to 16-19-year-olds, and that supporting them would take a new strategy. As one leadership member said, "The kicker for me was that we didn't have an institution that by law had to accept them back, which is different with 16-19-year-old youth and 20-24-year-old youth. And there's not a presumption that anyone will help you anyhow when you're 22. You're an adult now; you're on your own. There's a culture that says 'there's nothing real for me.'"

All of this work to improve the lives of youth operates through three core strategies: (1) continuously examining data to understand what the needs are, the progress being made, and identifying emerging gaps; (2) interacting with youth to understand their needs from their perspective;
and (3) engaging community partners to create a diverse, comprehensive service delivery infrastructure for the youth. The leadership indicate they have learned a number of lessons along the way, and as one said, "If you don't do a service intervention, you won't learn what you need to know about prevention, you won't learn what you need to know about reconnection." In other words, you have to learn by doing, and they are paying attention as they implement, and are making changes along the way.

Thus, the Connection Center, which is the center-piece of the intervention for Opportunity Works, was grounded in the experiences and successes of the Re-engagement Center which reaches out to the high school dropouts. The Connection Center was also developed as the centerpiece because there were already a fair number of programs in the community designed to provide youth and adults with postsecondary experiences, yet still, a high number of opportunity youth were not accessing these programs. The idea behind the Connection Center was that it could help find and connect youth, but it could also maximize the existing community resources. As one leadership staff member indicated, "the ones they don't take, they cycle back to the Connection Center. Now you see a system that is not losing people because programs can't be responsible for all of the youth."

The biggest challenge they continue to grapple with is the tension of youth needing to meet immediate needs of housing and hunger versus focusing on long-term career opportunities. The partners provided varied perspectives on this point with some partners feeling that more attention should be paid to helping youth secure more immediate work for more hours to allow them to more fully support themselves, while others felt like immediate work was too strongly emphasized and was hurting the future possibilities of the youth.

One of the great opportunities in Boston for engaging youth in college is the eight year old college completion movement that engages a number of sectors—the Mayor, philanthropy, the school district, higher education, nonprofits, and even opportunity-youth-serving agencies. College coaching for Boston Public Schools graduates is a regular feature of the landscape, and Back on Track programs are becoming more popular. Public and private entities are making scholarships available. Mayor Martin M. Walsh pledges that if you graduate from a Boston public school, you can go to Bunker Hill Community College or Roxbury Community College for free.

**Partners**

**Backbone: Boston Opportunity Agenda (BOA) and the Boston Private Industry Council (PIC)**

The BOA and PIC serve as a joint backbone to the collaborative Opportunity Works effort. Both are public-private partnerships. They jointly seek funding and connect the effort to other initiatives in the community. The PIC, the fiscal agent, also provides administrative support, data collection and support, and technical assistance, They have also recently hired a recruitment specialist to enhance outreach to youth.
The BOA is a public-private partnership among the City of Boston, the Boston Public Schools, the city’s leading public charities, and local foundations. Started in 2010, their mission is “to ensure that all Boston residents have access to the education necessary for upward economic mobility, civic engagement, and lifelong learning for themselves and their families.” This group is a long-time collaborator with PIC.

The PIC, founded in 1979, is Boston’s workforce development board, and is a nonprofit, intermediary organization. Their mission is “to strengthen Boston’s communities and its workforce by connecting youth and adults with education and employment opportunities that align with the needs of area employers.” They are the primary liaison for the evaluation, the funding administrator, and primary implementation lead.

The PIC has contracted with five organizations to provide Opportunity Works services. These include the X-Cel, AACA, CBD, IBA, and JVS. Partners are contracted through a vending process. The PIC solicited bidders in a Request for Proposal (RFP) for the Connection Center and through a Request for Quote (RFQ) for the postsecondary bridging, first year support, and supplemental employment services. Both the RFP and the RFQ were made available to an open pool of bidders; they advertised through their OYC email list of more than 80 organizations, forwarded to other email lists, and held a bidder’s conference. The Connection Center RFP was released in September 2014 and eight bidders provided proposals. The award made to X-Cel Education in January 2015 and the center opened in February 2015. The RFQ for the other services was released in November 2014 and six organizations provided information about their capacity and costs; four organizations were awarded contracts in April 2015.

All of the contracted sites, except the AACA and some of the voluntary sites, provide bridging services. That is, they help the youth understand and explore their career options, provide caring adults who listen to and support them, help the youth apply for financial aid, and assist youth in applying to an industry-based training program, apprenticeship program, or college program. Although the direction a youth takes is primarily guided by their interests, the bridging process also helps them identify barriers they are not likely to overcome. For example, youth may have an interest in pursuing a health care career, but they have a criminal record. Most health care institutions will not hire people with criminal records, so that simply may not be a feasible career pathway. AACA provides supplemental employment services that are not officially part of the Back on Track model but were identified as a necessary support for participating youth.

All of the youth receive services through X-Cel, the organization operating the Connection Center which is the services hub for the program. Many other community organizations and colleges are also part of the Opportunity Works picture, but they are voluntary rather than contracted partners. The services of the partner organizations of X-Cel, AACA, and CBD are discussed in more depth below because very few of the youth participating in Opportunity Works have been served by IBA or JVS, and because we did not interview staff at those partner organizations.
Programming Partner: X-Cel Education and the Connection Center

X-Cel is a community-based nonprofit organization that runs the Connection Center. X-Cel was founded in 2000 “to make high school completion, postsecondary study, and sustainable career paths more accessible to underserved communities in Greater Boston.” Prior to receiving the contract for the Opportunity Works Connection Center, most of X-Cel’s work focused on adults who were working to complete their high school diploma, although they had some college preparation and connection. Although they collaborated with many community-based organizations, X-Cel’s role was primarily one of direct service. The mission of the Opportunity Works Connection Center added more outreach, a new target population (youth with a high school credential), and the role of intermediary, connector organization.

The Connection Center provides support to all the Opportunity Works youth. They may be the original connector to the youth or may receive a referral from a contracted or voluntarily participating organization. The coaches provide individualized services to the youth, helping them to realize the opportunities available to them, brainstorming with them about their barriers to success and identifying how to address them, listening to their concerns and hopes, and helping them make progress toward enrolling in a postsecondary education or training program. Even after the Connection Center coaches provide a warm handoff of youth to a partner program that also has bridging services, the coaches continue to support the youth; the contracted expectation is to provide overlapping support for around three months, but interviews with Connection Center staff and youth statements suggest that overlapping support may be extending beyond that three month benchmark during this start-up period. As one coach said, “We assess where they are at currently, what they want to do, and how we can match and support them in bringing them to that next level.”

Programming Partner: Asian American Civic Association (AACA)

The AACA serves a broader population than its name might imply. Founded in 1967, this community-based nonprofit was originally focused on meeting the social and cultural needs of Chinese immigrants. Over the years it has expanded its mission and focus. Many of its services are focused on helping immigrants from all over the world transition into “productive workers, participating citizens and community leaders.” They provide an array of services to immigrants and non-immigrants around workforce development, social services, and child care. Prior to joining the Opportunity Works collaborative, they did not have a specific focus on the youth population, and the youth they did serve were primarily part of a family unit, living with their parents. They viewed the Opportunity Works contract as a means of extending their expertise to the youth population while building their capacity to meet the unique needs of that population. The Opportunity Works program has allowed AACA to extend their services, but they are finding these youth need a higher level of support. Specifically, they are more likely to be homeless. AACA has to curb their employment-seeking services to ensure that employment does not crowd out educational opportunities. They acutely feel the tension between meeting the youth’s immediate needs versus preparing for longer-term success.
Contracted Opportunity Works services include providing employability, resume and interview preparation, with employment services. AACA refers youth to job interviews with employers with whom AACA maintains a relationship. By helping youth obtain a part-time job, these employers youth to balance employment and educational or training opportunities, an important feature of the Opportunity Works model in Boston. AACA also provides two-year retention support once referred youth are employed. As part of their agency mission, AACA uses other funding streams to provide referrals to various training programs, including some sponsored by AACA.

AACA offers the Building Energy Efficient Maintenance Skills (BEEMS) Facilities and Maintenance program and the Banking and Finance program with funds they had prior to the start of Opportunity Works. The BEEMS program is a 22-week program that trains participants for careers as maintenance workers or engineers. It focuses on carpentry, plumbing, painting, electricity, appliance repair, and cleaning. It includes a five-week internship. BEEMS training can serve as an entry-point into apprenticeship in plumbers’ or electricians’ unions. When in the BEEMS program, youth attend instruction Monday through Friday from 3 to 7 p.m. The BEEMS program is funded through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. The Banking and Finance program provides instruction Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. for 15 weeks. It is funded through the Neighborhood Job Trust.

Programming Partner: College Bound Dorchester (CBD)

CBD is located in Dorchester, and although their original mission focused on serving the residents of Dorchester, they now serve individuals beyond those geographic boundaries. CBD has existed for more than 100 years and was originally part of the Settlement House movement. In its early years, it provided a number of social service and community functions. In 2009, they changed their name to CBD to reflect their new focus on education services; their past experiences showed that education was the best way to transform the lives of individuals and the community as whole. They operate a high quality early care and education program, an out-of-school-time program, a middle school program, and a college connections program. In the college connections program, they target individuals they call “core influencers” in the community who have the power to either encourage violence or to encourage positive change. They recognize that the youth have immediate needs for income, but are concerned that immediate employment is not the right solution because work and educational demands often conflict.

Contracted Opportunity Works services include postsecondary bridging and first year support services. These are services that CBD has a track record of providing to opportunity youth, but the contract secures slots for youth supported by Opportunity Works. As part of their postsecondary bridging services, CBD focuses on removing the academic barriers that youth face for college enrollment and attaining their first degree. They partner with Bunker Hill Community College to assess a youth’s math and English literacy levels (through Accuplacer testing provided by the college) and provide the youth with classes to improve their proficiency levels. The goal is to ensure that students do not need to take remedial classes once they enter to avoid using their whole Pell Grant eligibility on
remedial classes. About one-third of the youth they serve are justice-involved, and they partner with the Suffolk County House of Corrections to begin bridging services during incarceration.

The services youth receive at CBD and the pace at which the youth progress are individualized for each young person based on the skills and needs they have when they enter the program. Even if the youth stop progressing or drop out of the program, the coaches continue to contact them. As one coach said, "Even if they try to leave us, we stay with them." The services are structured around four pillars of college readiness: academic, college knowledge, career, and personal. CBD coaches help youth assess and prepare in all four areas. One component of college knowledge is visiting local colleges to understand what college campuses look and feel like. Career readiness is about understanding what your career would look like after college depending on the path chosen. Personal readiness has to do with friends, family, and networks, and readiness to leave behind unproductive influences. CBD is also working on what they call social and emotional skills—17 key dimensions they have identified including zest, curiosity, relationship maturity, and time management. CBD coaches keep in touch with the youth for a year following their enrollment in postsecondary education to provide retention support.

Programming Partner: Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción (IBA)

IBA is a community-based nonprofit organization that arose from the 1968 South End protests to stop displacement of residents due to urban development. Their mission is to empower and engage "individuals and families to improve their lives through high-quality affordable housing, education, and arts programs." They provide child care services for children starting at age three years, afterschool programs for school-age children, youth development programs, college and workforce preparation programs for youth, and various services supporting adults and the elderly.

Opportunity Works contracts with IBA to provide postsecondary bridging and first-year support. They help youth bridge to Bunker Hill Community College and Roxbury Community College.

Programming Partner: Jewish Vocational Services (JVS)

Jewish Vocational Services (JVS) is a community-based, nonprofit organization. Founded in 1938, it originally focused on assisting Jewish immigrants entering the American workforce. Now, it works towards "empowering individuals from diverse communities to find employment and build careers, while partnering with employers to hire, develop, and retain productive workforces." They offer an array of education, vocational training, and employment services to help individuals build a career pathway and obtain jobs.

The Opportunity Works program contracts with JVS to do occupational training in pharmacy tech, job referral and retention support services. The Pharmacy Technician training program operates for 12 weeks requiring full-time attendance. The program includes a 114-hour externship with CVS Pharmacies. Not as many youth as planned have enrolled in this pathway. The backbone agency and JVS have been reflecting on why that is; it is possible that the labor market is changing around this
pathway in ways that may require a more advanced degree. This particular pathway may not be a suitable option to maintain in the future. JVS also provides other training, such as Certified Nursing Assistant training, through other funding.

**Unfunded, Voluntary Partners**

The success of Opportunity Works is also dependent on the active participation of voluntary, non-contracted partners referred to in this report as “voluntary partners.” Year Up and Bunker Hill Community College were included in the site visit, so the summary focuses primarily on their roles and remarks. Although not contracted partners, Year Up and Bunker Hill Community College provide important services to youth served through the Connection Center.

Bunker Hill Community College, located in Boston, is the largest community college in the state system. About 14,000 students flow through its doors each semester—some part-time, some full-time, some transferring to institutions of higher learning, and some headed directly into the workforce. They offer more than 50 associate’s degree and certificate programs. They are proud of their responsiveness to their diverse student body and the communities they serve. As one representative said,

> “We’re very diverse: 24 percent black, 24 percent white, 24 percent Latino, 12–15 percent Asian. That kind of diversity is a wonderful and tremendous thing. Many institutions of higher learning don’t have that. We love and embrace that. We try to ensure that we maximize the services we provide to our students and that we reflect them in what we do. We engage in culturally responsive pedagogy. We provide an array of academic and social support services. We have a strong social justice mission here. Most everyone here takes that mission really, very seriously. We believe in being centered on students and student success. We try to really work with the whole student.”

As such, Bunker Hill Community College has contributed to the OYC and has worked with partnering organizations to be sure the coaches understand the college processes and timelines. Bunker Hill holds meetings with nonprofit postsecondary success coaches on a monthly basis to exchange ideas about creating better bridges for the youth. In addition, they partner with some of the community-based organizations like CBD to "bring college classes to the youth" through dual enrollment. As one representative from Bunker Hill Community College said, “One of the biggest barriers to success is the belief that college is not for you.”

Year Up, founded in 2000 in Boston, is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization serving youth in cities around the country. It has a mission to “to close the Opportunity Divide by providing urban young adults with skills, experience, and support. Year Up does not receive funding from the SIF grant, but it is an important voluntary partner. Year Up is one of the organizations to which the Connection Center refers youth, but Year Up also refers youth back to the Connection Center when they are not a good match with Year Up. Year Up has worked with the Connection Center to ensure the success coaches understand how Year Up works, the characteristics of youth that are more likely to be accepted and successful in their program, and to create a mutual referral environment for the youth.
The Year Up program consists of technical occupational skill building, skill practicing, soft skill building and an internship component in addition to intensive mentoring support, a stipend, and supports in meeting various life needs such as child care. Youth receive a stipend while participating in the program, but most youth still need to work while participating to meet their living expenses.

Other voluntary partners with which the backbone agency has a Memorandum Of Understanding (MOU) include:

- **Youth Voice:**
  - Boston Youth Service Network (BYSN)
  - Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative

- **Postsecondary Bridging and Support**
  - Freedom House

- **Career Bridging and Support**
  - Boston Career Link

- **Community Work Services**
  - East Boston Neighborhood Health Center (EBNHC)
  - SkillWorks
  - Sociedad Latina
  - YouthBuild Boston

- **Two-year colleges**
  - Roxbury Community College (RCC)
  - Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology (BFIT)

- **City Partners:**
  - Boston Public Schools (BPS)
  - Mayor’s Office of Workforce Development

**Nature of partnerships**

The partnerships for Opportunity Works are embedded with a larger structure of collaboration and partnership among youth-serving organizations in Boston. The OYC, begun in 2013, has 80 partnering organizations. The Opportunity Works backbone organizations, contracted organizations, and voluntary partners were already part of this larger collaborative when Opportunity Works formed.

Another important part of the partnership is with the youth themselves. The backbone organizations receive information about youth needs and experiences through an advisory group of
youth called The Youth Voice Project. The Youth Voice Project is run by the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative contracted through an RFP process some years ago. They typically hire and pay four youth leaders to provide the OYC with youth input at monthly OYC meetings and OYC planning meetings, conduct advocacy on a range of issues important to opportunity youth, and to develop themselves as leaders. The youth each serve for a year, though some have come back for a second or third year. Their ages are 16 to 24, many are, or formerly were, opportunity youth. The Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative selects them through a hiring process. They help the Connection Center with outreach. They also sit on other committees, like the Connection Center RFP and the vendor RFQ committees.

Specific to the Opportunity Works partners, the goal is to meet with the contracted partners as a group on a quarterly basis although the reality has been more like two to three times per year, and then supplement that with individual meetings. Individual meetings include regularly scheduled meetings to share and discuss data on the opportunity youth receiving Opportunity Works services. Both funded and unfunded partners indicate that the OYC monthly meetings are a great opportunity to share what they have learned across organizations and to support each other in learning new ways to support opportunity youth; although these meetings are not specific to Opportunity Works, they do help in building the capacity and relationships of the Opportunity Works partner organizations.

Program Design

Difference from Existing Programming

The Boston OYC has an interest in supporting youth through the full pathway laid out by the Back on Track model. They used data, input from youth, and community members to identify gaps in the current services available in Boston to support that full pathway. They identified “the door and navigation to be a missing piece in [their] pathway architecture, and that resulted in the development of the Connection Center funded by Opportunity Works. It provides a new avenue for drawing youth into a career pipeline, helps in matching youth to the best career tracks available to them, and builds the capacity of some organizations to better serve 20 to 24 year-olds in the community. Prior to Opportunity Works, a number of organizations within Boston were already providing career pathway services to help youth ages 20 to 24 pursue a career, though many felt underutilized. In the Opportunity Works model, those organizations continue to provide those same services, and the Boston PIC contracts with some of them through the Opportunity Works funds to “assure seats for Opportunity Works youth.” The AACA even broadened its services to specifically target the youth between 20 and 24 years old through the Opportunity Works funds.

The primary investment of Opportunity Works is in the Connection Center which X-Cel Education has been contracted to operate. The Connection Center provides youth with success coaches and serves as a hub for referring youth to an existing set of organizations that do not have the capacity to serve all youth. The Opportunity Works funds support coaching and a warm referral. At the Connection Center, the warm referral involves a Connection Center coach traveling with the youth to
the referral organization and introducing them directly to the coach on the other end who will begin to build a relationship with the youth.

**Back on Track**

The Boston Opportunity Works program aligns with phases two and three of the Back on Track Model—postsecondary bridging and first year support since the majority of the opportunity youth in Boston have a high school credential. Although Back on Track is not a terminology shared by all of the partners, the Boston community had been thinking about the opportunity youth population and the ways to serve them before they were officially introduced to the Back on Track model. Some of the partners think the model was developed based on the ways that they already interact with youth, and their description of the services they provide does match with the model.

The contracted and voluntary partners we spoke with on the site visit all seem to agree that the basic tenets of the model are important for youth, and some of them provide all three levels of the Back on Track model — enriched preparation, postsecondary bridging, and first year support. As discussed later, the pure focus on education in the Back on Track model is also a tension among the partners. Some of the partners believe that such a sole focus is necessary, and youth employment while attending school is counterproductive to their academic success. Others believe that the youth have too many immediate income needs for the pure Back on Track model to work. Boston has attempted to take a middle ground where they help youth find part-time, temporary employment to support themselves as they pursue their education. Some partners feel this diverts youth from the ultimate goal, but other partners feel it is still not enough. They all agree that youth have needs that require income from somewhere, but some suggest that the income should be in the form of a stipend (similar to how Year Up operates), while others feel like it must come from job earnings.

**Goals**

Coaches express short- and long-term goals for youth success. Short-term goals include the steps along the way that will help them be successful in the future, including enrollment and persistence in education and training programs, getting their driver's licenses or other instruments that open doors, and changing their general outlook from "impossible" to "I'm possible." Long-term goals include completing education and training programs that will allow them to earn a livable wage or live sustainably, and make them happy and feel respected.

The Boston OYC also sees education and training success as a systems-level endeavor whereby the institutions serving the youth start to better understand and meet their needs as well.

**Development Process**

As discussed in the context section, application for the SIF funds to implement the Back on Track model in Boston was a natural extension of the community vision regarding the gaps and needs of youth in Boston. Many youth service providers were already serving youth in ways commensurate
with the model. The SIF funds allowed Boston an opportunity to actualize their vision for how to improve the lives of the disconnected youth. As one voluntary partner that participated in the visioning process said, "It's been a great relationship. A lot of youth being targeted for this initiative will ultimately end up at [our institution]. Being able to collaborate and help shape the vision has been wonderful for everyone involved. I think it's smoothed some things that might have been an issue if we hadn't been involved."

The development of the Connection Center was based on data and the community visioning process that indicated that finding and connecting the youth to existing bridge programs was an important gap to fill in Boston. The roles and characteristics of the coaches are both grounded in the Back on Track model and in what youth expressed as what would meet their needs. These were incorporated into the formation of the Connection Center but were already present in some of the contracted partners.

The SIF funds are primarily used to support the staff needed to provide the Opportunity Works bridging services to youth. The contracting mechanism is a vending contract which was bid out competitively to implement the Connection Center and to secure slots in existing organizations and programs.

The backbone organizations continue to engage with contracted and voluntary partners to examine how Opportunity Works is functioning and how it can be improved.

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT
In Boston, they did not develop a particular curriculum for their bridging services. Each program has its own curriculum. As indicated in previous sections, the Boston backbone agencies knew that Boston was already full of organizations delivering bridging and retention support services. They contracted with organizations to deliver their existing services to Opportunity Youth referred through the Connection Center. The Connection Center is a new service delivery unit, but it does not have a "curriculum" as its primary role is assessment and referral of youth.

Staffing
SIF funds were used to hire the Success Coaches at the Connection Center, and support College Readiness Advisors (CRAs) at CBD, a Youth Employment Specialist at the AACA, a bridging instructor and support coach at IBA, and career navigator and program manager at JVS. A total of six full-time equivalent staff (FTEs) are supported through the SIF funds throughout the community.

The service delivery partners have been very intentional in the characteristics of the staff they have hired. Coaches at each contracted organization talked about the importance of the relationship-building aspect of their jobs:

One partner coach said,
“We’re all people who’ve come from their background and gone through the things they’ve gone through, and we’ve flourished and are on the path. When we’re talking to them, telling them about the steps they have to go through, we’re exemplifying it too. We give them someone to see in five years. ‘He was living on couches just like me. Maybe in five years I can be where he is.’ That relation keeps the motivation going. Anything can be overcome; it’s the amount of determination you put into it. If there’s a will, there’s a way. For those that have the will, we make the way with them.”

A partner coach at another organization echoed similar thoughts, “At the core of our work here is that relationships are everything. The coach [is] the go-to person who works with the students until the goal is accomplished. We hire coaches who have, to some degree, lived the lives of the students we’re working with. Whatever they bring to that relationship is real and authentic. It’s one way of keeping our students accountable—’I’ve done that. I’ve been there. Let’s make this happen for you as well.’”

In more than one organization, the staff talked about the importance of sincerity of the relationships. This echoes what the youth say as well about the reasons they feel respected by the staff and why they persist in the program. More than person said the youth know that the services are about them and what they want rather than “using them” to achieve a goal. The coaches tended to describe the relationship as more like a friend or brother/sister relationship. As one youth said, “I’ve been to other places trying to get help. But the way they interact with you is not comfortable. It’s not sincere. They make you feel comfortable in the Connection Center and you want to open up because you feel comfortable. We need more of that.”

**Funding Sources**

The SIF-matching funds are all supplied through the collaborative work of the two backbone agencies— the BOA and the PIC. The BOA provides the “door” to the foundations that provide the matching funds. Key in these funding relationships is that the foundations actually see SIF as providing a match to their funds rather than the other way around. They see Opportunity Works as an implementation vehicle for their mutual goals, and most of the foundations were partners at the table during the visioning stages. In other words, the SIF funds created an opportunity for mutual investment to realize collective goals for youth in Boston. The foundation dollars do not impose any restrictions not already imposed by the SIF. The funding sources currently (for years one and two) include the Hyams Foundation, Barr Foundation, the Boston Foundation, the Balfour Foundation, and the Angell Foundation.

Partners indicate that some of the services they provide for the youth participating in Opportunity Works are supported by the SIF funding, but some are supported by other funds. The SIF funding primarily supports the program staff who work directly with the youth in the Connection Center, AACA, CBD, JVS, and IBA. At the Connection Center, they have a grant through Liberty Mutual that supports the manager’s salary and transportation vouchers (additional funds, not match funds). At AACA, they have existing funds that support the BEEMS Facility and Maintenance training program and the Banking and Finance program they offer. Some of the partners are not funded by SIF at all,
but serve youth referred by the Connection Center, refer youth to the Connection Center, and participate in the community conversation that creates the vision for services to youth. Year Up and Bunker Hill Community College are examples of two such unfunded partners.

Timing

The Connection Center began serving youth in February 2015. Contracts with the other providers were in place by June of 2015, though some started between April and June of 2015. Youth are recruited and enrolled in Connection Center supports on a rolling basis. They are supported in applying for and enrolling in the education and training programs of interest to them according to the appropriate timelines for each organization. Services and timelines are individualized for each youth when possible. The postsecondary bridging phase is complete when youth finish developmental coursework and matriculate into a postsecondary institution, or complete occupational training and start employment in the field of training; first-year support begins at that time. None of the Boston opportunity youth have been in the program long enough to complete both postsecondary bridging and first-year support. Youth may “stop out” and then return to the program. When youth stop responding to the email, texts, and calls of their coaches, the Opportunity Works staff attempts to “recover” the youth and help them to become active participants again.

Participants

Characteristics of Participants

The program data show interesting information about the participants. As of September 2016, 52 percent of the participants were female. Over half (about 65 percent) identified as African-American and one-quarter (25 percent) identified as Hispanic. The mean age at enrollment was 22.5 years. All youth had a high school diploma or equivalency at program enrollment. At intake, 39 percent were not working, 36 percent were working part time and 25 percent were working full-time.

About one-fifth (20 percent) reported current or previous court involvement, 21 percent lived in public housing, and 8 percent were former foster youth. Almost one-quarter (22 percent) were parenting and 5 percent were expectant parents.

The coaches also noted issues with homelessness, hunger, transportation costs, and sometimes child care.

Target Population

Using ACS data, the Boston PIC identified 9,097 disconnected youth ages 16 through 24 years-old from 2011–13. Most of these youth, 7,548, were 20 to 24 years-old. The Opportunity Works program has targeted youth between the ages of 20 and 24 with a General Education Diploma or high school diploma who are not connected to a college or career pathway. This may mean that they are either
unemployed or underemployed, have never pursued a post-secondary credential, or have stopped attending college without receiving a credential.

**Recruitment and Admission**

The Connection Center has the primary charge for outreach and recruitment of youth for Opportunity Works. All of the contracted organizations and voluntary partners recruit for their own set of services which enhances the outreach efforts overall. Posting flyers has been the primary outreach method of the Connection Center. The staff travels to various neighborhoods throughout Boston to post flyers with tear-off phone numbers. When a youth calls the number, it takes them to the coaching supervisor. The supervisor then schedules an appointment to meet with the youth, does the initial screening, and if the youth is eligible for the program, matches the youth to a particular coach at the Connection Center.

Contracted and voluntary partners also refer youth who reach them directly back to the Connection Center if the youth are either not eligible for or do not get accepted to their programs. For example, Year Up, a voluntary partner, has created a formal process whereby they include language in their rejection letter that directs youth to the Connection Center for other options. Year Up worked with the collaborative to develop that language and process. One partner noted concern about whether gang-involved youth could actually go to the Connection Center due to the need to cross multiple gang turfs to get there; they suggested recruitment could be improved by providing more Connection Center locations.

At the time of the site visit in November 2016, the backbone agency indicated that they had just hired a new staff person to focus solely on recruitment. They are currently investigating social media options with a consultant to enhance enrollment. They are also in the process of analyzing data about the youth currently participating, primarily from the Dorchester, Roxbury, and Mattapan neighborhoods, to determine what would be the most effective outreach strategies to youth in places like East Boston and South Boston. One strategy they are examining is providing outreach materials in Spanish. They also plan to conduct a survey of youth to determine what they think would be some effective outreach strategies.

The youth in the focus groups had a number of suggestions for enhancing recruitment and outreach efforts. They emphasized the importance of raising awareness through visual items that got people’s attention AND trusted people talking about the Connection Center so interested youth knew it wasn’t a scam. Other strategies included:

- Starting outreach in high schools to target youth straight out of high school
- Using Facebook and social media
- Putting fliers in local gyms
- Having a stand at a college fair and bringing Connection Center alumni to talk about the program
- Hosting community events, like cook outs
- Attending related events, passing out flyers, and having alumni talk about the program
- Putting a slip in the newspaper
- Putting an advertisement on the bus panels
- Advertising in beauty salons and barber shops (This suggestion seemed to be a combination of posting flyers at these locations and getting the barbers and beauticians to talk about the Connection Center; as one youth said, "you can't do anything but listen while you are there.")

**Attrition**

Youth become inactive if they stop communicating with the coaches or stop attending their program. The staff of the contracted organizations, however, works hard to "recover" the youth if they do stop communicating. The idea is that the coaches in the partner organizations don't give up on the youth even if the youth feel like they can't actively participate for periods of time. Even the community college says that youth sometimes stop out for a while and come back. For example, CBD mentioned doing pop-in home visits if youth stop responding.

**Program Experience**

**Education and Training Programming**

Postsecondary bridging activities in Boston are designed to support the youth in preparing for admission to and success in a variety of education and training programs including two- and four-year colleges, industry-based credential training programs, and apprenticeships leading to union employment. The industry-based credentialing programs for which youth are screened and assisted in entering include fields such as pharmacy technician, plumbing, carpentry, construction, cooking, banking, computers, and many others.

The Opportunity Works program is focused on helping youth identify their passions and then supporting them to make those passions into sustainable living options. Success comes in many steps along the way including helping youth see possibilities in their lives, helping youth set and accomplish their goals, supporting them to apply to and enroll in education and training programs, and continuing to provide them with on-going emotional support and trouble-shooting.

**Support Services**

The SIF funding does not pay for support services in Boston. The partner organizations provide referrals to existing community support services but acknowledge it is challenging to meet youth needs that way.

Youth describe their primary support as the coach who works with them. To them, the coach is the most important support because the coach believes in them and understands their world. Whatever other supports they might need, the coach helps them access it, and they have a sense the
coaches are trying really hard on their behalf. The youth participating in the focus groups did not suggest that they needed any more supports than what the coaches could provide.

The coaches and supervisors of the various participating organizations, however, do have concerns about the homelessness and hunger needs that the youth are facing, in particular. They do their best to connect youth to available services, but express that it is difficult to help the youth access supports to adequately meet their well-being and the well-being of family members for whom they may be responsible. As one coach said,

“[Our organization] gets a lot of youth through the door who have a lot of obstacles. A lot of those obstacles we are not equipped to serve. So, in addition to outsourcing job and educational resources, we have to outsource those resources as well, like housing, child care—those things that are getting in the way of pursuing a career path. We have to partner with other organizations. That’s absolutely vital. We want to make sure their career goal is achieved, but also to make sure their well-being is taken care of as well. It's impossible to focus on the end goal without looking at the immediate needs of a needy population.”

Participant Path through the Program

The typical youth will see flyers posted in Boston subway stations. The youth in the focus groups said “they are everywhere you look.” The youth will call the number on the flyer and will speak to the coaching supervisor at the Connection Center. That person will set up an appointment to meet with the youth at the Connection Center at a mutually convenient time which could be early in the morning, late at night, or anytime in between. As one youth said, “It’s really flexible based on your time. If you can’t come, they will reschedule.”

The coach who meets with the youth and screens them for eligibility explains “who we are and what we do,” completes an intake form, and does a career assessment to determine the youth’s interests. The coach tries to determine “their passions, what they want to do, and potential barriers—we try to cover their barriers so it can be smooth.” The initial meeting may take 30 minutes or two hours—it depends on what the youth wants and needs. The youth and the coach will begin working on a plan of action: "We assess where they are at currently, what they want to do, and how we can match and support them in bringing them to that next level." The number of youth each coach works with varies. Staff across organizations indicated caseloads between 20 to 30 youth at any given time. They said that youth who have most recently come on board typically require the most time and interactions. Although the caseloads of coaches at the Connection Center, CBD, and AACA are currently similar, the expectation is that this will change over time as more youth enter services. Caseload levels at the Connection Center, in particular, are expected to rise over time as the services become more well-known.

Most of the training and education options in Boston have regular information sessions for interested individuals to attend and learn more about how those programs work. The typical youth will attend one or more of these sessions. A coach from the Connection Center will go with the youth to the sessions to help them learn about and assess their options.
Once the youth decides on the pathway they want to pursue, the coach helps the youth prepare their applications for the program and for financial aid if appropriate (e.g. the FAFSA or other appropriate forms). They may need to engage in other pre-application activities such as getting a driver's license or clearing something from their record. Whatever they might need, the coach helps them brainstorm a way to make it happen and facilitates the process. For example, a youth might apply directly to a training program like Year Up or an educational institution like Bunker Hill Community College with the help of their Connection Center coach.

In some cases, the coach from the Connection Center is connecting them to a coach at one of the partner organizations that will help them continue in the bridging process. For example, if the program at CBD seems to be a good fit, then the Connection Center coach does a "supportive referral" to CBD which includes bringing the youth to the initial appointment with a coach at CBD. The Connection Center coaches will continue to provide support to the youth for about three months following the warm handoff.

The Connection Center coach provides continual support to the youth through texts and phone calls at least twice per month and sometimes weekly, especially if the youth is not reaching out to them regularly. However, most of the youth and coaches indicate that the youth tend to reach out more frequently, sometimes daily, to ask advice about various happenings in their life. The coaches strive to be as accessible as possible, even beyond scheduled work hours, and the youth participating in the focus group indicated that their coaches are always there for them. This supportive relationship begins after the first screening and continues throughout the process.

The coaches at CBD conduct further career and academic testing, and provide preparation activities such as college tours and access to developmental courses if needed. CBD accepts students year-round; the amount of time a student spends in postsecondary bridging activities depends on their own needs and skills at the time of arrival, and when they arrive at CBD in relationship to the academic calendar at the school to which they want to apply. The goal is for youth to spend about the length of one academic semester engaged in postsecondary bridging activities. At CBD, they work to help the youth create a new mindset and narrative about the possibilities in their lives. As CBD leadership says, "We work to unlearn skills that are important for being an opportunity youth but are detrimental to being a college student or worker."

When youth first arrive at CBD, they meet with the college readiness advisor who will serve as their primary coach while they are in the postsecondary bridging program. That coach receives them when they arrive, discusses the youth’s expectations and the program’s expectations, completes an intake form to assess student interests and needs, and connects them with the internal academic advisor who ensures they receive the Accuplacer testing, administered by Bunker Hill Community College, to determine their English and math skill levels in relation to what they will need in college. The idea is to identify any barriers to enrollment and success in college. For example, the intake form includes information about gang-involvement, mental health issues, previous individualized education plans, etc. so CBD can work with the youth to create personal success plans that anticipate the challenges they may encounter. They refer youth to other organizations to help with issues like
housing, and using non-Opportunity Works funds, they keep nutritious food available for youth at their service delivery location. If youth need help with child care, CBD is often able to help the youth obtain a child care subsidy voucher and enroll the children into their child care services.

One key element of the model at CBD is the work they do to help youth develop their social/emotional skills. They have 17 benchmarks in areas such as “college ambition, time management, relational maturity, curiosity, citizenship, self-discipline, social intelligence and zest.” They meet with the youth twice per week to work on these skills.

CBD also wants to be sure that youth don’t “waste” their Pell Grant funds paying for developmental courses. So, they offer the developmental English and math courses on-site. The academic advisor creates a plan with the youth based on the data from the Accuplacer test to improve their skills and uses their interests to help them move forward quickly. If youth have a first language other than English, they also provide English for Students of a Second Language classes.

When the youth are ready, CBD helps them apply to the college of their choice, “wherever they want to go,” Bunker Hills, Northeastern, University of the Massachusetts, etc. When they complete their college bridging at CBD, CBD holds an official matriculation ceremony with caps and gowns and appearances from important local individuals to mark the achievement. Using non-Opportunity Works funds, they also provide the youth with a $500 achievement reward about a month after they enroll in college.

If the youth needs a part-time job to support themselves while in education or training or wants to pursue one of the career pathways provided by AACA, the Connection Center coach accompanies the youth on a supportive referral to AACA to form that relationship. As part of the funded Opportunity Works services, AACA uses a strengths-based approach to help the youth assess their employment interests and needs. AACA staff describe their services this way, “We do intake, paperwork, IDs, proof of income. I ask them to tell me about themselves–their interests, personality, strengths and weaknesses. And we separate their options into careers and what they want to do for a job. Also we talk about if they are in school, not in school, seeking full-time or part-time [employment]. After they leave they have a new resume. Then we meet every week and do a job search. Then we do mock interviews, and then actual interviews.” AACA staff has 140 employer partners to which they can refer the youth. The referrals the youth receive depend on their individual work experience, skills, interests, and the ways they need their work hours to align with their education and training hours. The AACA youth specialist stays attuned to short-term, pop-up opportunities like companies that need help for a single weekend event; she indicates that this is particularly helpful for homeless youth because it gives them a place to go in addition to some additional wages. For example, “The clear ballot group is hiring people to go through ballots. It is $15 an hour and they provide lunch and beverages all day. They all said yes because they will get fed and make money. I try to encourage them to try new things. Or I’ll find a hackathon on a Saturday–like for one of my students that wants to a programmer. So I try to show that job searching isn’t just sitting behind a screen, but getting out there and advocating for yourself.”
At the time of the site visit, none of the participating youth had progressed beyond their first year in education and training, which means that coaches at CBD, IBA, and JVS would be continuing their first-year support. Although youth in the first-year-support stage indicated their Connection Center coaches continued to keep in touch as well, that is not an expected part of the model and may not be a sustainable practice once the Connection Center begins to serve a larger number of youth.

If youth stop engaging with their coach—whether at the Connection Center or at CDB—the coaches attempt to reconnect and recover the youth. As one CBD coach said, “When we have the reconnection it’s me calling up and following up with them. Sometimes we do home visit pop-ups and check to see if they are still good. It’s a friend relationship, a big brother and big sister relationship too. I tell them about how I’ve messed up, and show that I don’t want them to mess up too.”

Participants’ Perspectives

This section is derived from two youth focus groups; the youth in the focus groups were recruited by Connection Center staff. A total of 15 youth participated in the focus groups, 10 young men and 5 young women; all participants were youth of color, and one of the focus groups was solely young men of color. The focus group questions posed to the youth focused largely on the Connection Center because the questions were designed to elicit information about how they learned about the program, the screening process for receiving services, referral to contracted and voluntary partners, their receipt of postsecondary bridging and first-year support services, and understanding what was most meaningful to the youth about the Opportunity Works programming. For most of the steps in the process, the Connection Center is the primary conduit and many of the youth participating in the focus groups had not been receiving postsecondary bridging services for very long.

Youth in the focus groups discussed a variety of challenges to their education and employment. Several had past histories of justice-involvement—including one young man who found out about Connection Center through his probation officer. Several had difficulty affording public transportation to get to and from services, but all said the Connection Center was convenient to access via public transportation. One participant was pregnant and a young man talked about preparing for a baby on the way. A number of the youth lived with their parents.

Many youth in the focus groups weren’t sure what careers they wanted to pursue when they first started participating in the program. They felt that the Connection Center coaches had helped them figure out what they might be interested in, and had introduced them to new options. As one young man said, “I would recommend it to anyone who is lost and doesn’t know what to do but wants to do better.”

Youth in the focus groups were enrolled in a wide variety of programs, educational pathways, and trainings. Several youth were currently or had previously been involved with Year Up. Other youth had been involved with Youth Build, the BEEMS program through the AACA, and CBD. Some youth were currently enrolled in community colleges, including Roxbury Community College and Bunker Hill
Community College. Their interests varied from nursing, to sales, to mechanical engineering, carpentry, plumbing, coding, and toxicology.

One youth talked about how AACA was helping him obtain employment and to provide support. The youth indicated the Connection Center made the warm handoff to AACA about a month after first contact with the Connection Center. The youth said, “Their pathways to these programs varied widely as well. Some youth had previously been enrolled in postsecondary education but did not complete because of financial and personal challenges. Other youth wanted to go to college but did not know how to get there. Still others were just looking for employment but felt encouraged by the program to reach further.”

One young man said, “I wanted to learn a trade. The BEEMS program is the one that fit me. I didn't know about it before the Connection Center.” Another young man was working with the staff at the AACA to find employment while waiting for the Year Up program to start, saying “it feels good that my name is out there.”

Another youth, with some college already completed, was enrolled in Year Up, almost done paying off bills from his two years of college, and currently studying for his placement tests for Bunker Hill Community College.

Youth in the focus groups emphasized the importance of their relationship with their success coaches. Some youth found out about the Connection Center through their success coach (as in, they knew each other outside of the Connection Center). Other youth emphasized how much it helped that their success coaches came from similar backgrounds and had similar experiences. As one young man said, “Everyone has their opinions, but they don’t know how it feels when you aren’t in the situation. It helps to talk to someone who has been through that and knows what you are talking about. Like feeling desperate to get something or get somewhere.”

Youth also recognized and deeply appreciated how much time and energy staff invested in supporting them. They felt like the staff were equally invested in their futures. One student said that the staff encouraged him to stay engaged, explaining “The people here...They are serious, they are consistent and they put in so much work for us. You can't come here and then not plug in.”

Many of the youth said the Connection Center was different than other services they’d received because of the staff’s commitment. One explained, “I started coming when they were as interested in me pursuing as I was. That’s another reason I left other programs. I didn't feel like the staff cared about my problems. They weren't thinking about helping me, they were just caring about me when I was there. Here people called after I left.”

Another young man said, “If they didn’t take it serious, they’d be like any other program. They’d just talk. Because they are doing the full work, it makes you want to do it. You know they’re giving it their all.”
Youth also discussed how coaches are flexible in their schedules and in their approach, being willing to meet with youth outside of the Connection Center’s regular hours, making time for them even when the coaches are busy, and being willing to let youth “switch it up” and try different programs or pathways until they find the right fit. Many youth said they considered their success coach to be a friend and felt that they truly cared about them. One young man said, “I really connected with [my success coach]...I text him. I ask him if I can come by. It always makes me feel better. I really do see him as a friend. I’m glad I’m here.”

Finally, youth felt that success coaches pushed them to work harder, believed they could succeed, and were consistent in their support. Many youth said that success coaches stayed connective even after the youth were enrolled in a program or if they did not come to the Connection Center for a while. One participant who was currently in Year Up still felt that the success coach was supportive, saying “You can do things on your own, but you always need support. Even though I am in Year Up now, I got in on my own, but he directed me to it. If it wasn’t for him I never would have done it. Even now, I am in Year Up and I have support from Year Up, but I have support from him as well. If anything goes wrong I’ve got support from multiple institutions.”

In fact, some youth in focus groups were caught off guard by questions about the length of support from their coaches. At the thought of no longer receiving follow up from their success coach, one young man said “that breaks my heart” and another explained, “I feel like [the coach] is my friend. I think even if he doesn’t work in [there], [he will still be my friend]."

Data

The backbone agency, the Boston PIC, has historically partnered with the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University. As leadership explained, “We’ve also been driven by data reports. That’s in our culture. Our frontline staff have always had a culture of data collection research, not just data collection. You’re all researchers, trying to figure out what’s going on and inform the conversation.”

After the center closed, the PIC invested in building the data capacity themselves. Their research analyst uses the data to report on data as the work progresses, which “gives us the ability to tell us how to change things, almost in the moment, in that conversation with the implement, like the team at the Connection Center.” Leadership at the PIC highlighted the importance of building a data culture with providers. They use an iterative process with partners to develop and frame questions, encouraging buy-in from frontline staff and demonstrating the value of the research. As a backbone leadership member explained, “The message here is to embed the research with the frontline staff and make sure they get to know each other and appreciate their perspectives. And help each other do their work. That doesn’t always happen.”

They also emphasized making sure that “data informs practice.” They encourage members of the collaborative to have access to the data in order to “inform their own work.” For example, they track
different benchmarks of involvement with the Connection Center, including how many youth work with a coach to apply to a program, how many apply to a program, how many start a program, maintain enrollment, and how many finish.

Contracted partners provide monthly reports on the youth they are serving to the PIC, which will now be uploaded to the new Salesforce database that went live in January 2017; data were maintained and transferred through spreadsheets prior to the Salesforce implementation. Connection Center staff present on number of intakes to the Connection Center, placement rate and placements, demographics of the youth completing intake and enrolling in programs, and completions at every other OYC planning committee meeting and every other OYC meeting. PIC and BOA staff also discuss the data monthly internally to inform coaching practices at the Connection Center. For example, the higher number of referrals to training programs and employment programs in the beginning of the Connection Center prompted ongoing internal discussion about how to bridge the youth's stated needs for employment with the idea of attending postsecondary schooling. The lower-than-expected intake numbers at the end of year one led to us hiring an outreach manager for the Connection Center.

Scale and Sustainability

The backbone agency and the funded partners are committed to the Opportunity Works model. Partners have concerns about the tensions between the needs for immediate income and the need for youth to focus on building skills to further their career pathways. Sustainability depends primarily on the availability of funds. Although they have a number of committed funding partners, it is not clear how they would sustain the same level of funding that the SIF brings. The PIC indicates, one benefit of the model is that a modest investment in the Connection Center services would be sufficient, given that many Back on Track college and career training programs would accept referrals because they receive other funding to provide these services. Another asset is that many adult training programs are interested in serving opportunity youth at this time.

The OYC is actively thinking about how to incorporate the Connection Center, now and in the future, within the ecosystem of one-stop “door” programs, like the Re-Engagement Center and Career Centers (aka America’s Job Centers), and are considering various public and private funding scenarios. For systemic sustainability, they are hoping to motivate community colleges to provide more supports for opportunity youth and/or first generation college students through Boston’s collective impact work, and to facilitate occupational training providers to be more open to accepting opportunity youth into their programs.
Lessons

Advice to Others

1. Youth of different ages mature in different ways and need different things. Programs created for youth ages 16 to 19 years-old cannot be simply applied it to youth ages 20 through 24. As one collaborative member said, "Providers can only get to know the population they want to serve by talking to them and trying to serve them. Disconnected 20 to 24 year-olds are more unknown than other groups. Incorporating youth voice is important."

2. Backbone organizations should carefully consider partners and the roles they will play. If they are playing less familiar roles, then expect to provide them some support in those roles.

3. Create a peer learning structure for the organizations in the youth-serving space, thinking broadly about which organizations to include. Once the formal program begins, continue to facilitate collaborative discussions across contracted and voluntary partners.

4. Think carefully about the potential career pathways in the region to assure that the pipelines created match the opportunities available. In Boston, multiple pipelines are possible because of the variety of well-paying jobs available and the available educational and training options. This may not be the case in all communities.

5. Backbone organizations should build a data culture with their partners. Expect an iterative, interactive process of deciding what is important to track (beyond what must be reported) and building the system for tracking it.

6. Youth need front line staff who are relatable and who believe in them. This sentiment is expressed uniformly across the staff who work with the youth, the leadership who hire the staff, and the youth themselves.

Challenges

1. The tension between needing an income to meet immediate needs and pursuing post-secondary career pathways for longer-term rewards exists. All partners and the backbone acknowledge the tension, but some frame it as a need for immediate jobs while others would like to see it framed in other ways because full-time jobs tend to get in the way of longer-term success. Partners identify homelessness and hunger as two major issues for youth of this age, and some are feeling the strain of not being able to help these youth meet their immediate needs more than others. The partnering organizations continue to discuss these needs.

2. Finding the youth who need the help has also been a challenge because many of the 20 to 24 year-old youth are not looking for these kinds of opportunities, because they don't think there is an option. And, unlike high school dropouts, there is no list of disconnected youth with high school diplomas. They continue to investigate the options.

3. Some career paths have requirements that pose particular challenges to these youth that the program may not be able to overcome directly. For example, while the bridging coaches may be able to help youth obtain a driver's license or provide some adult basic education, it is
beyond the boundaries of the program to support a permanent place to live. And, even some of the barriers around getting a driver’s license can be challenging. One coach indicated that nine times out of ten the barriers are related to cost—the cost of taking the test, the cost for driving school if the youth doesn’t have a car.

4. For youth with children, child care can be a major barrier. Child care subsidy vouchers can be difficult to obtain, the state rules require that the applicant be receiving Department of Transitional Assistance cash assistance (the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program), and the Department of Transitional Assistance program requires that they be working 30 hours per week (according to coaches). But, so far, youth with children have been a rare occurrence.

5. Uncooperative parents can be another barrier for enrolling youth in school. The youth need to submit a Free Application for Federal Student Aid to apply for Pell Grants or other types of financial aid for which they may be eligible, but the Free Application for Federal Student Aid requires that parents provide their tax returns.

6. Infrequent or distant start times for education and training programs contribute to lack of persistence of some youth. For example, a youth might connect with a bridging program in October but learn that the program they are interested in taking does not begin until January. Keeping the youth motivated to stay the course can be a challenge.

7. An emerging concern is around the legalization of marijuana in Boston. Some coaches are concerned that youth will interpret the legalization as permitting them to smoke marijuana even when they are subject to drug testing. The coaches are warning youth that they can still be fired or denied entry into a program for testing positive for marijuana even under the new law.
Appendix: Boston Logic Model

**Inputs**
- Existing community resources
  - Job placement programs
  - College bridging & training programs
  - Colleges
  - Social services
  - Childcare
  - Referral sites: College Bound Dorchester (CBD), Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción (IBA), & Jewish Vocational Services (JVS)
- Federal & state funding
- Local match funding
- Local intermediary capacity of the BOA & PIC
  - Staff
- JFF Coaching & Convening the Learning Community

**Implementation Activities**

**Functional Activities**
- PIC contracts with existing community resources
- PIC enhances access & improves/ augments college bridging programs
- PIC accesses, maintains, & expands occupational training & job placement employer networks
- Connection Center develops multiple outreach strategies
- Building relationships with other youth serving organizations to generate outreach
- Social media & youth on the streets to reach other youth
- Teen-aways
- Events

**Programmatic Activities**
- Connection Center conducts outreach
- Connection Center conducts intake, assessment
- Career counseling, TABE, Accuplacer
- Connection Center provides supported referrals/referral facilitation
- Connection Center & referral site provide coaching support
- Referral site delivers programmatic interventions

**Bridging Outputs**
- Student-Level
  - 450 young adults recruited, placed 150 in job placement, college bridging (75) or career bridging/training (75)
  - 70% complete pre-employment activities (job placement)
- Program-Level
  - Build relationships for outreach

**Bridging Outcomes**

**Short-Term Outcomes**
- Soft Skills for Success
  - Self-efficacy
  - Employability skills
  - A sense of initiative
- Access College/Career Coursework
  - Post-secondary matriculation
  - Enrollment in occupational training programs
  - Job placement
- Subject Knowledge Gains
  - How to write a resume (job placement & occupational training programs)
  - Interview skills (job placement & occupational training programs)
  - Self-awareness around skills & interests & linkage to the pathways
- Support Systems
  - Coaching support

**Medium-/Long-Term Outcomes**

**Individual Outcomes**
- Career-level employment, sustaining job
- Financial independence
- Homeownership
- Civic engagement

**Community Outcomes**
- Lower poverty rates
- Fewer opportunity youth, lower disconnection rates
- Make career pathways visible to young people

Contextual factors: Economy (all levels), political climate, currently strong college completion movement.
Hartford is implementing the postsecondary/career bridging component of the Back on Track Model for their Opportunity Works programming. Other funders within Hartford support services throughout the community that mirror the three stages of the Back on Track model, and the youth participating in the Opportunity Works-funded postsecondary bridging sometimes access enriched preparation and/or first-year support through other funding streams. Both of the organizations contracted to deliver the postsecondary bridging services for Opportunity Works, Blue Hills Civic Association (BHCA) and Our Piece of the Pie (OPP), were providing services that align with the elements of the Back on Track Model prior to the Opportunity Works funding. Opportunity Works funds have been used to expand the number of youth that BHCA and OPP can serve; prior to Opportunity Works, many opportunity youth were on waiting lists for services around the community.

Hartford’s Opportunity Works program is operated by the Capital Workforce Partners (CWP) and builds from CWP’s facilitation of the Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative (HOYC), “a cross-sector, collective impact collaborative formed with the explicit goal of engaging organizations and systems throughout the City of Hartford, Connecticut, to address the needs of Opportunity Youth: those Hartford youth between 16 and 24 years of age who do not have a high school diploma, or who have a high school diploma but are not in school and not working.” HOYC was formed in 2014, and is a collaboration of 40+ organizations and agencies. OPP and BHCA were founding members of this collaborative, and CWP refers to them as “learning partners.” The foundation for Hartford’s Opportunity Works program emerged from 2005–06 strategic planning efforts of CWP where a decision was made to focus efforts on opportunity youth. At that time, they allocated 100 percent of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), now Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), youth dollars to out-of-school young people despite the fact that only 40 percent was required.

Matching funds for Opportunity Works are gathered by CWP rather than the partner sites. So far, matching funds have included the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, NBC Universal, Berkshire Bank, and Annie E. Casey Foundation.
Context

The City of Hartford is facing many difficulties, making it a challenging community to serve opportunity youth. Interviewees report that unemployment is high and the state of Connecticut has been experiencing a severe budget cutback in recent years which is reflected in service cutbacks for community residents. Many community support services have long waiting lists. In addition, Hartford has altered the mechanism for accessing some services in the community. Previously, individual service providers would contact each other using personal relationships to connect clients to services. Now, a new structure exists whereby service delivery organizations must seek services through a centralized call-in network; some of the frontline staff express frustration with this system due to a perception that it delays receipt of services. Staff members indicate challenges in helping youth access services for homelessness, mental health, and food insecurity. In addition, community college budgets have been cut across the state making it more difficult for the colleges to collaborate with community partners.

Leadership staff indicate that these budget cutbacks also create more competition among agencies seeking funds from local foundations and other private funding streams; many agencies are seeking funds just to meet basic service needs. This has made it more difficult to obtain the match funding for the Social Innovation Fund (SIF). On the other hand, leadership indicate that the current mayor ran on a platform of youth employment and is enthusiastic about serving opportunity youth. The mayor is now chairing the HOYC and has requested more frequent meetings.

Within the state of Connecticut there is a higher education mandate requiring that colleges move youth into credit-bearing courses within a year; this means that it is important that youth enter college needing few development courses.

Partners

Throughout the brief, we refer to backbone agency staff (anyone who works at CWP), leadership staff (leadership members at OPP and BHCA), and direct service staff or coaches (the staff who work directly with the youth). When we describe the types of staffing positions there are, we provide the actual job titles for those positions, but otherwise we do not use specific job titles.

Backbone: Capital Workforce Partners (CWP)

CWP is the backbone organization for the HOYC. They are the Workforce Development Board serving Connecticut’s north central region (37 towns around Hartford), and they are a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. They have been operating since 1998 and their mission is to “leverage public and private resources to produce skilled workers for a competitive regional economy.” CWP oversees four American Job Centers in the region which provide job referrals, career workshops, job development, online training, individual training scholarships, individualized career guidance, and recruitment events. CWP provides resources for youth programs serving youth ages 14 through 24. CWP also provides specialty and sector-focused services including a mortgage crisis job training program, health care careers support,
construction/manufacturing jobs funnel, and a subsidized employment program for veterans entering manufacturing. Finally, they offer business services that help employers find the talent they need.

As the backbone organization, CWP administers the SIF grant, contracts with partners, facilitates building of relationships, supports data collection and analysis, and secures the matching funds. They also lead monthly meetings with the partners. CWP has contracted with BHCA and OPP as the bridging partners. BHCA and OPP had previous relationships with CWP and engaged in the development of the proposal with CWP. They were selected by CWP based on their track record for identifying opportunity youth, their existing relationships with postsecondary education institutions, and their success in supporting youth through a career pathway. Contracts were executed on July 1, 2015, and Opportunity Work activities commenced immediately.

**Programming Partner: Blue Hills Civic Association (BHCA)**

BHCA is a nonprofit organization founded in 1962 seeking to “empower residents and neighborhoods to become self-sufficient through advocacy, organizing, and services for the betterment of Hartford.” They began as a “block watch club” created to help create a successful neighborhood transition in the 1960s when a large number of African Americans moved into the community following white flight. The organization helped teach people how to be homeowners, They have traditionally focused on the neighborhoods of North Hartford but recently decided to serve residents throughout Hartford. Now they operate programs to increase home ownership; employment programs to connect residents to employers; outreach services to promote neighborhood stability; and youth programs in leadership development, employment, and recreational activities. The current executive director was the first formal executive director.

BHCA began to focus their work on youth about 25 years ago. They run a track program for youth in the greater Hartford area, so many youth begin engaging with BHCA around 9 years old, and at that point they engage the family too. This creates the foundation for a life-long relationship where the families and youth feel comfortable coming back and asking for assistance, or returning to work for BHCA someday.

Their Opportunity Works project is called the Blue Hills Employment and Skills Training Program and is operated in partnership with Capital Community College (CCC) and Manchester Community College (MCC). BHCA recruits, assesses, and enrolls youth into their program. They help youth connect to support services but provide some of their own. They provide postsecondary bridging services that include remedial education, goal setting, applications to college, and financial aid. And, as youth participating in the focus group emphasize, they provide a safe space and warm, caring relationships for the youth. If they identify youth who have dropped out of high school and are interested in getting their high school diploma or General Education Diploma (GED), BHCA partners with a community-based organization called The Village to help the youth obtain their GED or equivalent while engaging them in the other postsecondary bridging activities.

**Programming Partner: Our Piece of the Pie (OPP)**

Our Piece of the Pie (OPP) is a nonprofit youth development organization that has been operating for 41 years. They are "offering a relationship-centered approach to help young people access and attain a mix of
the educational, employment, and personal skills that contribute to their success." Although they now focus their efforts exclusively on youth-centered services, they have targeted their services over time. Leadership staff indicate that when they started they had a day care center, senior centers, and workforce programs for adults in addition to some services for youth. In 1999, they began to focus more intensely on youth development due to a grant from the local workforce investment board (the current backbone agency, CWP). In 2006, the Clark Foundation and McDonald Foundation approached OPP to become part of their portfolios under the condition that they consolidate and focus their work on youth. They agreed to focus on 14 through 24 year-olds. In 2008, they submitted a charter school application for "Opportunity High School" to respond to a community need to serve "over-age and under-credited" youth. In 2009, they entered in a partnership with the National Youth Employment Coalition to launch an initiative with 100 first-generation college students to place them in community colleges. As they say about their business model, "We're ever-evolving. If something is not working, we're not afraid to take a step back, pull the plug. We are able to say no to some resources, whereas other nonprofits compromise their core service delivery model. If it doesn't fit our model, we may say no and walk away."

Their Opportunity Works program is called the Pathways to Careers Initiative, and they partner with CCC, Asnuntuck Community College, and Goodwin College. OPP recruits, assesses, and enrolls youth into their program. They help youth connect to support services but provide some of their own. They provide postsecondary bridging services that include remedial education, goal setting, applications to college, and financial aid.

**Voluntary Educational Partner: Asnuntuck Community College**

Asnuntuck is a publicly funded community college located in Enfield, Connecticut, about 20 miles from Hartford. As reported on their website, they were chartered in 1972 and are one of the smallest in Connecticut with about 1,500 students enrolled per semester. They offer 19 associate's degrees and 23 certificate programs. One of the areas they specialize in is manufacturing, where they have five different manufacturing-related programs: computer numerical control machining technology (CNC), welding/robotics technology, electronics and controls technology, electro-mechanical technology, and advance manufacturing.

As described by OPP leadership, Asnuntuck has been an active collaborative partner prior to and during Opportunity Works, and they have helped each other learn about how to better serve opportunity youth over the years. OPP leadership indicate, "What's been successful is continued dialogue, some modifications in scheduling and attendance requirements. It gives us a baseline for how to engage other college partners." The successful manufacturing program relationship led to the allied health program relationship. Using non-SIF funds, OPP works with Asnuntuck to provide supports to students once enrolled in school. OPP even transports students in a van to campus since public transportation to Asnuntuck is not available.

**Voluntary Educational Partner: Capital Community College (CCC)**

CCC is a publicly funded community college located in downtown Hartford founded in 1967. They have served as many as 4,000+ students in credit-bearing classes in a semester, and annually they serve about
4,000 individuals to obtain professional training. They indicate they are the only college in Connecticut designated as a "Hispanic-serving institution." They offer 30+ associate's degree programs and 20+ certificate degree programs. Allied health fields are among their offerings.

As described by BHCA leadership, CCC has been an engaged partner. CCC provides a space for the BHCA education coordinator to sit two days per week. From there, she is able to help the youth enrolled at CCC to select appropriate courses and to get help with their coursework when professors are not available. CCC also comes to BHCA to talk to the youth about financial aid.

**Voluntary Educational Partner: Goodwin College**

Goodwin College, founded in 1999, is an accredited nonprofit organization. According to their website, they are an open-enrollment college with more than half of students being the first in their families to attend college. They are capable of enrolling more than 3,000 students per semester. They offer 10+ bachelor’s degree programs, more than a dozen associate’s degree programs, and fewer than 10 certificate programs; among their offerings are manufacturing and allied health. In addition to their college offerings, they operate a magnet high school and an early care and education program for young children.

As described by OPP leadership, Goodwin College has been an engaged partner. They were able to work with Goodwin to create a six-month program instead of the typical 12–18-month offering, while still incorporating the skills that employers want.

**Voluntary Educational Partner: Manchester Community College (MCC)**

MCC is a publicly funded community college founded in 1963. According to their website, they serve more than 15,000 students per year. MCC offers associate's degrees in over 40 disciplines and certificate programs in the same areas. Manufacturing and allied health are among their offerings.

BHCA indicates they have a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Manchester, but the specific relationship with the college was not discussed in the interviews.

**Voluntary Educational Partner: The Village**

The Village was originally founded in 1809 as the Hartford Female Beneficent Society. Over the years, the mission of the nonprofit, community-based organization has expanded. The Village provides services in 9 communities and 11 elementary, middle, and high schools. They use a holistic, strengths-based approach to improve the lives of families and children. They offer a variety of support services which they classify under four broad areas: prevention, community support, and early intervention; outpatient behavioral health/trauma center; intensive community and residential treatment; therapeutic foster care, adoption, and family preservation.

BHCA partners with The Village to support youth who need to obtain their high school diploma or GED and to support the child care needs of any of the youth they serve. The Village provides these services as part of their prevention, community support, and early intervention which operates through funds other than SIF. Youth in this service track receive services from The Village and BHCA simultaneously.
Nature of the Partnerships

The contracted partners, OPP and BHCA, have worked with the backbone agency for many years prior to the SIF grant. The partners indicate a good relationship with the backbone agency and appreciate the attention that the agency pays to youth needs. They think some of the multiple initiatives could be aligned better, but they also indicate the backbone is always willing to listen and engage in dialogue, and has been attentive to needs like integrating data systems.

Although OPP and BHCA have been providing community-based services in the Hartford area for more than 40 years, comments from staff would suggest they do not work together directly much. Historically, their service delivery areas have been a bit different, focusing on different parts of Hartford, and they have had their own service models despite serving youth with similar needs. The staff indicate that the two agencies share information and interact during the monthly meetings held by the backbone agency but otherwise do not actively collaborate. As one partner said, “There’s not much collaboration needed, but I think we’re going to try to do that more. [There is a] healthy competition to find the kids and fill our rosters. We also need to be in communication because some of the youth will run from one place to the next. We try to make sure that kids are not co-enrolled in two different programs.”

The backbone agency hosts a monthly meeting with the partner agencies. Leadership and frontline staff indicate they attend those meetings. In the monthly meetings, CWP provides updates about the SIF grant. They talk about challenges partners are facing and discuss ways to meet the challenges. From CWP’s perspective, the meetings are about helping to meet outcomes together, “Even though it’s a funder-grantee relationship, we’re a team, and we’re trying to reach outcomes together.”

The contracted partner agencies conduct the outreach, but they do so through other organizations and businesses in the community. For example, one youth mentioned learning about the program through a flyer at a flower shop. The partner organizations also reach out directly to the youth based on youth participation in previous programs sponsored by their organizations.

Each of the contracted organizations has relationships they have developed with particular schools. See the Education and Training section of this document for more information about those partners and relationships.

Program Design

Difference from Existing Programming

The Hartford partners have an interest in supporting youth throughout the full pathway laid out by the Back on Track Model. They each drew from their own experiences in serving the youth population to identify gaps in services and ways the SIF funding could fill those gaps. The program design has evolved throughout implementation. Originally, the SIF funding was implemented as a supplement to WIOA with opportunity youth co-enrolled in both WIOA and SIF, allowing partners to provide more opportunity youth with services but providing the same services they had through WIOA. During the first year, youth received support from initial assessment and development, through education or training, and help getting
a job; waiting lists were wiped out because the SIF funds enabled the serving of more youth. Just before the site visit, the partners received additional clarification about differences between the ways the SIF funds and the WIOA funds should be used in supporting the youth—namely that the SIF funds should be used to provide only the postsecondary bridging services (services before attending education and training). This will allow partners to provide more support to youth in the front end of services, like taking them on college field trips, providing guidance counseling and small workshops, and providing more developmental support before the youth apply to an educational or training program. The WIOA funds require an assessment of “fit and suitability” prior to starting services, but the SIF funds allow more exploration of interests before that process takes place.

Because the new understanding of how to use the SIF funds occurred right before the site visit, many of the statements from interviewees reflect on how they had been delivering services during year 1 and what the new expectations may bring in year 2 of the program. The youth reflections are on the year 1 services because none of the youth had yet experienced the new interpretation of the service delivery, and even if they had, they would not know where one funding stream ends and another begins.

Back on Track

The partners understand the Back on Track model as in alignment with the model of service delivery already provided by OPP and BHCA. They believe in the importance of all three elements of the model, and the partners deliver all three elements, although enriched preparation and first-year support are provided through other funding streams; BHCA serves a small number through enriched preparation. During year 1, however, partners interpreted the funds to be primarily an add-on to their WIOA funds allowing them to serve a slightly broader population of youth but for the whole continuum of services. Understanding of how to apply the Back on Track model through the SIF funding is continuing to evolve as the backbone agency receives additional guidance from Jobs For the Future and provides that information to the partner sites.

Goals

The leadership and direct service staff at the partner organizations express goals for youth in a variety of ways, but all of their words focus on transforming the way youth see themselves and their possibilities in life. Their goals for youth include:

- Shifting the youth mindset from "Help me get a job" to "Let's look at career pathways,"
- Building [youths’] resilience to get back up and keep moving,
- Having [youth] work toward a degree that will give them sustainable employment,
- Having [youth] leave with better competencies, speaking with other people and being a more mature individual,
- Equipping [youth] to compete for middle-skilled jobs in order to change their life circumstance and the life circumstances of their children as well, [helping them] move on to middle class success

The ways the youth express their goals across the partner organizations is a bit different, but the ultimate goal expressed by all of the youth is to have careers that will enable them to be financially
independent. Youth appreciate the goalsetting with the staff, and the focus on concrete steps for progress. “[The coach] gave us a goal paper—your six months and up. One of my goals was to get my learners’ permit and [the coach] is helping me with that. It’s not just job-wise, it’s whatever you need.” Some of the youth have near-term goals like getting a driver’s license, but others have goals about their future. “My goal is to live the American dream by the time I’m 30—which is house, family, cars, kids. A nice house with a white picket fence. And the jobs that they set us up with is looking pretty good,” said one youth.

Beyond the goals for the individual youth, the leadership are striving to bring about a culture change in the community colleges (which they see as a need throughout the country). “[The community colleges] are built on adult service models, not youth service models. They are built on the assumption that you know what you want from them when you arrive there, and that you have the focus, discipline, and forethought to navigate their systems without much support. A lot is built around the notion that you go to school, you finish school, and go to work. They don't build flexibility in programming to do both. The semester-based structure [fails] when it doesn't make sense for the youth to shut down in the summer."

Development Process

Application for the Opportunity Works funding was a natural next step following the strategic decision of CWP, as the Workforce Development Board for WIA/WIOA, to allocate 100 percent of youth-focused WIA funds toward support for out-of-school young people in 2005–06 and their subsequent receipt of an Aspen Institute planning grant four years ago. As they reflected upon their progress in serving opportunity youth prior to application for Opportunity Works, they were concerned that although they were meeting their “compliance responsibilities and getting them in jobs... [the youth] weren't moving, or they were moving laterally and horizontally, but not vertically. We used that data to think about how we could enable young people to be able to acquire more advanced opportunities, grow in the workplace, and not be in a static, low-wage job.” That led to them steering their efforts towards “a sector-based career pathways model," and “that model interfaces nicely with the Jobs For the Future Back on Track model.”

The two contracted partners indicate they were at the table for the decision to apply for the grant and in the design of the application from the beginning. OPP leadership indicate they had an interest because of the opportunity to serve a more diverse population of youth that are not always eligible for WIA or who need more time to complete a credential than a WIA-funded youth, and their experiences also highlighted the importance of bridging support to assure that youth did not enter school “cold” or “stuck in remediation.” BHCA leadership indicate they had been looking for national models that help youth stay in college and complete it once they get there helping youth “through tough times.” Thus, OPP and BHCA also saw Back on Track as a natural extension of the work they were already doing.

OPP and BHCA were "learning partners" with CWP prior to the application for the SIF funding, although OPP and CWP have been partnering longer than BHCA and CWP. The backbone and the partners had worked together on a number of other projects before the SIF opportunity. Each of the contracted partner organizations already had programs using principles congruent with the Back on Track model, so they used those existing programs as vehicles for implementation. Recently, there have been some clarifications about ways that the SIF-funded services are a bit different than what they had been previously doing, and the partners were working to adjust their service models accordingly. In one site, it
was interpreted as narrowing allowable expenses, and in the other site, it was interpreted as creating some new opportunities.

**CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT**

In Hartford, they did not develop a particular curriculum for their bridging services. Each program has its own curriculum.

**Staffing**

SIF funds have been used to support staff positions at BHCA and OPP that provide outreach and bridging services. A total of 4.4 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff positions are funded through Opportunity Works. The direct service staff at BHCA includes an educational coordinator, two success coaches, and a recruitment and retention specialist. The educational coordinator tutors and assists youth with college preparation. She spends two days a week on-site at CCC. The two success coaches provide case management and consistent contact, including goal setting, career assessment, job search, mock interviews, referrals to needed support services, and life skills training. The recruitment and retention specialist handles intake and follow-up once youth are enrolled. At BHCA, the staff describe the relationships as being like family. The success coaches report that they have caseloads of between 16 to 60 youth, and that it widely fluctuates depending on enrollment levels and the number of youth who are active versus in follow-up.

At OPP direct staff include youth development specialists (YDSs) and workforce development specialists (WDSs). YDSs provide day-to-day youth management, including taking case notes and providing youth with additional support. They maintain consistent contact with each youth throughout the pathway. The WDS provides the Career Competency Development Training which includes "how to get an interview, how to get a job, and how to maintain a job." The training also includes soft skills, like interview behavior and dress. The WDS builds relationships with the employer partners who provide jobs for the youth. As direct staff put it, the YDSs handle the "social/emotional side," while the WDSs do the "business/economical" side. However, they have an “all hands on deck” model where all staff can help the youth. All staff members assist with recruitment. OPP staff reports they have caseloads of about 35 active youth and 35 follow-up youth who have obtained employment at any one time. The youth talk about the relationship with YDSs and WDSs as being a big brother/big sister-type relationship.

The direct service staff and leadership staff we met at both of the partner organizations were reflective of the population they serve. Nearly all the youth we met were young people of color and most of the staff were as well. Many of the staff grew up in Hartford or in surrounding communities and considered themselves role models for the youth participants.

Direct staff at both organizations often had long-term relationships with the partner organizations. At BHCA especially, many of the staff members had been involved in the youth programs when they were younger. At OPP the leadership staff had originally been YDSs and WDSs and had grown with the organization.

The backbone has experienced considerable staff turnover since the start of the project, but they have used that turnover as an opportunity to reflect on the types of positions needed and the responsibilities of
those positions. The partner organizations had experienced some staff turnover as well, although they did not note any particular issues as a result.

Funding Sources

The backbone agency supplies all the required matching funds for the SIF. They indicate that the SIF funds are far more restrictive than any of the matching funds. The partner agencies are also pairing some of their other funding with the SIF funds, but these do not fulfill the required match dollars. The primary challenge seems to be that the SIF funds come with a number of restrictions, and those restrictions are passed on to the matching dollars. That means that if the project wants to support things not allowed by SIF, they have to raise funds beyond the match to do so.

Based on the description from the backbone agency, the SIF funds could be used to do more than what the partners are using the funds for. Within their allocations, the partners can decide whether they want to use all the funds for staff, or if they’d like to use some of the funds for support services. The models are very labor-intensive so they are understandably staff-focused, and the youth say that the meaningful, caring staff interactions are the most important. At the same time, the staff are frustrated about helping the youth meet all their needs with existing community supports, and some wished they had funds they could use to better meet youth needs.

Timing

Contracts were awarded to the partner organizations by July 1, 2015. Opportunity Works recruitment began July 1, 2015, and bridging services began to enroll youth then as well.

Both of the partner organizations enroll youth on a rolling basis for initial assessment and referrals. At BHCA, youth set goals with their coaches and work in a self-paced environment to achieve them. At OPP, youth also set goals with their coaches, but the bridging process is more structured because a key component is the two-week career competencies training that they engage in as a group. The total amount of time in bridging depends on when youth enroll in relation to the start of a school semester and their individual skill and readiness level upon enrollment. For example, some youth with low CASAS scores will need to take remedial courses or engage in tutoring before enrolling in college. Other youth may be ready for help enrolling in school immediately and may receive bridging services for just a couple of weeks. At OPP there is more of a cohort model in place because most of the youth attend Asnuntuck College for manufacturing.

Participants

Characteristics of Participants

As of December 31, 2016, 108 youth had enrolled in the program. The program data show that most of the youth are 18- (22 percent) or 19- (31 percent) years-old at program entry. Seventy percent are male, 73 percent are African American, and 31 percent are Hispanic or Latino. More than one-quarter (26 percent) list their household size as one person. Only 11 percent report ever being arrested with only 5
percent reporting ever being incarcerated. Seventeen percent report having been homeless at some point, and 6 percent report having been in foster care. Fourteen percent have children of their own. As of December 31, 2016, 48 percent of the youth were not working, 20 percent were working part time, and 17 percent were working full-time. Eighty-eight percent indicate having completed a high school diploma or GED.

Staff indicate that youth face a variety of barriers to employment and education, including food insecurity, homeless, child care, and mental health issues. Direct service staff indicate that youth are often hungry when they arrive at the program, saying, “Sometimes they eat breakfast like they haven’t eaten since lunch the day before.” Program staff are also concerned that many of the youth suffer from undiagnosed mental health conditions and cannot access the clinical help that they need.

Both staff and youth discussed the importance of transportation or at least transportation vouchers for being able to access the program and other support services.

How “disconnected” the youth are varies from youth to youth. Disconnection is more about a state of being than a period of time. Youth are disconnected if they are unemployed and not in school, underemployed and not in school, or employed but without a clear career pathway that can make them self-sufficient. They may be just graduating from high school but be disconnected because they are leaving school without a clear plan of what to do next.

Target Population

- Young men of color have been targeted for the program. They expect that about 66 percent of the individuals they serve will be young men of color. They do allow other youth to be served in the program.
- When asked about the total target population in the city, CWP estimated that there are about 4,100 opportunity youth ages 18 through 24. Of them, about 1,845 are young men of color and about 615 are young moms.

Recruitment and Admission

DESCRIPTION OF RECRUITMENT METHODS

OPP and BHCA both do recruitment through flyers, referrals from other community organizations, and social media. Youth in the focus groups found out about the Opportunity Works programs through fliers, word of mouth, and past experience with the organization. BHCA presents on Opportunity Works at their summer youth program and makes sure fliers about all their programs are out for any BHCA events. Some youth at OPP had heard about their Opportunity Works program during a presentation at their high school. OPP indicated they target juniors and seniors, parents, and guidance counselors. In addition, OPP leadership indicates they recruit through going to the mall, bus ads, and door knocking. BHCA indicates that much of their recruitment occurs through word of mouth as individuals who work for them travel throughout the community and when they are sitting at CCC.

Youth indicated that paper flyers and word-of-mouth are very important for recruitment. They explained, “A lot of people don’t have access to cell phones or being able to google it or on Facebook all...
the day. I think putting up a flyer, or at a food bank, that’s so helpful. That helps get who needs it." Most youth found out about the programs through flyers or personal referrals from people they knew.

SCREENING AND CRITERIA FOR ADMISSION, INCLUDING ANY TESTS OR ASSESSMENTS
At OPP, they do CASAS testing, a Kuder assessment, and fill out an application to be submitted to CWP. Once that is certified, they contact the youth and set goals and get them into the two-week Career Competency Development Training. They discuss college options and start filling out applications for college. If a student scores too low on CASAS, OPP has tutors who they can work with two or three times a week.

At BHCA, the intake process focuses on assessing suitability for the program. Suitability is assessed by the CASAS math and literacy test, and one-on-one conversations with the youth about what they want and what the program can provide, and the barriers that the youth face. They make sure the youth are willing to commit to working toward something other than just employment or a paid internship. Youth must be willing to engage in financial literacy training and customer service training, come to appointments, and do the tasks the coaches have set for them.

HOW PROGRAMS DEAL WITH EXCESS DEMAND (E.G., A WAITLIST)
Prior to the start of Opportunity Works, waiting lists for opportunity youth programs were persistent. CWP said that the Opportunity Works funding “obliterated waiting lists for our providers.” The contracted partners indicated that they do not have waiting lists and hinted that they are in competition with each other to recruit sufficient numbers of youth to meet their funded targets.

Attrition
Completion of the Opportunity Works postsecondary bridging process occurs when youth begin attending a postsecondary institution through an identified career pathway. However, they will likely have completed other goals along the way. In addition, completion of the stage funded by Opportunity Works does not typically conclude the youth’s involvement with BHCA and OPP, as both organizations provide first-year support through other funding streams.

At both organizations, there are particular rules governing behavior. If youth don’t follow the rules, they may be asked to leave the program; rules include good behavior and showing commitment by regularly participating in appointments and activities. Youth may also drop out of the program due to life circumstances or lack of motivation; some youth move and change their contact information making it impossible for the coaches to follow up. According to data available as of December 31, 2016, youth had left the program for the following reasons: noncompliance with the program (16 percent), employment (16 percent), incarcerated or institutionalized (9 percent). Another 38 percent have completed the program, and for 22 percent the reason for exit was not recorded.

RETENTION EFFORTS
Both partner organizations discussed the value of incentives to keep youth in the program. One partner was using SIF funds to provide the incentives, while the other partner was pairing youth with other funds to provide the incentives. The backbone agency indicated that many incentives could be purchased
through the SIF funds, but that partners may choose not to do so because they prefer to direct the SIF funds to support the intensive staffing offered through the model.

BHCA discussed the value of incentives to help keep youth in the program, saying, “We use gift cards to provide leverage—some youth get jobs and don’t want to come back to the program—so we create an incentive for them to come to workshops, demonstrate commitment, and get $25 gift cards. We can utilize our creativity there from a program standpoint.” On the other hand, they also indicated that the relationships they form with the youth help them re-engage if they do leave.

Direct staff at OPP on the other hand, did not think they could use Opportunity Works funding for incentives. They felt that this was a disadvantage to youth in their SIF-funded programming because they needed incentives to help get them through their first semester. But, if the SIF-funded youth were eligible for other funding once enrolled in school, then they could offer them paid internships starting in their second semester of school. As a staff member stated, “The youth need a chance to work and get a paycheck. They are not coming from the milk and honey.”

Youth talk about the mutual accountability of staff to youth and youth to staff: “They always go the extra mile for me. Nobody’s ever really done that before. So the least I can do is show up,” and “They really have a passion for helping and we have a passion for them.” Some youth also talk about the promise of the future paycheck that will alleviate their worries over paying the rent. And, for the youth attending OPP, they operate as more of a cohort and talk about “having each other’s backs.”

BHCA indicates that when youth are active, they speak to them every day. If they have a placement in school or employment, they consider those youth “self-sustaining” and exit them from the program, although they continue to follow up with them for about a year afterwards.

MAIN REASONS FOR EARLY EXIT
Pressing life concerns, like poverty, homelessness and child care needs can directly prevent youth from engaging in the programs or staying with the program. One staff member explained, “I’ve had a youth who was all of a sudden homeless and with the stressors of homelessness, they up and quit. That happens all the time. And we can’t blame them for that. They have to deal with the here and now. They can’t do their homework if they have nowhere to be safe and if they’re hungry.”

Program Experience

Education and Training Programming
The bridging support partners collaborate with four colleges in the region for the education and training programming they are preparing youth to attend: Asnuntuck, CCC, MCC, and Goodwin College. Asnuntuck, CCC, and MCC are public community colleges, while Goodwin is a private, nonprofit college that offers BA degrees in addition to associates and Certificates. OPP partners with Asnuntuck, CCC, and Goodwin, while BHCA partners with CCC and MCC. BHCA also collaborates with The Village to support youth in completing their GED or high school diploma.
Successful completion of the bridging stage is represented by enrollment in one of these colleges and the youth having a vision and goal around a particular career pathway. Youth participating through OPP would have goals around manufacturing and allied health careers whereas youth participating through BHCA could have goals focused on allied health or any type of career. OPP would like to broaden the career pathway options and BHCA would like to broaden relationships with more colleges, including four-year schools.

**Support Services**

Program staff said their youth frequently have mental health issues, child care needs, housing needs, and food insecurity. As some staff put it, "We're not creaming. We want the people with the strongest need and they often come with the greatest challenges." While staff try to assess the needs, they also view youth as partners. As one site indicated, "We sit with them and try to understand their needs and hope they have the voice to articulate. Sometimes they do and sometimes they don't. Sometimes it's revealed after the initial conversation, and then we have to take steps back to address the issues."

Program staff members feel that their programs were not able to effectively support youths’ many needs. OPP and BHCA are able to provide limited support services, including transportation vouchers and interview clothing. At both OPP and BHCA, they talked about the importance of always having food available for the youth even if that food had to be purchased with funds other than WIOA or SIF.

The program staff emphasize the importance of a “warm hand-off” when connecting youth to other organizations and agencies. In other words, they connect youth directly with a contact person they know whenever possible. But some direct service staff would like to be able to provide those services all in one place. They explain that when youth disclose their undiagnosed issues, they’d like to be able to provide them services "in one place, rather than referring youth across agencies. I think that would allow them to be more successful. We may be providing them with all sorts of supports, but another agency could be a really bad fit. I think that’s too much on them with all the things they have to do." Despite this sentiment from direct service staff, it is not clear that the organizations would be interested in doing this, as OPP once had a diverse array of services it offered in-house, but decided to target their focus to the career pathway approach for youth.

Some direct services staff expressed frustration at how long it can take to get youth the supports they need due to the way that community support services function. As one said, "We have a true need for housing because we work with a lot of homeless youth. We have to follow [the] 2-1-1 [process for accessing community resources]. It provides an assessment a few days later but not immediate help. There aren't a lot of agencies that can take a homeless youth." When referring to child care challenges, one staff member said, “The hours don’t work, or there isn’t enough, or it’s really complicated to get it.” On the other hand, another staff member indicated that a partnership with the community-based organization, The Village, is a help in obtaining child care for youth who need it.

Leadership staff discussed wanting more strategic and systemic partnerships to address these needs. They felt that community support services were limited and that youth face delays in receiving needed services. They also mentioned that there is a new system in Hartford where all requests have to go through a centralized agency and that may create some delays in access.
The primary support that both BHCA and OPP staff provide to the youth is the relationship they build. As one coach said, "I’ve been really excited about the positive interactions I’ve had with the youth so far. I’m finding just giving them simple words of encouragement has given them the push they need. And that makes me feel really fulfilled, and it’s great to look and see where the youth will be. It means a lot to me to play a part in that."

**Participant Path through the Program**

The participant path through the programs varies somewhat depending on whether the youth participate through OPP or BHCA, although the general principals of the experience are the same. Youth contact either OPP or BHCA in response to an outreach or recruitment effort. When youth make the first contact, staff members assess if they meet the criteria for the SIF-funded programming; they perform a CASAS assessment (both OPP and BHCA), and Kuder testing (OPP). If the youth are determined eligible, then the staff assess their skills and needs to individualize a plan for advancement. The youth work with coaches to help them meet their goals and prepare for school. It is during this stage that biggest differences appear in the participant path. At BHCA, the goalsetting and planning stage is more individualized and self-paced than at OPP. The reason for this is likely two-fold: OPP serves more youth at once and their program is more targeted, focusing on two key career pathways—allied health and manufacturing provided at Asnuntuck Community College, Goodwin College, and CCC.

At OPP youth meet with a youth development specialist, who helps them understand the Opportunity Works program—what they would get and what to expect—then helps them fill out an application and set up goals. They also enroll the youth in the Career Competency Development Training, a two-week training that includes “career awareness, job searching methods, interviewing skills, good work habits, workplace ethics, and money management techniques.” The YDS develops an individual service plan with the youth, taking into account their short-term and long-term goals as well as other needs: “We research the different schools, review pros and cons of the schools. We work on filling out the application for college. We do the financial aid with the individuals, then we register them for school.” If youth have CASAS scores that are too low (below the ninth grade level), OPP will offer tutors who can work with the youth several times a week. In the words of one youth, "No one tells you how to do things. Here the people take you through step-by-step and it’s a lot easier on everyone because it’s not about ‘what I’m doing wrong’ and more [about the] weight off your back."

The youth participating through BHCA describe a typical day as reflecting on “your past self and how you are now,” “what you want to accomplish,” and working toward your goals, including filling out job applications. A classroom is available for them to work in, and coaches are available for them to ask for help. The youth say, “We are given the tools we need. If we need help, we can call [the coach to come in].” The youth indicate the coaches help in getting ready for school like looking at classes and making sure they have their immunizations and their free application for federal student aid (FAFSA). Success coaches discussed the need to be persistent and encouraging, pushing youth to be committed and “internally driven.” As one staff member said, “There is a big push for self-sufficiency here. I like how we think about the roles that the youth need to do, how they think about what they are going to work on. I like how we’re a team and their efforts match our efforts. That builds their character and self-esteem, and it’s helping them build those life skills. That’s special too.” The words of one youth reflect a similar sentiment, “It’s like
a helping hand, but you're doing it yourself, so you feel proud." Some youth are working toward the GED or high school diploma; those activities are done at The Village, but those youth also work with the coaches in parallel to prepare for postsecondary education.

Staff at both organizations highlighted the importance of convincing youth to look at career pathways and education rather than immediate employment. The youth may have had very traumatic secondary school experiences and now they're being told "Let's go back to school. It's something we've seen—the trust piece." They also talk about the importance of helping youth be realistic in their goals and expectations, "We're not setting the youth up for failure. For example, I had a youth with a couple of felonies who wanted to go to the allied health field. We told him that wasn't likely to happen—we weren't trying to shut his dreams down—but we try to guarantee employment. So we have the one-on-one conversation."

Once youth begin attending school, their postsecondary bridging services funded by the SIF end, but both BHCA and OPP then roll the youth into other programs to provide first-year support. The length of time that youth are supported by the SIF varies depending on when they have their first contact with the program in relation to when they are ready and able to start school. This varies depending on how much developmental support they need before they can qualify for the college coursework and/or when the courses will be available to start their chosen program. For youth at BHCA, the amount of time varies more widely because each youth is engaging in an individualized goal-setting process. One OPP leadership staff member noted: "Everyone comes in with different skills sets and aspirations. Ideally, it would be a year. That's the best way to get them on track. For a lot it's about reprogramming mindsets. Many have never spoken about college or postsecondary planning, and they've never had the mindset or confidence to go to college. Often when they come in our door it's about just getting employment. We want to make sure they're invested in the program, in getting the skills, as well as the voice and confidence to be independent and self-sufficient. Longer term, I'd love to see someone stay in the program. Due to funding restrictions we have to get them in and get them out. If we could have them for three years, that would be pretty ideal."

Staff highlighted that one benefit of the SIF funding was that it allowed more time for bridging. They said, "For the SIF, the good stuff is that even if an individual comes in during July and the semester starts in September, SIF allows us to assess if they are really ready to start school in September. If not, we can work with them longer and push their enrollment to January."

On the other hand, direct staff at BHCA explained that sometimes youth want to go straight into school, but come to the program right before the semester. One staff member said, "Sometimes they want to get in school and we have two weeks before school starts, so then they need to get right into that. They need to be willing and roll with the punches. Sometimes they want to give up, but we are persistent. We let them know that this is to help them."

Participants' Perspectives

This section is derived from two youth focus groups: one focus group was held at BHCA with BHCA participants and the other was held at OPP with OPP participants. Most of the youth we spoke with were young men of color (only three women vs. nine men). We did not hear any differences, however, in the
perspectives of the women versus the men. All of the youth emphasized the caring, meaningful relationships with staff as being key to their continued involvement and success in the program.

MOTIVATIONS TO JOIN THE PROGRAM AND EXPECTATIONS
Youth in the BHCA focus group joined the program to get organized, set goals and go back to school. One of them indicated he had contemplated joining the military to get some discipline, but felt this program was teaching him the self-discipline he needed.

Youth at OPP wanted to go to college but didn't know how to make it happen without the program. As one young person said, "People would talk to me about college, but I didn't know how to get there. This place took away the worry about being in debt my whole life to go to college. It gave me relief in a sense."

Another young man said, "OPP sits down and teaches you and gives you confidence. With the help and guidance of them with you—you can do it. It's a relief to know you can do it." Some of the youth at OPP also indicated that the expectation of the starting pay in manufacturing is also what kept them motivated.

PERSONAL CHALLENGES AND SUPPORTS
The youth in one focus group highlighted that their own motivation determined their success, and that the program was there to support them, but ultimately it was up to the individual: "It's up to you how far you want to get in the program. What I like is it's about how motivated you are. If you are meeting your goals, they are helping you get there. It's up to you and your experience with the program. They aren't here to give you rules about what you can and can't do. They are here to get you where you need to be. And they don't make you feel bad about your progress because everyone has to start somewhere."

When asked what they would be doing if the program didn't exist, a number of youth indicated they'd be at home feeling negative and beating themselves up about not being in school or having a job.

Youth at BHCA highlighted the importance of feeling comfortable in the building. They described BHCA as a "second home", saying "most schools just care about the school, some teachers care about your problems on the outside, but here they take the time to understand your problems. It really helps a lot. I'd say it feels like a second home."

Unlike home, where there are lots of distractions and pressing problems (child care, pending eviction, homelessness, mental illness), the program provides a comfortable, safe space to be in. One young person explained, "But when I came here, started coming regularly, I built a relationship with everyone. I could talk with them while I was doing my work. I couldn't go home and do work. I come here and get to block everything out."

STAFFING
Youth in the focus groups continually highlighted the importance of their relationships with direct service staff. They felt that staff members genuinely cared about their wellbeing and that staff were consistent in their support. They appreciated the friendliness and positive attitudes of staff, saying "they like their jobs."

The importance of a caring adult, whose concern is both genuine and consistent, cannot be understated. Youth felt that staff truly cared about them and their wellbeing, both in terms of success in
the program and general wellbeing outside of the program. They felt they could talk to their coaches about almost anything, and that they'd try to help them. One youth said, “[It's] someone who really cares about your welfare and how you're doing. I don't have that many adults that do that. Having someone help me and check and see how I am is really cool."

Youth appreciated that the staff consistently followed-up with them, unlike other programs where “they give you coaches, but you have to call them. They don't call and check on you.”

Youth also appreciate that staff are sometimes willing to be flexible, especially when they are dealing with mental health issues. Given the presence of mental illness, and the lack of support services, this seems especially important. One youth explained, "Certain days I get in a mood and I'll feel depressed and anxious. If I have a meeting with [my coach], I can call and explain that and she'll reschedule. If I miss a day, she follows up with me and asks how I'm going. I feel like it's not just about the job, but she actually cares about me and my well-being as a person."

In many ways, the direct staff serve as role models for the youth. Many of the direct service staff come from the same communities as the youth and have faced similar struggles. Youth felt that it was "good to see adults out there in the workforce, having good jobs, supporting themselves. You see them doing that, so we can do it too."

Interestingly, youth really appreciated that the program staff treat them like adults and take them seriously. One youth said, "In other programs they treat you like a kid with childish rules. Here they treat you like an adult. The way an advisor will help an adult—that's how they help us. If I was to tell people about this program, I'd tell them all the benefits." One youth, who admitted to sometimes missing class and going to school tired, said, "They don't sugar coat it. You have to have good behavior and act like a mature adult. If not, you have to leave. They don't sugar coat, they'll tell you straight up. They don't treat you like you're in high school or elementary."

Youth highlighted that this attitude encourages them to be responsible and to make the most of the program. As one young man explained, "It's not even like a freebie, all this stuff just given to you. We're all held reliable. It's our responsibility to ourselves to make sure that we at least do well in school. Some people think it's a freebie and they squander it. In that aspect, it's not just given to us. We're grateful for it and we need to show them that we are. That's how I feel about it."

Youth in all the focus groups felt extremely positively about the staff. As one youth summed up, "They really have a passion for helping and we have a passion for them."

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT
Youth had very few suggestions for improvement. Youth in both focus groups wished that the program could be available to more youth. They believed that the program helped them both get into college and stay in college. The youth at OPP wished there could be more areas of study and that the transportation could be more timely (referring to the van that takes them to and from Asnuntuck Community College).
Data

CWP uses an efforts-to-outcomes (ETO) database to track the youth involved in Opportunity Works. Direct staff at OPP and BHCA enter their data directly into CWP’s system. CWP hosts monthly calls with the providers and offers technical assistance on the data system. They recently held a training with the partners to talk to them about how they can run their own reports from the data system to get information they need. At the time of the visit, CWP had just hired an opportunity youth coordinator to specifically focus on the population of opportunity youth (rather than funding streams). They envision her looking at the data and sending weekly reminders: “That’s prompting [the partners] to do things in more real-time. Having someone keep an eye on the data and communicate back to them helps us get there.”

CWP staff monitor program data monthly to stay informed of the status of recruitment, overall programming, successes and challenges. Data is communicated back to providers electronically and in-person as a way to discuss trends and any necessary changes. In addition, program data is shared with the HYOC to inform strategy discussions.

CWP and OPP worked collaboratively to create a data bridge between the data systems in their two organizations. The data bridge allows OPP staff to enter data directly into the CWP system, but then to transfer it back into their own system in a way that makes sense for service delivery, while CWP can receive the data in a way that makes sense for reporting. The bridge is primarily supported from the OPP side to avoid duplicative entry of their staff and to enable the OPP managers to “determine effective performance management strategies for programs and staff.”

CWP explained that the data requirements for SIF funds are the most comprehensive. "Jobs For the Future asks for so much data that what we’re giving them satisfies the other funders. SIF is the most restricting.” However, now they will have to enter data into multiple systems due to a new federal requirement around reporting of WIOA and sharing data across state agencies. They were preparing to transition all providers to that system. Previously, they had been able to use ETO for all the data entry, but this new system was going to require separate entry for the different funding streams.

Scale and Sustainability

As one leadership interviewee expressed, scale is important but challenging, “We are continuing to figure out how we mold systems to begin to do more of this work. My struggle in particular is that we do good things for the fortunate few. The young people who access our services, we do good things for them. But how do we scale this work?” They are grappling with the challenge through the HOYC.

They are committed to the model and committed to continuing to seek resources. The leadership note that the enthusiasm and support of the current mayor is helpful in sustaining the work. But, as noted before, the current economic and services climate in the state and community is challenging despite interested foundations.

There is a hope among partners that demonstrated success will draw in more funds to continue support for the efforts. They indicate that one challenge to scaling and sustainability is that multiple career
pathways initiatives are occurring at once which makes it difficult to create a united front around one initiative.

In addition, the partners express an interest in expanding on career pathway and college partnership options, "I'd love to bring in more paths to meet the interest of the populations coming through the door." These sentiments are similar to those expressed by the youth.

Lessons

1. **Go for it!** – A charge to other Workforce Investment Boards to think beyond the confines of WIOA in helping opportunity youth to get credentials and seek career pathways.

2. **Be intentional about onboarding partners when engaging in new funding opportunities or programs.** Organizations sometimes become used to their relationships when one contracts with another consistently. It is important to reflect when the contracts are business as usual versus when they may need additional training or explanation. Reflection after a year of Opportunity Works service indicates that more initial training was needed to ensure understanding of the unique parameters and goals of the SIF funding.

3. **Peer learning and support across the cities implementing the programs is an important method for learning new strategies and improving services.**
   a. Convenings and other opportunities to learn across sites are important. They wish more funds were available to support travel of a wider range of staff and partners. Sometimes the same individuals are tasked with going to everything, and they experience some fatigue; whereas others would embrace the opportunity for growth, but cannot attend.

4. **Formal technical assistance by the funding agency is an important part of the process.** It supports ongoing reflection, learning, and improvement.

5. **Supporting youth around education is just one piece of the puzzle.** Youth have many other needs that have been difficult to address in the community. Creating strategic partnerships to address those needs could be helpful.
## Appendix: Hartford Logic Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inputs</th>
<th>Implementation Activities</th>
<th>Bridging Outputs</th>
<th>Bridging Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Staff at Our Piece of the Pie (OPP), Blue Hills Civic Association (BHCA), and Capital Workforce Partners</td>
<td>Functional Activities</td>
<td>Student-Level</td>
<td>Short-Term Outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Grant resources</td>
<td>CWP</td>
<td>• Completed individual Service Strategy</td>
<td>Soft Skills for Success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Matching resources</td>
<td>Quality Assurance</td>
<td>• Status of goals</td>
<td>• Youth can demonstrate career competencies (financial literacy, customer service...8 competencies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Data System ETO</td>
<td>Manage matching funds</td>
<td>• Youth Leadership Activities</td>
<td>• Youth perceive themselves as college bound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• OW Participants</td>
<td>Develop guidance on program policies and procedures (ongoing)</td>
<td>• Youth test into credit bearing courses, if applicable</td>
<td>Access College/Career Coursework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Training partners</td>
<td>Provide training and ongoing technical assistance</td>
<td>85% complete bridging program</td>
<td>• Participants identify career pathway and create individual service strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Secondary education partners</td>
<td>Contract performance management</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Gain work experience and internships in career pathways</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• American Job Center</td>
<td>Develop data and tracking systems</td>
<td></td>
<td>Subject Knowledge Gains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partner Sites</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Gains knowledge in the financial aid process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Regular collection and entry of data</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Gains knowledge in career pathways, associated industries, job positions, requirements, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Recruitment and intake</td>
<td></td>
<td>Support Systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Eligibility determination</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Factors in Life Domain Profile have improved (each factor may have its own scale)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Individual Service Strategy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Supportive services referral</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• All</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Participate in the evaluation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Programmatic Activities</td>
<td>Program-Level</td>
<td>Long/Medium-Term Outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• OPP and BHCA provide or conduct:</td>
<td>• Funding secured</td>
<td>• Participants begin post-secondary training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Recruitment and intake</td>
<td>• Policy Manual created</td>
<td>• Participants complete training programs/college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Individual Service Strategy</td>
<td>• Accurate data to feed reports</td>
<td>• Attain post-secondary credentials and certificates (additional)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Basic skills instruction</td>
<td>• Enrollment numbers met</td>
<td>• Enter career pathway employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Career competency training</td>
<td>• Continuous use of data to inform services</td>
<td>• Self-sufficient (as measured by wages earned, 200% above federal poverty level)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Financial literacy education</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Youth become Youth Leaders and give back to community by informing working moving forward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Tutoring</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Transitional training</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Leadership development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Guidance and counseling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Entrepreneurial skills training</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Work experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Job development and support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Contextual factors: Local labor market, available services (housing, food, transportation, child care, etc.), available trainings, Juvenile Justice System
New Orleans is implementing the postsecondary/career bridging component of the Back on Track Model for their Opportunity Works programming. The Cowen Institute at Tulane University in New Orleans is supporting four main programs through Opportunity Works: the Youth Empowerment Project (YEP), the largest literacy organization in the area; Delgado Community College’s Accelerated Career Education (ACE) program, based on the Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) model; the Earn and Learn program, a paid work experience at Tulane University; and Bard Early College of New Orleans (Bard), liberal arts college classes for youth. Opportunity Works allows for increased capacity in these programs for opportunity youth who enter the system through any partner organization—a “no wrong door” approach. The programs provide case management and pathways to education and employment.

Opportunity Works funds support staff at the Cowen Institute and each of the four programs. These staff members coordinate with each other, work with participants, and fill capacity needs specific to the host program, such as curriculum development, administrative support, coaching, and instruction.

In addition to hiring staff, Opportunity Works enables all of the partner organizations to serve the opportunity youth population better and improve retention rates through Cowen-led professional development and technical assistance opportunities. Program staff members have monthly meetings, led by the Cowen Institute, to participate in learning opportunities, coordinate to improve youth experiences, and discuss data and compliance.

Generally, the programs fall into the postsecondary bridging phase of the Back on Track model. The Opportunity Works enhancements at YEP provide a bridge to postsecondary education through services provided by transition coordinators. YEP participants also benefit from other YEP services, which include High School Equivalency Test (HiSET) completion, work readiness, basic soft skills,
employability skills, and help with opening a bank account, developing a budget, and obtaining official identification. Delgado’s ACE provides postsecondary bridging and industry-based credentials for those who want to pursue high-demand career and technical college courses. The program begins with a non-credit industry-based credentialing semester; the subsequent semesters are for credit. The Opportunity Works enhancement helps the program concentrate resources toward opportunity youth (people ages 16-24 not working or in school). Earn and Learn provides an opportunity for paid work experience and on-the-job skills training linked to postsecondary education, mostly for those who have earned their high school diploma or high school equivalency (HSE). Opportunity Works allows Earn and Learn to serve more youth, doubling in capacity. In addition, Bard Early College teaches an early college liberal arts writing and reading seminar at Earn and Learn and YEP.

The New Orleans Opportunity Works model is to have a set of pathways that exist along a developmental continuum rather than having them in competition with each other. Though there is no one participant pathway, young people can participate in multiple of the partner programs based on their readiness and need. YEP is often the point of entry, and then the young person might take a Bard class, be referred to ACE or Earn and Learn, or engage in any combination of the programs. Any enrollee across the four programs works with a navigator or coach, participating in streamlined case management.

Beyond the Opportunity Works funding, each of the partner organizations receives funding from a variety of public and philanthropic sources. Baptist Community Ministries (BCM), a local foundation supporting the greater New Orleans region, provided financial support for the Social Innovation Fund (SIF) match. Cowen also receives funding to support opportunity youth from the Aspen Institute’s Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund, the Kellogg Foundation, and the JPMorgan Chase Foundation.

All of the organizations are part of the Employment and Mobility Pathways Linked for Opportunity Youth (EMPLOY) collaborative, which is the larger 35-organization collective impact effort in the New Orleans region focused on opportunity youth. In addition, the partner organizations each have relationships with other service providers and organizations throughout the city.

Context

According to recent research from the Cowen Institute, there were 6,820 opportunity youth in New Orleans in 2014, accounting for 14.5 percent of all 16- to 24-year-olds. These young people generally live in unstable economic conditions and are more likely to be black, male, older, parenting, and have a disability than all 16- to 24-year-olds in Orleans Parish. While opportunity youth had lower educational attainment than other 16 to 24 year-olds, 64 percent had a high school credential, and 20

---


2 Louisiana is divided into 64 parishes, which are equivalent to counties in other states.
percent had some college experience. Approximately 50 percent of opportunity youth received benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program in the previous year, compared with 25 percent of all 16- to 24-year-olds in Orleans Parish.

Transportation is a significant barrier to accessing services and obtaining employment according to several staff members. For example, program staff noted that it takes over an hour to get from Tulane University (the location of Earn and Learn classes and job sites) to Delgado’s campus (the location of ACE programming). The level of crime in New Orleans is relatively high compared with other cities, and program staff noted that many youth in the city have been “exposed to, potentially engaged with, or even victims of crime.” Interviewees also noted that homelessness is a challenge for many opportunity youth.

The school system is made up primarily of charter schools. Ninety-three percent of public school students attended charter public schools in the 2014–15 school year, the highest proportion in the nation. Two interviewees suggested that the public schools are not addressing the needs of young people at risk of disconnection. Historically, workforce and career pathways opportunities have traditionally served youth with fewer barriers, rather than youth who are experiencing disconnection.

In November of 2016, the unemployment rate in the New Orleans-Metairie-Kenner metropolitan region was 5.0 percent, slightly higher than the national rate of 4.6 percent. The largest employment sectors in the city in 2014 were education and health services, leisure and hospitality, and professional and business services.

One of the positive contextual factors in New Orleans is the alignment among service providers that serve opportunity youth. The Opportunity Youth Data Sharing Council (OYDSC) is collaborating on a common database to coordinate services more effectively and demonstrate impact at a community level. Staff noted that there is cooperation and trust among these organizations and a belief that they are operating together to make a stronger safety net.

**Partners**

**Backbone: Cowen Institute**

The backbone organization is the Cowen Institute at Tulane University, a “think and do tank” based in a private nonprofit university, with the mission to advance public education and youth success in New Orleans.

---

Orleans and beyond. The Cowen Institute was founded in 2007 during the recovery from Hurricane Katrina with the purpose of tackling questions about school governance, financing, and facilities. Now, the 18-staff-member organization does policy research and provides direct services through a college and career readiness program, Upward Bound (serving 50 students per year), and through the Earn and Learn program (serving between 20 and 30 students per year). The Cowen Institute’s three areas of focus are K through 12 research and advocacy, reconnecting opportunity youth, and college and career success. The Cowen Institute manages and is a part of the EMPLOY collaborative. Being situated within Tulane University has been beneficial to the Cowen Institute in many ways (e.g., for Earn and Learn work placements), but also means that they are part of a large bureaucracy that can make it difficult to implement changes nimbly.

**Programming Partner: Youth Empowerment Project**

YEP is a citywide provider of education, mentoring, and employment readiness services for underserved young people that was founded in 2004. YEP has various programs and satellite locations to meet participant needs. Originally, the organization was focused on reintegration of youth with criminal justice involvement, but their work has expanded to include 4 areas: community-based intervention, reintegration, mentoring, and prevention. YEP operates 11 programs across 7 sites and 2 parishes (Orleans and St. Charles). Specific programs include services for people with justice system involvement, basic employability skills training, training in work environments (bike shop, food vendor, and graphic design shop), adult education classes, “the village” (classes that are separated by gender, literacy, and life skills), and advocacy services to help enrollees succeed. YEP emphasizes individual services and helping youth who face the most barriers and are the most disconnected. YEP focused on opportunity youth long before the term had been coined. Currently, YEP serves about 1,000 young people per year and has over 40 staff members. The majority of the people YEP serves are opportunity youth, ages 16 to 24, though they serve children as young as 7 years old.

**Programming Partner: ACE Program at Delgado Community College**

Delgado Community College is one of the oldest community colleges in the state and part of the Louisiana Community and Technical College System. Delgado has several locations in the New Orleans metropolitan area; its main campus, City Park Campus, is located in the Navarre neighborhood of New Orleans. Delgado is the second largest college in the state, serving over 30,000 students. The Adult Education department at Delgado served over 4,000 students in 2015. A relatively small proportion of that group is in the 16 to 24 age range. In recent years, Delgado has never had programming specifically dedicated to young people; it has been mixed into the large programs.

The ACE program at Delgado integrates basic skills with career and technical instruction and offers certification and for-credit classes. It is considered a bridging program in that it helps students ages 16 and older who need basic skills training earn credits and credentials before entering Delgado’s main programs and sometimes before they have completed their high school credentials. This type of bridging program was originally housed in Delgado’s Adult Education department. When Delgado
received grants from Accelerating Opportunity (AO) and the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College Career Training (TAACCCT) program, ACE became its own program separate from Adult Education. During this period of time, ACE joined New Orleans Opportunity Works. After the AO and TAACCCT funding ended, ACE was folded back into Adult Education to enhance financial sustainability. This shift, which occurred in spring 2016, has resulted in staff and financing changes. ACE is now under the leadership of Adult Education. Without grant funding from AO and TAACCCT, ACE participants must obtain financial aid after the first semester of the program in order to continue participating, whereas the program used to be entirely free. These changes have caused some challenges, which are described below.

**Programming Partner: Earn and Learn Career Pathways Program**

Earn and Learn is an apprenticeship program run out of the Cowen Institute at Tulane University. The program was founded in 2014 as a way to connect opportunity youth to career pathways in high-growth, high-wage industries. Currently, the yearlong program serves cohorts of about 20 to 30 participants. The program involves a paid work experience at Tulane University, as well as classes two days per week: a Bard class on Wednesdays and an Apprentice Academy—professionalism and soft skills training—on Fridays.

**Programming Partner: Bard Early College of New Orleans**

Bard Early College of New Orleans is associated with Bard College, a liberal arts college in New York. Bard offers immersive, credit-bearing liberal arts college courses to juniors and seniors in high schools throughout New Orleans. Before the Opportunity Works grant, Bard had started offering its seminars within YEP, modified to serve out-of-school opportunity youth. For Opportunity Works, Bard is continuing to offer courses at YEP and has also partnered with Earn and Learn to offer courses to the apprentices. Bard is using the relationships with YEP and Earn and Learn to adapt their model to alternative settings that work for opportunity youth. They are writing a “playbook” that includes lessons on effective pedagogy for this population based on the first year of working with opportunity youth.

**Other Organizations**

There are other organizations peripherally involved in New Orleans Opportunity Works, including the other organizations in the EMPLOY collaborative and OYDSC, who act as referral partners.

EMPLOY is cross-sector collaborative of 35 organizations working to reconnect opportunity youth in New Orleans. It is part of the Aspen Institute’s Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund. The collaborative has three areas of work: 1) a data sharing pilot, 2) a career pathways initiative, and 3) policy advocacy.

OYDSC is the council of organizations participating in EMPLOY’s data sharing pilot. Currently, 10 organizations are members of the council. OYDSC members use a custom-built, shared data system
using Efforts to Outcomes (ETO) to streamline referrals and other processes and maximize data sharing between organizations serving the same target population.

BCM is a local foundation that has been involved with New Orleans Opportunity Works since the beginning of the effort. BCM funded the original proposal development, provided the entire funding match in year one, and provided part of the funding match in year two. BCM is part of the EMPLOY collaborative and funded the ETO system for the OYDSC.

In addition, Opportunity Works participants may be referred to other organizations in the city for support services, such as the Children’s Bureau or Covenant House.

**Nature of Partnerships**

The partner organizations have cooperative relationships that are facilitated through monthly meetings at the Cowen Institute. The meetings are a hybrid between learning community meetings and partnership development meetings. So far, the meetings have focused on the Back on Track model, structural challenges, and retention and engagement. These discussions have focused more on the procedural level and less on professional development. Instructors and coaches always attend the meetings, and often administrators or program leads will attend as well. There is a fair amount of overlap in terms of the students that these organizations serve, so these meetings allow the partners to discuss challenges and find solutions to better serve the youth. The meetings are also used to learn about and implement tools that can help with service delivery, including:

- the Youth Program Quality Initiative—a framework to help with student engagement and retention used by YEP, Earn and Learn, and Bard,
- a career readiness assessment and framework from MHA Labs—used to establish a common language for soft skills across the partners,
- Early Warning Indicators—a system of indicators and interventions that is aimed to improve retention for students at risk of dropping out, currently used by Earn and Learn, and
- Headed To—a career assessment and exploration tool paired with financial literacy that is funded by EMPLOY and used by YEP and Earn and Learn.

The Cowen Institute also has individual meetings with each of the partners monthly. Staff at the partner organizations noted that the Cowen Institute staff is helpful and available to answer questions or meet as needed. Coaches at YEP, ACE, and Earn and Learn also communicate as needed to discuss their shared students.

The Cowen Institute, YEP, Delgado, and Bard all have data-sharing agreements with BCM, which owns the license agreement with for the ETO database of the OYDSC. Earn and Learn is part of the Cowen Institute, so it does not have a separate data-sharing agreement.

Some challenges in partnerships have arisen. For example, given the organizational and staffing changes at ACE, the amount of collaboration and communication between ACE and the other partners
has been less than anticipated. However, there are plans to strengthen these partnerships over the coming year.

**Program Design**

**Difference from Existing Programming**

The programming has largely remained similar within all programs, with a few exceptions. The program now has:

- Added navigation and coaching support at YEP, ACE, and Earn and Learn, focused primarily on postsecondary and career options but also individualized to students’ needs.
- Added capacity for Earn and Learn and Bard. At Earn and Learn, the cohort size doubled and staff implemented lessons learned from the first year. For Bard, Opportunity Works pays for instruction and some of the administrative costs for the classes at YEP and Earn and Learn. Previously, Bard was only offered at YEP but not at Earn and Learn.
- Added capacity to the transitions services at YEP to build it out to be its own program within YEP, with academic components and a cohort model. Whereas postsecondary and career-transition services used to be separate, now they are housed under one single program, with two staff members partially funded by Opportunity Works.
- More emphasis on serving the unique needs of opportunity youth at ACE through dedicated coaches and Bard through modified pedagogy.
- Enhancements to the programs to focus more purposefully on the opportunity youth population based on professional development from the learning community meetings.
- More streamlined experience for youth participating in more than one of the partner programs (e.g. resolved scheduling conflicts, joint orientation sessions, and communication between case managers).

A lot of the program activities already fit within the Back on Track model; however, Opportunity Works has led to more capacity, collaboration, and focus on opportunity youth. Opportunity Works has increased the level of coordination and communication between organizations serving opportunity youth and has bolstered their focus on the specific needs of that population. The monthly meetings have enabled professional development opportunities, where partners learn about tools to better serve their youth. Opportunity Works has also facilitated referrals between the partner organizations. In addition, the programs have worked together to improve experiences for youth who participate in multiple programs by making scheduling accommodations. Opportunity Works has provided more capacity to the organizations by funding navigator positions and funding the Bard classes. Although coaching may have existed without Opportunity Works, they might not have been able to serve as many students. Without Opportunity Works, ACE would not have had much of a focus on the needs of opportunity youth.

Most staff believe the programs and services would be the same without Opportunity Works but with less collaboration and with different programmatic approaches. Overall, Opportunity Works has
helped to fill a gap in postsecondary bridging for opportunity youth by strengthening and aligning programs.

Opportunity Works can be distinguished from the larger collective impact efforts (the EMPLOY collaborative, which works to address youth disconnection) in that it places more emphasis on postsecondary and career bridging, and because EMPLOY is not a service-providing entity but a collection of service-providing partners. The Opportunity Works partners collaborate closely in coordinating services along a developmental continuum.

**Back on Track**

The Back on Track model is similar to the structure of existing services in the partnership.

ACE leadership noted that they are not sure what they are supposed to be doing differently with Back on Track; it appeared to be a model they were already using just with a focus on the opportunity youth demographic. They already had infrastructure set up to support the needs of adult learners, who also face a lot of barriers similar to opportunity youth. They have found, though, that opportunity youth tend to need more coaching for a longer period of time than older adults.

Some YEP staff noted that the model was not clear to them initially, but when they understood it better, they thought that it was innovative to have postsecondary bridging as a focal point. One of the staff members liked that the model does not overemphasize four-year education as the only valid postsecondary option. Other YEP staff appreciated the emphasis on out-of-school youth as an opportunity to promote equity, since they often receive fewer resources. YEP leadership noted that a lot of youth are not yet ready for postsecondary bridging. That same interviewee said that the model makes sense in theory, but in reality, it takes a lot of work to prepare the young people for bridging. He noted that getting on a career pathway can be very ambitious and may not work for all young people. Therefore, in his view, it is important to meet youth where they are and find other ways of measuring success for those who are starting from different places.

The Earn and Learn staff said that they view the model positively and particularly appreciate having all of the partners under the same umbrella because it has enhanced communication and coordination among the partners serving the same youth.

The Cowen Institute, as the backbone organization, works to make sure that the model is understood and implemented by the partners in compliance with the grant requirements. Cowen Institute leadership described the model as helpful for developing a common language and having alignment and a shared vision across the partners in the system.

**Goals**

At YEP, the short-term goals for youth are for them to be stabilized and connected to opportunities to re-engage with either work or school. The intermediate goals are to engage them in a career path
through postsecondary training or employment that is a good fit and in which they will persist. The long-term goal is for the young people to be positively contributing members of the community.

For ACE, the goals for students are academic. They want their students to pass out of developmental education and into college-level courses, hopefully without having to pay the college for developmental coursework. They want the students to select a program that has career interest for them and, in the long term, complete their education and obtain employment in that area.

For Earn and Learn, the goal is for students to start on a demand-driven career pathway and have the opportunity to learn on the job and in a classroom environment while also having a paid work experience.

For Bard, the goal is for students to have exposure to a liberal arts college environment and see that a four-year or liberal arts education is available to them, and they are capable of succeeding in it, if they choose to. Even if they decide not to pursue a liberal arts degree, the goal is that they learn to think critically and express themselves in writing based on their exposure to the readings and discussions in the seminars, that they earn some college credit for free, and that they build some self-confidence.

Development Process

The Cowen Institute became aware of the Opportunity Works grant through their involvement in the Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund. The Cowen Institute was developing a collective impact model through EMPLOY and wanted funding to apply that work to direct services and programs in the community. The Cowen Institute identified a gap in service offerings in postsecondary and career bridging. Opportunity Works was seen as an opportunity to leverage Jobs for the Futures’ expertise and build the system’s capacity in this area.

As one of the largest providers of HiSET services, and given its longstanding attention to serving opportunity youth, YEP was a natural choice for the Opportunity Works partnership, according to Cowen leadership. In particular, this grant was seen as an opportunity to build out the transition services at YEP for students nearing the end of their HiSET. YEP leadership was very involved in writing the grant application. Delgado was chosen because it is the most centrally located community college in the city and because of its existing bridging work through the ACE program. Earn and Learn was one of the only providers of job training for high-growth careers for opportunity youth, and the Cowen Institute wanted to continue to build the Earn and Learn model. Bard was the last partner to join, five months after the grant was written. Bard was trying to build their model to serve nontraditional students, and the Cowen Institute saw their work as an opportunity to help with the reading and writing deficits young people were facing. Bard was also seen as a promising contributor to the partnership as they could embed credit-bearing coursework within the supportive contexts of YEP and Earn and Learn. Although Cowen considered some other partners, these were the ones that were most aligned with the grant.
One of the unique aspects of New Orleans Opportunity Works is the number of distinct partners and potential pathways for young people. One member of the leadership said that this is just how it is in New Orleans—everything is decentralized and fragmented, so it makes sense to have all of these partners that are providing different services and better connect them to each other.

**CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT**

The curricula for students are designed by each of the partners, mostly separately. YEP has had its HiSET programming in place for a long time. The transition services team at YEP is developing trainings and workshops related to job readiness and college prep. For ACE, the curricula were designed to be taught through integrated and contextualized instruction. At Earn and Learn, there is an Apprentice Academy that includes instruction in professionalism and soft skills. The curricula are designed by Earn and Learn staff and external partners that are brought in for the academy. The Bard curriculum and pedagogy are based on the approach that the organization uses for its other classes at high schools with some refinements based on the needs of opportunity youth. The model is based on liberal arts college courses.

**CHANGES OVER TIME**

Since the grant was awarded, there have been a number of refinements through implementation.

The other external grants that had supported the ACE program ended, so the program was moved into Adult Education, and the financing requirements changed. In the second semester, students now need to qualify for Ability to Benefit, obtain federal financial aid, or pay out-of-pocket for program tuition. This means that the students need financial support sooner than expected to participate. The program is still adjusting to this new context.

At YEP, the main refinement through implementation has been moving more towards a cohort model for the transition services by offering classes and workshops related to postsecondary and career readiness to groups of students, in addition to personalized transition services. The transition coordinators now work with cohorts from YEP’s Work and Learn program (paid work experience in graphic design, bike repair, or food service); New Orleans Providing Literacy to All Youth (NOPLAY) (HiSET prep); and the Village program (HiSET prep and wraparound case management).

At Earn and Learn, the staff is planning on making several refinements to the program based on lessons from the past year. They are looking into adding more job-related training and certification opportunities for apprentices. They are also going to require that the next cohort have their high school diploma or HiSET before starting the program. This change came about because Earn and Learn staff found that students without their HiSET tended to have higher rates of attrition from the program or sometimes lost motivation to continue pursuing their HiSET when they started working as apprentices. Earn and Learn experienced some staff transitions and is currently only staffed by two full-time individuals. Earn and Learn will be hiring an on-the-job training supervisor manager to focus on work projects and work-related skill building and a manager of instruction to focus on academic components and partnerships. In addition, Earn and Learn is revamping its onboarding and orientation process to give participants clear expectations at the beginning. Part of this work will involve defining
requirements and graduation criteria more explicitly. Finally, Earn and Learn is planning to remove or replace some of the apprenticeship positions that have been less positive for students (e.g., ones where the apprentices are given too little work).

Bard has also made some changes during the implementation of the grant. For instance, they made the Bard classes optional for Earn and Learn students rather than mandating they participate. This has generated more buy-in from participating students. They also shortened the timeframe of the classes for the YEP students from once a week for eight weeks to twice a week for four weeks (still 16 hours total) in order to help with retention.

One of the refinements across the partners has been figuring out how to better serve students who are in multiple programs. There was a concern that students were being over-served and that students were struggling to meet different, sometimes conflicting, sets of expectations. The partners have met to discuss these challenges and came up with solutions around increased communication, transition points for the students, and coaching. Moving forward, the programs will have joint orientation sessions so that students can hear from all of the programs at once and see that they are coordinating and talking to one another. In addition, each student will have a primary coach if they are working with multiple coaches at different programs. The partners have also thought about how to better sequence the different programs and experiences. For example, it might not make sense to be concurrently enrolled in the Bard liberal arts course while taking a developmental English class at Delgado.

Staffing

Opportunity Works funds support staff members at each organization who coordinate with each other and work with participants. Each staff member fills a capacity need specific to the host program. At Delgado, which reportedly has not seen as much success with opportunity youth as they would like, the grant supports a success coach to help opportunity youth students persist through postsecondary education and address social, community, and contextual barriers. At YEP, the grant supports a portion (50 percent in the first year and somewhat more in the second year) of two positions—an employment services coordinator and a postsecondary transition coordinator—to focus on postsecondary bridging and transition services. These staff members help with postsecondary and career pathways through the completion of high school equivalency and beyond. Earn and Learn has hired a senior program manager (50 percent supported by Opportunity Works) and a college and career counselor (100 percent supported by Opportunity Works). At the Cowen Institute, a full-time staff person was hired to manage Opportunity Works, and a total of 40 percent of another two senior staff members’ time at the Cowen Institute support the management and leadership of the effort, including data collection (25 percent for one and 15 percent for another).

At YEP and Delgado, the Opportunity Works staff were hired from within the organizations. At Earn and Learn, the staff was hired by the Cowen Institute at the beginning of 2016. One Earn and Learn staff member left the organization, and Earn and Learn is looking to hire two new full-time staff
members. Since ACE moved to Adult Education at Delgado, the leadership of the program changed, resulting in some challenges in communication and mission-alignment.

One issue that arose around staffing was the diversity of staff and the ability of students to relate to staff members. In the two focus groups, it was clear that students valued having staff members that they feel comfortable around and that have a similar background to them or at least understand where they come from.

Funding Sources

The Opportunity Works match in New Orleans is from BCM. BCM places a large emphasis on systems change, which has influenced the design of Opportunity Works in New Orleans in terms of focusing more on the partnerships between organizations and less on significant alterations to the individual programs.

YEP, Earn and Learn, ACE, and Bard are supported by various funding sources beyond the Opportunity Works grants.

Less than 25 percent of YEP’s funding comes from public sources; the majority of funding is from philanthropy (both large and small foundations, including Kellogg, JPMorgan Chase, and family foundations), along with some contracts with private entities and individual gifts. YEP has a contract with the city through Criminal District Courts to do adult education programming and a contract with the 29th Judicial Court in St. Charles Parish to do community-based mentoring.

ACE receives its funding from tuition and public sources. The program was previously supported by grants that have since expired.

Bard fundraises every year and receives a grant from the state (Supplementary Course Academy) that is focused on dual enrollment.

Earn and Learn is housed within the Cowen Institute and receives funding and support from them. The Cowen Institute’s funding from the Aspen Institute, JPMorgan Chase, Kellogg, and BCM has been critical for the Opportunity Works project.

Timing

YEP began to count Opportunity Works enrollees in July 2015, and enrolled youth into the evaluation as of September 1, 2015. The program serves students on a rolling admission and individualized service model. The transition coordinators are moving towards enrolling students in cohorts, rather than having all services individualized. The intervention lasts about one year, but the navigator will continue to provide follow-up alumni support after completion. The length of follow up has not yet been defined.

ACE began to count Opportunity Works enrollees with the August 2015 cohort, and enrolled youth into the evaluation as of January 2016. ACE serves students in a cohort basis, aligned with the
The ACE program is usually two or three semesters, but the length varies based on student needs. Students can stay in the program and continue to receive coaching for additional semesters until they test out of developmental courses or feel comfortable navigating the college system on their own. The navigator will continue to provide follow-up alumni support for six months after completion.

Earn and Learn began to count Opportunity Works enrollees with the November 2015 cohort and enrolled all these youth into the evaluation. Earn and Learn serves students on a cohort basis. The program originally followed the academic year. Then, in the second year, the start date was delayed to January 2016 due to staff turnover. The next two cohorts will begin in January 2017 and then again in fall 2017 to resume the academic calendar schedule. Earn and Learn is one year long (two semesters), but the navigator will continue to provide follow-up alumni support for six months after completion.

Within YEP, Bard classes are 16 hours (over either four or eight weeks). Bard has run three classes at YEP, all in 2016. Within Earn and Learn, Bard classes are 16 hours over eight weeks. Bard has run five classes at Earn and Learn, all in 2016.

Participants

Characteristics of Participants

The program data for New Orleans Opportunity Works currently includes 117 students, which covers all students who were at least 18 years old at the time of data collection in June 2016. However, there is a lot of missing data for individual items. According to the available data, 56 percent of enrollees are male, 84 percent are black or African American, and 20 percent have children (the vast majority have custody of their children). Of those who are in the data delivery, the median age is 21. Over half (53 percent) have not yet earned a high school diploma or equivalency and have not taken any college courses. Almost two thirds (64 percent) are unemployed. Of those that are working full- or part-time, the mean wage is $8.37 per hour. Finally, 41 percent have ever been arrested and 13 percent have ever been incarcerated.

According to YEP staff, around 70 percent of the young people they work with self-report income of less than $10,000 and come from significantly impoverished households and parts of the city that are disconnected from essential services and transportation hubs. A lot of their young people have been exposed to, engaged with, or have been victims of crime.

ACE staff noted that the opportunity youth tend to need more handholding and assistance than the older adult students. Youth are also more likely to change their minds about their career interests, which can cause challenges. Some are enthusiastic, while others are less internally motivated.

Earn and Learn staff noted that some students have been involved in the justice system and therefore may be in debt for court fees. Others are in debt from having taken a few college courses. This perpetuates a cycle of poverty for the young people and makes it difficult for them to persist in
the programs. In addition, some youth face challenges related to mental health, learning disabilities, or parenting.

Bard staff said that the youth are often students of color, and many face challenges around homelessness, home instability, and brushes with the justice system. They find that students appreciate the opportunity to do some hard thinking. An instructor shared, “There’s a depth to their thinking and ability of self-expression that doesn’t necessarily get highlighted in the data.” The instructors find that students have much more ability than they are given credit for. Students are also very persistent in terms of coming back and trying again if they don’t pass the first time. Students are able to engage more if they have supports in place like child care, food, and transportation.

Target Population

As part of Opportunity Works, New Orleans is targeting any youth age 16 to 24 not connected to meaningful employment or school. However, Earn and Learn can only enroll participants who are at least 18 years old (ACE and YEP can serve participants as young as 16). The Opportunity Works team is currently focused on helping whichever youth come through the doors; they are not focused on a particular subpopulation.

Cowen staff reported that there are, overall, about 26,000 opportunity youth in the greater New Orleans metropolitan area, and about 6,820 in the city of New Orleans (2014).

All three programs are aiming to be more intentional about recruiting opportunity youth, even though ACE and YEP serve a broader population. ACE serves older adults and traditional college students, and YEP serves children as young as age 7 as well as adults.

Recruitment and Admission

Rather than being individually selected for Opportunity Works, all participants in ACE and Earn and Learn who are 16 to 24 in the August 2015 cohort were considered Opportunity Works participants. In YEP, Opportunity Works participants are those ages 16 to 24 who work with the Opportunity Works transition coordinators. Students do not opt in to the program, and some may not know that they are actually considered to be Opportunity Works students. Rather, they think of themselves as participants in one or more of the four programs. Only those who are at least 18 are enrolled in the evaluation.

The New Orleans team expected to serve 70 individuals in the first year (enrolled by the end of the 2015 calendar year), including 30 individuals in the first year in enriched preparation and 40 in postsecondary bridging). In fact, they served 157 individuals in the first year: more than twice the target.

All of the partner organizations, except for Bard, recruit for Opportunity Works. YEP is the most common entry point for Opportunity Works participants, since the organization is well-established within the community. ACE recruits through Delgado’s traditional mechanisms, and some outreach to
the K-12 school system but there is no robust, targeted recruitment effort for the opportunity youth population. Earn and Learn receives the majority of its students through referrals and general recruitment, including from high schools. Bard does not recruit for Opportunity Works but rather works with students in YEP and Earn and Learn. In November 2016, the partners implemented a joint information session for interested students, and they plan to continue these sessions going forward.

The partner programs recruit and receive referrals from other partner organizations, especially those on the OYDSC. Referral partner organizations may include soft skills programs, adult literacy programs, job training programs, disconnected youth programs, faith-based organizations, the court system, alternative high schools, and YEP’s in-high-school program. In addition, all programs, but especially YEP, receive strong word-of-mouth referrals. In the first two years, this was by far the primary mode of recruitment, along with information sessions at partner organizations’ orientations. The three organizations also do some outreach through radio, TV, and social media.

At YEP, the participants in Opportunity Works are those that are on the “fast track” for completing HiSET within a year and have an interest in and readiness for pursuing a postsecondary, high-growth career pathway. Students are targeted for participation if they have completed two or three sections of the HiSET; they can begin postsecondary bridging programming by working with the transition coordinators before actually completing the HiSET. Recruitment has not been difficult for the transition program at YEP because YEP serves over 1,000 people per year and has a strong reputation in the community. YEP handles excess demand by referring youth to other programs in the city, such as Job One, a mayoral workforce development initiative funded through workforce funds, or other adult education programs in the state, such as Delgado Community College.  

Opportunity youth interested in Delgado’s ACE program must take the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) test to qualify for admissions. Students must score at least at the fifth- to eighth-grade level, depending on the pathway, in order to be eligible for participation. Students also must complete an application, submit a letter of support from a friend or family member, and participate in an interview. The program is making some adjustments to make it easier for students to take the TABE test and enroll.

Anyone who is at least 18 years old can qualify for Earn and Learn, though there is screening to narrow the applicant pool; there are more applications than slots, though the number of slots has more than doubled with Opportunity Works support. This screening primarily takes the form of a readiness rubric that is an expanded version of the workforce system rubric; this rubric was developed by the EMPLOY collaborative and all of the job readiness organizations in New Orleans use it. For the third year, Earn and Learn will require that students have a high school diploma or pass the HiSET before being admitted to the program. This change in admissions criteria was based on lessons learned in the second year, during which a lot of the students who did not have their HiSET struggled in the program or lost focus on passing the HiSET. Earn and Learn participants have to undergo a background check in order to be able to work at Tulane as apprentices. If they have been convicted of certain types of crimes (e.g., serious drug charge, possession of a firearm, or violent crimes), they will be exited from Earn and Learn and referred back to YEP.
In order to be admitted to the Bard classes at Earn and Learn, students attend an "audition" class to get a sense of what it entails and then can opt into the class. For the Bard summer 2016 class at YEP, students were required to be at an eighth-grade level of reading and writing based on their TABE scores. This TABE benchmark is not an official requirement for the other classes, but classes are oriented to students that are close to completing the HiSET. In general, most students in the Bard classes at Earn and Learn and YEP have not completed their HSE.

Attrition

At the beginning of the Opportunity Works effort, Cowen expected attrition to be 20 percent at Earn and Learn and YEP and 30 percent at ACE. In fact, the attrition rates for the first year of the grant were 23 percent at Earn and Learn, 20 percent at YEP, and 64 percent in ACE. Currently, if there is any contact with a YEP student in the past month, that person is considered retained. However, YEP will be developing a more robust definition of retention.

Attrition primarily occurs due to community, contextual, and family barriers and competing priorities. ACE, for example, has fairly strict attendance policies that some people cannot meet due to external barriers or being dual-enrolled in another Opportunity Works program. The Opportunity Works-supported staff is meant to work with the participants to try to prevent attrition, but ACE does not presently have as strong wraparound services as the other two programs. In addition, the new financial aid obligation has posed challenges for ACE’s retention rates. ACE is working to provide clear information to students about the financial aid requirements to help improve retention rates.

For the current Earn and Learn cohort, the number of students fell from 31 to 21. The students who left mainly did not have their HiSET and/or were facing significant barriers in their personal lives, such as homelessness, parenting, or health issues. The staff tried to retain the students who left through phone calls and home visits.

Programs are supposed to indicate “reason for dismissal” in the data system and any subsequent follow up. There will be further clarification among staff of the protocols for dropout and follow up. Anyone who enrolls in another program that is part of the EMPLOY collaborative would be tracked in the data system.

YEP, Earn and Learn, and Bard are currently implementing the Youth Program Quality Initiative, a framework to improve student engagement and retention. ACE may implement the framework in future years. Earn and Learn is also adapting Early Warning Indicators research to identify and intervene when students are at risk of dropping out.
Program Experience

Education and Training Programming

All four of the partner organizations provide education and training. Bard teaches courses for students at YEP and Earn and Learn. YEP also provides HiSET classes and career training. Earn and Learn provides life skills training through its Apprentice Academy on Fridays. ACE provides training for industry-recognized credentials and offers traditional community college courses. There is no unified pathway for Opportunity Works youth; instead it is the overlap among programs and the additional support provided by Cowen that defines the Opportunity Works intervention. This section describes the experience of opportunity youth at each partner program.

YEP

The Cowen Institute encouraged creating a distinct transition program with a cohort model at YEP in order to be able to provide a training component to the transition services, such as resume workshops and success skills classes with defined cohorts of students. YEP staff is still in the process of transitioning to this model while maintaining the ability to offer individualized services to meet different needs. They say this has been challenging and has required creativity to balance.

YEP has 11 different programs, one of which is the Postsecondary and Employment Transition Services program (also known as the transition program), which is staffed by the two transition coordinators funded by Opportunity Works. Opportunity Works participants are those who have completed or are close to completing their HiSET and are interested in further education or employment. These participants work with the transition coordinators, who help them get into postsecondary education, jobs, or both, depending on the individual student. When they start working with the transition coordinators, each young person develops an individualized service plan that is part of ETO and involves goal exploration and goal setting. The transition program involves services like resume workshops, interview prep, college exploration, and financial aid assistance, along with individualized services and referrals to internships, full-time employment, or postsecondary opportunities (including Earn and Learn and ACE). The program is moving towards becoming more of a cohort model rather than just individualized services. The Opportunity Works transition program is also starting to serve cohorts from some of YEP’s other programs, including Work and Learn, the Village, and NOPLAY. Work and Learn is paid work experience in bike repair, graphic design, or food service, and has six-week long cohorts of 8 to 10 students. The Village is General Education Diploma/HiSET prep and wraparound case management. Students in the Village program also take a Bard class onsite at YEP that is supported by Opportunity Works. The transition team works with the Village cohorts that take the Bard class to offer “success skills” training, such as college exploration, study skills, and time management. Finally, the transition coordinators work with students in NOPLAY, which is another HiSET prep program, when students have completed or nearly completed their HiSET.
Completion for YEP’s Opportunity Works students occurs when they leave YEP to pursue an employment or postsecondary opportunity. However, participants may continue to work with the transition coordinators after this placement.

EARN AND LEARN
Earn and Learn provides an opportunity for paid work experience and on-the-job skills training linked to education. The paid work experience is an apprenticeship at Tulane University, either with the information technology department or with the facilities and maintenance department. Participants work up to 17 hours per week. (They are not allowed to work more because otherwise they would have to be counted as full-time employees eligible for benefits.) The other part of the program is classroom learning. On Wednesdays, students participate in a Bard class at the Cowen Institute. On Fridays, Earn and Learn participants go to Apprentice Academy, which is focused on soft skills and professionalism development, and includes topics like career preparation, coping skills, personal identity, and mental health. Apprentice Academy also includes smaller group learning, personalized support, study time, and office hours with staff. Earn and Learn organizes job shadowing opportunities and information sessions with representatives from different industries.

Earn and Learn has experienced some challenges because it is still relatively new and has had a lot of staff turnover. The staff intends to make changes for the next cohort (entering January 2017) to improve student experiences. For example, the program will only accept students who already have their high school credential, and students will not be required to take the Bard class if they do not want to. The staff also want to improve the Apprentice Academy so that it is more focused on skills related to the participants’ work placements. In addition, Earn and Learn is still defining success. Right now, it is not clear to students what they need to do in order to succeed besides staying in the program for the full year. Transportation has also been a challenge for participants since Earn and Learn does not have a dedicated space for the Apprentice Academy. In 2016, the Apprentice Academy was held in 20 different spaces, which has made it extremely challenging to plan curricula and provide services.

DELGADO ACE
The ACE program is two semesters or longer. The first semester involves obtaining an industry-based certification in health care, technical trades, culinary arts/hospitality, or information technology. Students are enrolled into one of those pathways upon entering the program. The first semester is not for credit but is mapped to for-credit courses at the college. In the second semester they can use a prior learning assessment to award credit for the first semester without charging tuition and at a lower risk to the student. (The one exception is health care, where the students have to start in for-credit classes.) Staff describe this first semester as the “on-ramp to the on-ramp.” In subsequent semesters, students become formally enrolled students in the college but still receive basic skills instruction integrated with technical training in their chosen pathway to help them prepare for traditional college courses. The first semester is free, but then students have to cover the cost of tuition through financial aid or other sources in the subsequent semesters. Students must remain dually enrolled in Adult Education until they get their high school equivalency, and most are encouraged to stay in Adult
Education until they have demonstrated college readiness so that they bypass developmental education classes. Through ACE, students also take two college prep courses, College 101 and College 102, to equip them with the skills needed to transition.

Originally, the Cowen planners intended for SIF funds to support a bridge program at Delgado for students who do not score high enough on the TABE to qualify for the ACE program. After the first year, plans for a bridging component within ACE were still being clarified, but students who scored too low to enter ACE were referred to YEP for bridging services.

BARD EARLY COLLEGE
Bard classes are offered through YEP and Earn and Learn for free. These are liberal-arts-style seminars focused on reading and writing. Each session includes some in-class reading, writing, textual analysis, and discussion. Topics of the courses include “what is privacy?” and “what is beauty?” Participants can earn up to one credit for passing each Bard class. The class includes essays, a midterm assignment, and a final project. The goal is for Opportunity Works students to take three seminars and earn three credits in a year, the equivalent of a college course. Students must get a grade of 70 percent in order to pass the course and earn college credit.

Support Services
Students in Opportunity Works can leverage the support services provided by each organization. YEP offers a wide range of wraparound support services through its 11 programs that are individualized for the participants, including stipends, help with food, transportation, and housing, and mental health services. The transition coordinators provide some of the support services themselves or refer youth to other organizations to meet their needs. For example, youth might be referred to the Children’s Bureau for a mental health assessment and mental health services as needed.

ACE also provides limited support services, such as helping with study habits, time management, transportation, and personal challenges, mainly through the opportunity youth coach funded by Opportunity Works. ACE coaches will refer students to services like food assistance or Medicaid, as well, if the student comes to them with a financial issue or other personal issue.

Earn and Learn provides support services primarily through its college and career counselor and referrals. The counselor provides life coaching and helps students address issues in their personal lives. The counselor also helps with resumes, cover letters, personal statements, and accessing federal financial aid. Earn and Learn partners with local service providers to get participants access to group counseling, Medicaid, and food assistance. Staff noted that there is some stigma involved in receiving mental health services, so it has been helpful to bring counselors to the program rather than referring students out to external providers.

In general, the staff are concerned that young people are not receiving adequate services for mental health or learning disabilities. Another challenge for students is being in debt, either from having taken college classes or from being involved in the justice system.
Participant Path through the Program

Once participants enter the program, they work with the navigators to develop an individual success plan, though that may occur immediately in some cases and after participation in some activities for others. The individual success plans focus on educational and career advancement goals. The development of the individual success plan has been piloted at Earn and Learn. YEP is developing individual success plans based on Earn and Learn’s model with some modifications. Although ACE does not have the same kind of individual success plans in place, the coaches work with the students to write down their goals and develop a plan for achieving them, as well as think about transportation, responsibilities at home, employment, and how to make sure they’ll be successful in ACE.

Opportunity Works participants then engage in activities at YEP, Earn and Learn, or Delgado in alignment with their needs and readiness. The navigators support them as they make progress in their programming. They may then move into programming at one of the other organizations or into other education or employment opportunities. Some participants are engaged in multiple of the Opportunity Works programs at a time. One illustrative pathway is to start at YEP with HiSET instruction and, perhaps, a Bard class. Upon nearing completion of the HiSET, the student might be referred to either Earn and Learn, ACE, or both. While at Earn and Learn, the student might take another Bard class. Upon completing a year with Earn and Learn, the student might continue at ACE and then enroll in regular Delgado classes. Many participants only participate in one or two of the programs rather than all three.

Participants’ Perspectives

Two student focus groups informed the research in New Orleans, one at YEP and one at Earn and Learn. The Earn and Learn focus group was limited to young men of color.

Participants in both focus groups were mostly very engaged and had insightful comments and suggestions about the programs, reflecting a range of experiences and opinions. They described a variety of barriers they had faced: they "come from all types of backgrounds," some from "broken homes." A few of them said that they have been victims of violence or have family members or friends who have been victims. Some described having negative experiences in high schools due to factors like the large class sizes and inexperienced or uncaring teachers. Some have challenges with transportation or child care. Due to financial need, participants say that they need to be working in order to attend school. Participants were very motivated about educational and career-related goals.

YEP FOCUS GROUP

The YEP focus group revealed that students were extremely enthusiastic about the program, overall. Many of the youth felt that the program is helping them. One participant stated, "It’s a program that's going to help you grow and build and be successful as far as getting your education, staying positive, and changing." They compared it to the negative experiences they had had in high school, with uncaring or inexperienced teachers. At YEP, they get more individualized attention and feel more motivated. In particular, they loved the staff members and described them as supportive, genuinely
caring, attentive, available, and respectful. Another participant said, "People genuinely want to help you. They really do care about you. They really do check on you. I was away for a [while] but they still kept in touch with me, and I can call them if I need them." Youth described a sense of cohesion and peer support among the group and said the program was like "a big family."

In terms of programming, some students like the opportunities for vocational training in trades. Others mentioned enjoying the field trips. A couple of people mentioned the Bard class and described it as "cool" or personally moving.

Youth were appreciative of the range of support services, including transportation assistance, stipends, food, uniforms, and supplies. While some have faced barriers that have made it difficult to participate, most agree that if someone is motivated to participate, they will find a way. One shared, "It’s a mind and will thing. If you don’t want to come in and better yourself, you’re not going to come. If you want to better yourself, you’ll find a way. Most of us find a way to come. They were paying us, so that was a motivation too." A few youth are involved in other programs as part of Opportunity Works. They have not experienced conflicts because "the staff communicate with each other" to make sure it works for them. Overall, they think the program is "wonderful" and wish that it could be expanded to serve more people.

In the focus group at YEP, participants talked about different goals, like pursuing a trade and having a "career for life." Some participants felt motivated to complete the GED or HiSET. Several of them are interested in four-year colleges and universities. Some participants’ goals have shifted or expanded. For example, some students did not think they would go to college, but now they want to. For others, their goals are the same, but they feel more motivated. One stated, "My goals haven't changed but they just helped me, they just pushed me and changed me to strive and go after my goals harder than I was doing."

Suggestions included having a bigger building, having more locations, increasing salaries for staff, and serving children starting at a younger age. In particular, the group agreed that there should be more advertising and promotion of the program so that more people know about it. Most students found out about the program through word of mouth or through the internet. Other suggestions included having the higher-up staff get to know the students more and offering more workshops.

EARN AND LEARN FOCUS GROUP
At the Earn and Learn focus group, participants shared some mixed impressions of the program and had several suggestions for improvements. Students described the program as a form of career development and an opportunity to get training and exposure to a real job. A participant explained, "I would describe it as an opportunity, because not only are we getting training but we’re also getting the taste of what a regular job, as in a career, would be like. We’re getting the full hands-on [experience]." They thought it was a good way to figure out their goals and get their foot in the door for a professional career. Many were referred to the program. Some had previously been in or were concurrently enrolled in other programs. In general, they think the program is better suited to young
people right out of high school who do not have a clear sense of what they want to do and less suited to people who have clear goals.

Students had mixed feelings about the classroom components (the Bard class and the Apprentice Academy). Some students liked the Bard class, especially the ability to earn credit, while others did not find it useful. Students found certain parts of the Apprentice Academy more beneficial than others; some described it as “unnecessary” or a “waste of time.”

Most people said the thing they liked best about the program was the hands-on work experience. Some students had very positive experiences with their jobs. However, some students were frustrated that they were not working in the field they had expressed interest in. Some people also noted that they do not do a lot of actual work while they’re on the job. In addition, some students did not like how rigid the schedules were. For example, it could be difficult to reschedule work time, and the clocking-in system meant that some students had little or no time for a lunch break. Many students wanted to be able to work more hours per week.

Several students felt that the program did not turn out to be what they expected when they enrolled. Students also expressed some confusion about programming decisions that seemed illogical. For example, they did not understand why the classes were taught by Bard rather than Tulane, even though the program is located at Tulane. They also did not understand the purpose of parts of the Apprentice Academy. They perceived that a lot of these decisions were “because of grant money” or “for a grant.”

Students felt like some of the staff members were caring, but did not have close relationships with other staff members. Focus group participants noted that they motivated and supported each other.

In the Earn and Learn focus group, participants expressed both education- and employment-related goals. For example, they described goals such as owning a business, working a permanent job that pays well, going to school, or earning a degree. They reported that some goals have changed or been shaped by the Earn and Learn program.

The focus group had several recommendations. They suggested getting rid of the Apprentice Academy, making it optional, or changing it to be more focused on things like business or entrepreneurship. They also wanted to have more training related to their jobs and career goals. Another suggestion was to set up partnerships with employers so that they can get a job at the end of the program. They also wanted to be able to work more hours and were frustrated by the current 17-hour limit. The participants also suggested hiring more staff members to whom they can more easily relate. One person said, “I feel like next year we should be working with people more relatable to us in being from New Orleans and young and being black because they would know how we feel.” Another agreed and wanted the staff to include, “people that can relate to you... black American males that have been through hell and high water.”
Data

Opportunity Works supports the continued development of a shared data system for the OYDSC that currently includes 10 member organizations, including the main Opportunity Works partners, which are all part of the larger EMPLOY collaborative. Cowen Institute staff anticipate that up to 5 other organizations from EMPLOY will participate in the shared data system, which is the primary data repository for the Opportunity Works effort.

New Orleans did not have codified systems to reach young people previously, so there was room to build data capacity. They have been working on implementing a shared data system for all opportunity youth service providers in the city. The data system is based in ETO, and it tracks individuals enrolled in programs that are part of the OYDSC. This is intended to allow for appropriate referrals based on student need and interest. It also allows the New Orleans team to track students who entered Opportunity Works as they participate in two or three of the available pathways. As of June 2016, all participants were entered into ETO, but the program partners were using the system to varying degrees. Programs were expected to input more information in summer 2016. Over time, as more data are entered, program staff can use the data to inform programming decisions and demonstrate impact at a community level. In addition, the Cowen Institute is hiring a staff person to build data capacity. Currently, the data are not yet being used extensively for strategizing among the programs.

Most organizations do not have solid case management systems and do not have performance management systems, so the Cowen Institute is helping with capacity building. The goal is to be able to provide information on the opportunity youth population, how they get connected, the touch points, and other critical measures. So far, organizations have made progress inputting data about participants into the system, but more information needs to be added. The Cowen Institute is continuing to train and orient staff to the system. They have created cheat sheets and guidance about using the shared system. Partners need different levels of support in transitioning to use the system.

YEP has been using ETO for a long time. They use the data to measure impact and assess how the programming is going. Currently, they are using ETO Connect to integrate their own data system into the new shared system.

Currently, the partners are in the process of developing a common intake form that will feed into ETO. They are also working to streamline the touch points so that youth do not have to provide more information than what is necessary to serve them.

Scale and Sustainability

The programs may expand and grow throughout the intervention, but the trajectory of this growth is uncertain. All of the programs are still being refined and may change in subsequent years.
The YEP transition program is expected to continue and hopefully grow after the grant. Ideally, the transition team would like to have an additional staff person to be able to split up the coordination and direct service work. Transitioning to a cohort model at YEP has been challenging because the organization traditionally has offered very individualized services.

ACE is still adjusting to the changes since it was moved into the Adult Education department at Delgado. It has taken some time to get the programs in alignment and to generate buy-in among the administrators who inherited the grant well after it began. It took several conversations and meetings between the Cowen Institute and ACE to get everyone on the same page.

Earn and Learn may begin to work with other employers besides Tulane. For Earn and Learn, they are still determining what it means to be a full participant of the program and to complete the program.

When the grant ends, Bard would like to continue the work, at least with YEP. They would like to see Tulane and other colleges and universities offer similar programming.

The Cowen Institute is committed to carrying the work forward with the four partners, and hopefully expanding the learning community for professional development and sharing best practices. The Cowen Institute is deepening its relationship with the city and may be able to tap into other public funding sources, such as workforce funds, in the future.

Lessons

One of the challenges and lessons learned has been making sure the multiple tracks work for the young people. In the first year, the New Orleans team found that it was challenging for youth to be in multiple programs. Defining the pathways and various on- and off-ramps for youth more clearly, adjusting the sequencing of programming, and making sure each young person has a primary case manager may help with this issue. For Earn and Learn, it is required that youth be dual-enrolled in an educational program (the “learn” to the “earn”), but otherwise there’s no expectation that the young person be enrolled in multiple programs. The New Orleans team is focused, instead, on making sure the processes are in place for a student to be successful in multiple programs if that makes sense for the individual.

Having strong communication between partners is an important, related lesson. There has not been much communication between Delgado and Bard, even though they are both postsecondary institutions. For example, it is not clear whether Bard credits can transfer to Delgado or not. Delgado has not been involved in developing the instructional playbook, either, though there are plans for the two institutions to communicate and learn from each other more in the next year. Communication between Delgado and Earn and Learn was also a challenge due to the reorganization of ACE. This sometimes made it difficult to resolve issues for students.
It is also important to get consensus from the group early on. It took a long time to get to professional development in the monthly meetings because it took so long to gain consensus about the Back on Track model and to build buy-in, alignment, and accountability. It was also difficult because the model itself was shifting and continues to shift. Having clearer guidance from the funder earlier on would have been helpful.

There have also been lessons around pedagogy for opportunity youth and how to improve students’ experiences in the program. For example, at ACE, it has been important to identify the necessary college success skills and help students develop them early on. Bard is recording their lessons learned in their playbook to encourage replication of the model. YEP staff advise setting aside one-on-one time with individual students “to make sure you are meeting their needs and that they are set up for success in the programs” in which they are involved.

One of the big successes has been the number of youth that have been served, which has been more than expected and will continue to grow. In particular, YEP’s transition coordinators have been able to serve a large number of opportunity youth. In addition, the Back on Track model and existence of Opportunity Works has really been game-changing for common language, alignment, and shared vision for the work. It has also helped with the quality of the four partner organizations overall.
# Appendix: New Orleans Logic Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inputs</th>
<th>Implementation Activities</th>
<th>Bridging Outputs</th>
<th>Bridging Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grant funds from JFF, CNCS, local matches (mostly Baptist Community Ministries)</td>
<td>Cowen leads ETO integration across partners (ACE, YEP, E&amp;L, OYDSC partners)</td>
<td>Student-Level</td>
<td>Short-Term Outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical support from JFF, Cowen Institute</td>
<td>OYDSC supports reporting quality in ETO</td>
<td>E&amp;L, YEP, ACE: Student develops career advancement plan</td>
<td>Student improves soft skills (e.g., time management, punctuality, appropriate dress for job, attendance, communication skills, conflict resolution)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cowen Institute (as the backbone)</td>
<td>Partners refer from &amp; to OYDSC partners</td>
<td>E&amp;L, YEP, ACE: Student is linked to needed support services</td>
<td>Student feels prepared or informed about their pathway(s) to their goal(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner orgs: ACE, Bard, YEP, E&amp;L</td>
<td>Cowen provides backbone support &amp; facilitates the learning community (inclus. use of data to increase or enhance quality of programming at orgs.)</td>
<td>E&amp;L, ACE, Bard Seminar: Student persists through entire program</td>
<td>Plan: Student makes progress on non-cognitive skills rubric—based on MHA Labs model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMPLOY Collective &amp; OYDSC</td>
<td>Cowen raises matching funds</td>
<td>E&amp;L, ACE, Bard Seminar: Student meets attendance requirements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National OW learning community through JFF &amp; Aspen</td>
<td>Cowen hires &amp; manages backbone support staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity youth</td>
<td>Delgado, E&amp;L, YEP, &amp; Bard hire &amp; manage navigators to work with youth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETO system</td>
<td>Partners explore program expansion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Back-on-Track model</td>
<td>Partners develop curriculum</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation evaluation from Urban Institute</td>
<td>Partners do youth outreach &amp; recruitment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bard provides TA to E&amp;L &amp; YEP for curriculum development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Opportunity Works evaluation report pull/reviews</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Programmatic Activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grant-supported staff at YEP, ACE, &amp; E&amp;L provide post-secondary guidance (i.e., transition counseling)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E&amp;L offers paid apprenticeships on Tulane Campus (possibly other locations in future)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E&amp;L helps with job placement after apprenticeship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bard teaches early college seminars at YEP &amp; E&amp;L</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E&amp;L provides Intern coaching</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>YEP offers linkages to other services (e.g., life coaching, HSET prep, job placement)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ACE provides credentialing in health care, IT, manufacturing, &amp; culinary/hospitality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Delgado provides linkages to other services at the college</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E&amp;L &amp; YEP offer dual enrollment at Delgado (possibly other locations in future)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Contextual factors:** Partner organizations' internal & mission changes, funding climate (philanthropic & public from the city, state, & federal government), availability of support services, overall job market in New Orleans, adult basic education policies, natural disasters, racism, poverty, training program availability (at colleges, non-profits, for-profits, etc.), quality of K-12 system, students' personal experiences (including education, etc.)
Philadelphia is implementing the postsecondary/career bridging component of the Back on Track Model for their Opportunity Works programming. The Philadelphia Youth Network (PYN) hired two instructors and two college/personal success coaches to work with enrollees in the Opportunity Works-sponsored College Success Program (CSP) in the city's four E³ Centers, described in more detail below. The CSP provides additional instruction and individualized support to about 80 enrollees per year. The staff members work in coach-instructor pairs, and each team rotates between two E³ Centers.

Philadelphia’s Opportunity Works program falls within the postsecondary bridging component of the Back on Track model. The CSP is divided into two phases. During the first phase, which lasts 12 weeks, participants enroll in one-hour college readiness courses four days per week with Opportunity Works instructors and coaches. The readiness course alternates daily between academic content (taught by instructors) and a non-cognitive skills workshop (taught by coaches). Meanwhile, students are engaged with E³ Center services, including literacy support, high school equivalency (HSE) instruction toward the General Education Diploma (GED) credential or High School Equivalency Test, job readiness training, case management, and personal empowerment.

During the second phase, the CSP staff helps participants bridge to postsecondary education by providing transition services, college placements, and ongoing support. Specifically, they help with the logistics of either dual or regular enrollment at the Community College of Philadelphia (CCP), accompany participants to campus, monitor students’ experiences, and help students plan for their next steps in postsecondary education and training. PYN covers the cost of a “first college experience,” based on the testing level and enrollment type of each student. The CSP staff continues to work with students after they enroll at CCP for their first one to two semesters.
The Opportunity Works programming is supported through the Social Innovation Fund (SIF) grant and a match from the William Penn Foundation. State Temporary Assistant for Needy Families (TANF) supports about 75 percent of the E³ Center services, and Department of Human Services supports the remainder.

**Context**

The unemployment rate in the city of Philadelphia was 6.3 percent in November 2016, higher than the national rate of 4.4 percent. The largest employment sector is education and health services, followed by wholesale and retail trade and professional and business services. The Georgetown Public Policy Institute predicts that by 2020, 63 percent of jobs in Pennsylvania will require a postsecondary credential.

Philadelphia experiences unique challenges with economic hardship and disparity. Of the 10 largest US cities, Philadelphia has the highest rate of deep poverty. Philadelphia also experiences high levels of disparity relative to other cities on income, housing value, and education level. As in many other cities, economic wellbeing and educational attainment in Philadelphia tend to correlate with race. Black and Hispanic residents experience higher rates of poverty and lower educational attainment relative to their white peers. An asset to the city is that it has a strong transportation system, though it has encountered disruptive strikes on occasion.

The economic and educational challenges of opportunity youth (i.e., people between the ages of 16 and 24 who are not working or in school) in Philadelphia reflect and intensify those experienced by the broader population. In 2016, there were approximately 45,860 opportunity youth in Philadelphia. The School District of Philadelphia (SDP) reported that the high school dropout rate in 2014 was 26 percent. This population was mostly male (58 percent), mostly black (58 percent), and largely economically disadvantaged (67 percent). For people ages 16 to 19 in Philadelphia, the unemployment rate was 20.4 percent in 2014, somewhat higher than the general unemployment for

---


that age range in the state, which was 17.2 percent.\(^\text{12}\) Many students in the program describe their neighborhoods as the "ghetto," which is at least partially characterized by low educational attainment, drug dealing, and strife with police.

In 2006, various organizations in the city, including the SDP and PYN, came together to form Project U-Turn, which focused exclusively on dropout prevention and re-engagement. The postsecondary bridging focus fills a gap within the city’s services for youth by promoting a focus on college and postsecondary options after youth are re-engaged.

**Partners**

**Backbone: Philadelphia Youth Network**

PYN is the backbone organization for Opportunity Works. PYN is a 51-person nonprofit intermediary organization that was established to support SDP's turnaround effort in 1999. They are the managing partner of Project U-Turn.

Though PYN serves primarily as an intermediary, they also do some “incubation” of nascent initiatives in-house, such as Opportunity Works. They are presently trying to determine how to make this incubation function more central to their work as an intermediary and convener.

**Programming Partner: E³ Centers**

The CSP is integrated into the city’s four E³ Centers, and student recruitment comes from the existing student population at the Centers. The E³ Centers have existed for over 10 years, focusing on the three areas of education, employment, and empowerment. The E³ Centers are operated by four different nonprofit organizations that won the contract for the Centers from PYN through a competitive bid. Centers serve youth ages 16 to 21, per TANF funding restrictions. Most Centers are open-enrollment and rolling-admission, and enrollees can drop in as needed; however, some Centers are somewhat more structured than others.

The Center staff creates an individualized service model for each student. Generally, a participant is enrolled primarily in the education or employment components with empowerment as wraparound. The education component includes HSE preparation and literacy support, and the employment component consists of job readiness training, work experiences, part-time work, and service learning. The empowerment piece varies across Centers but is reflected across program components. Around 2013, the Centers refocused transition services toward long-term placement in next-step education or employment. With this change, the expectation became that all young people would be placed in their education or career of choice when they leave the Center.

The four E³ Centers vary widely in size, culture, structure, and approach. This means that some Centers operate more one-on-one with students, and others operate in a more structured setting. One Center has a larger emphasis on social activities, such as a prom and field trips. Two of the Centers are strongly identity-based, one focusing on Latino heritage and one focusing on African-American heritage. These Centers are open to anyone, but the staff, the décor, and the activities emphasize and validate these cultural identities. One of the Centers runs the HSE programming in a cohort model with strong attendance and behavioral expectations, while others have varying levels of drop-in structure. One Center is attached to an SDP accelerated school, and two others serve as satellite campuses for Harcum College. PYN staff has grown to appreciate the variation in the Centers’ daily operations as they have become more familiar with the inner workings through Opportunity Works.

Postsecondary Partner: Community College of Philadelphia

CCP is the only community college in the city, and it is the higher education provider associated with Opportunity Works. CCP has a history under the Dean of the Division of Adult and Community Education of collaborating around youth re-engagement and providing first college experiences through dual-enrollment with students in traditional high schools and alternative HSE programs through an initiative called Advance to College. Students in this program have full access to campus resources, including the library, computer labs, and tutoring (only athletics is excluded). This is unusual among dual-enrollment programs, as is CCP’s policy of offering developmental education courses to dual-enrolled students. CCP subsidizes the tuition rates for Advance to College students to less than $100 per credit and offsets the costs of books and supplies though external grants. In addition, CCP offers a summer Advance College Experience program in which students who have not completed their HSEs enroll in interesting humanities courses at no tuition cost.

Students in dual enrollment programs may enter any CCP course that they place into, based on the Accuplacer placement exam. Many students, but not all, place into below-college developmental education classes. The nature of the developmental education courses at CCP vary by subject area. In math, they are sequential with two pre-college levels. In English and writing, the developmental education courses are linked and take the place of the college-level gateway courses but include additional supports to students. In order to place into these linked developmental courses, students must score at least at the ninth grade level on the Accuplacer.

Collective impact effort: Project U-Turn

Project U-Turn was founded to focus on high school graduation. It is a collective impact effort composed of five city agencies (including the Mayor's office), four offices within SDP, and 13 community partners (including CCP and the William Penn Foundation). PYN is the managing partner. Led by SDP and others, Project U-Turn members strategically coordinate to increase high school completion rates through action teams that meet at least quarterly. Project U-Turn as an entity does not provide any specific services, but its existence motivated the establishment of a re-engagement
Center within the city. The current Center is reportedly focused primarily on the city’s public school system and does not generally help students access HSE programming.

The Opportunity Works effort spurred a “landscape study” within Project U-Turn that has caused the organizations to think more purposefully about how to move beyond a collection of programs and to create a cohesive postsecondary bridging system. A unified system would have a common strategy for college access and success across the partner organizations.

Other Organizations

Other organizations, such as the Department of Behavioral Health, Department of Human Services, and Philadelphia Housing Authority provide other supportive services for youth.

SDP does not directly provide services to Opportunity Works youth, but they have collaborated with PYN and the Urban Institute to recruit students into the comparison group for the Opportunity Works impact evaluation.

The Philadelphia team has also had a very strong relationship with their Jobs for the Future coach. He has reportedly been a thought partner who has been very willing to meet with staff and provide suggestions for program improvement. He conducts monthly calls and quarterly visits with the Opportunity Works team. The PYN staff members have also found Jobs for the Future’s convenings to be useful, particularly in thinking about their data system and how to use data in new ways.

Possibilities for Expansion

PYN is exploring working with other service-providing partners in addition to the E³ Centers in order to draw in a larger population of eligible youth.

There have been strategic conversations between PYN and workforce agencies as well to think about increased collaboration.

Nature of Partnerships: Leadership

PYN has a formal memorandum of understanding with the E³ Centers and CCP. PYN leadership holds a monthly meeting of the four E³ directors. Opportunity Works is frequently on the agenda at those monthly meetings. The leadership of one E³ Center was particularly involved with the PYN staff in the initial planning of the effort, and they have regular communication and brainstorming approximately every other month.

PYN also convenes partners for professional development, including instructors at the Centers. The professional development is more focused on the core E³ Center services than on postsecondary bridging and Opportunity Works, but there was a separate Opportunity Works presentation at a recent professional development retreat. PYN’s plan for Opportunity Works originally had more
professional development, but PYN had to downsize their professional learning and development office due to budgetary constraints, which made additional efforts more challenging.

Many partners interact regularly at the Project U-Turn stakeholder meetings. Special sessions at these meetings have focused on the Back on Track effort. In summer 2016, PYN convened all of the Project U-Turn partners to share positive lessons from Opportunity Works, which was reportedly energizing. At the time of the site visit in late 2016, PYN was planning another convening to discuss scale and sustainability of the postsecondary bridging effort.

**Nature of Partnerships: E³ Centers**

In addition to the leadership-level interactions, the Opportunity Works project manager and the CSP staff, who are PYN employees, engage with the E³ Center staff regularly. The Opportunity Works project manager has daily interactions with members of the E³ Center leadership and monthly check-ins with the Center directors to get feedback on the program. The CSP staff helps with E³ Center events and play a role similar to the other instructors within the Centers. In many ways, the CSP staff sees the E³ Center staff as their coworkers, since they are on site four days per week. However, the dynamic between the CSP staff and the E³ Center staff can be complex because PYN is both the E³ Centers' funder and partner. The CSP staff reports that they still manage to get along well, though recent turnover in CSP staff has been challenging and means that the E³ Centers will need to rebuild relationships.

At two Centers, the E³ leadership and staff characterized the CSP staff as “fully integrated” into the Center. The staff characterized communication as “fantastic,” reporting approximately weekly formal check-ins and daily informal check-ins. The leadership and staff see the CSP as an asset by providing a third point of support for students, in addition to their E³ advisor and the Center’s transitions coordinator. The staff noted the benefit of being able to put students in immediate, in-person contact with someone who can help them when they express an interest in postsecondary education. Staff at these Centers supports the CSP by helping with recruitment. They were especially grateful that the design of the CSP integrated so well with their existing structure and is offered on-site.

Staff and leadership had very different experiences from each other at a third Center, which is somewhat larger and was served by a different coach-instructor team than the other two Centers (the team has since transitioned out of their roles). Despite strong relationships with PYN at the leadership level, the CSP staff felt fairly disconnected from the effort, even by late 2016. They were struggling to reconcile the CSP with their case management and instructional responsibilities, and they felt that they had little information about what was going on with the program or with individual students except in emergencies. There was one meeting early in the implementation period about curriculum and skill development for students, but this type of dialogue has not persisted. Though communication has reportedly improved, the staff would have found it useful for the communication plans to be developed early on. In addition, because the CSP gives students homework and deadlines, students
often put off working on the less-structured high school completion work, which is problematic to CSP staff.

Because the E³ Centers have distinct staff attitudes and program expectations for youth, the CSP staff has found it challenging at times to calibrate their programming to the style of each E³ Center. For example, it is more challenging to maintain an 80-percent CSP attendance expectation in a Center where there is no attendance expectation for the HSE programming than at a Center where youth in all E³ programming are held to high-attendance and other behavioral criteria.

**NATURE OF PARTNERSHIPS: HIGHER EDUCATION PARTNERS**

The program manager meets about monthly with the CCP point person in the Dean's office in the Division of Adult and Community Education. There is also informal communication by email as needed. The CSP staff communicates approximately weekly. CCP has been a strong partner, with only occasional communication challenges early in the initiative. They were involved in the original design of the CSP and have accompanied the PYN team to several of Jobs for the Future's convenings, which increased their enthusiasm.

PYN and Opportunity Works leadership have faced difficulty trying to engage other higher education institutions. There are many colleges and postsecondary institutions in Philadelphia, but only one community college. PYN would like to offer multiple postsecondary tracks for youth, but they have only been able to formalize the partnership with CCP. PYN has discussed but has not yet pursued a relationship with Harcum College, which has an extension at two of the E³ Centers. They are concerned that it may not align because Harcum College is not open-enrollment and does not provide services to E³ members. Instead, they generally serve non-traditional adult students who are farther along in life or in their careers. E³ Center staff also suggested that PYN explore relationships with other institutions that would expand young people's exposure to different environments, such as Temple University and Bryn Mawr College.

**Program Design**

**Difference from Existing Programming**

The Opportunity Works CSP is essentially a small program within the E³ Centers' HSE-focused programming. The CSP provides students an opportunity to take a college-level English course and a college readiness course at the E³ Center and then experience a warm transition into courses at CCP. The on-site component is a 32–48-hour classroom-based intervention over the course of 12 weeks for youth who are particularly close to being college-ready or who are very motivated to complete their high school equivalency and attend college. The program is individualized to student needs. CSP staff help students connected with needed support services, largely through the E³ Center resources, but also sometimes through the CSP staff members' own connections with relevant service providers. After the on-site component, students remain in the program and actively engage with CSP staff during their first semester at CCP.
The bridge to CCP is an important distinction from existing E³ Center programming, not only because the CSP provides tuition support, but also because the CSP staff brings students beyond the door of the E³ Center. Even with the college advising and transition services offered by E³ Centers, the E³ Center staff does not have the capacity to escort students to the CCP campus. The CSP staff does this every day, physically serving as the college bridge. When youth try CCP without the CSP, staff reports that they often give up and come back to the E³ Center. The issue is not a lack of a referral or financial aid; it’s that students need additional support to take the next steps in their education. CSP is filling this gap in support as students move into their first semester in college. Success in the first semester sets their trajectory to persist in college.

Back on Track

The CSP staff was originally given only a very general overview of the Back on Track model. It was explained as a dual enrollment bridging program from the E³ Centers to CCP.

The E³ Center staff described the CSP as giving students a chance to dual enroll between HSE and postsecondary education, which gives them an opportunity to seek higher education and a stepping stone to advancement. The free tuition is a particularly appealing aspect of the program. The program also informs students about various professions they can pursue. Some staff members had concerns about redundancy when PYN first introduced them to the Opportunity Works program. However, they soon grew to understand that the focus is much more heavily on preparation for college work and college exposure instead of high school completion with some college access resources, as provided at the E³ Centers. Some E³ Center staff members were concerned that it may be a little too much for students to handle the college preparatory curriculum on top of HSE preparation. They reconciled this concern by collaborating with the CSP staff to determine which students were ready to take advantage of the opportunity and encouraging students to stick with their HSE programming even while pursuing college-level classes.

Goals

PYN leadership expressed several goals for youth. Two main goals are that students develop realistic postsecondary plans and make progress toward a credential on a career pathway. The idea is to motivate and accelerate them. This would ideally lead everyone to have an HSE and a postsecondary credential. In addition, PYN leadership and staff want youth to develop their non-cognitive skills. For example, they want youth to be able to make decisions about their own education, career, and lives without the support of a program. Ultimately, they want the program participants to be productive, self-driven adults.

The CSP staff’s goals largely reflect those of the leadership. Not everyone will get a four-year degree, but they should be moving toward a positive future and a sustainable life. The staff wants to help them learn, grow, and progress. Staff indicated that the one-year goal for students is for them to work relatively independently and to have the tools to do the work, even if they need to seek out knowledge. They should be able to self-advocate and be resourceful, so they no longer need to rely on
the program staff. In five years, the goal will depend on the individual student. They might be in graduate school, or they might be working a full-time job in a career that pays a good living wage.

E³ Center staff echoed many of these goals. They would like to see students earn an associate's degree or bachelor's degree, noting that “the sky is the limit.” They shared that the first semesters of college present a major hurdle for students, and once they get past that point, they are much more likely to persist and be successful.

The CCP staff noted that the development of non-cognitive, “21st century” skills is critical in the short term, such as time management. In the medium term, students would ideally earn a credential of some sort, even if not a degree. In the long term, they would be active citizens contributing to the economy in a career (as opposed to holding a generic, non-career job).

The goal for the CSP itself is to have more integration, buy-in, and alignment with the high school completion services and a more permeable barrier. Ideally, the CSP staff would tap more deeply into the wisdom and knowledge of the E³ Center case managers and instructors and utilize shared data and information to serve students.

Development Process

LEADERSHIP LEVEL
PYN had been engaged with the Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund though the Aspen Institute and was looking for better ways to serve somewhat older youth, particularly young men of color. The Back on Track model seemed to provide a useful framework for this population and fill a gap within the system of youth support by introducing a purposeful focus on transition to postsecondary education as opposed to only high school completion. The PYN staff considered whether they should work with the Accelerated Schools operated by SDP or with the E³ Centers for the Opportunity Works pilot and decided to leverage the E³ Center structure because they oversee those Centers.

PYN tried to engage the partners early on, including the E³ Centers, the Project U-Turn partners, the Housing Authority, and others. There has been an ongoing learning community around the Opportunity Works pilot, and it is beginning to affect other organizations’ operations, as discussed in the “Scale and Sustainability” section below.

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT
PYN hired a curriculum design consultant at the early stages of the curriculum discussion, but PYN’s involvement in curriculum design faltered when the three PYN staff members who were leading the effort in 2015, including the program designer, transitioned out of their roles shortly after hiring the new CSP staff. Therefore, the CSP staff was given a great deal of discretion around the curriculum and structure of the CSP. The initial start-up process was “hectic” and “fraught with conflict” because it was largely left to the two newly hired instructors and two newly hired coaches to develop the program in summer 2015.
The program took on a two-phase model with a 12-week college preparatory phase and a one-semester dual-enrollment phase at CCP. The 12-week college preparatory phase had to fit into the existing structure at the E³ Centers, which forced it into a one-hour meeting in the middle of the day four days per week. Staff indicated that this is not necessarily the ideal structure, since it offers minimal flexibility to students who have scheduling conflicts.

For lack of guidance, the college preparatory curriculum and the nature of supportive services varied substantially among the staff members. In 2016, there was an effort to make the college preparatory classes more consistent across instructors and staff members; the incorporation of common capstones was a large step in this direction. PYN brought in a curriculum design consultant to help with this process.

The basic program model evolved somewhat, as the initial 12-week phase was separated into three modules with notable milestones for students at the end of each. For the fall 2016 cohort, the first module was taken out of the classroom and converted into a less structured relationship-building period between the students and CSP staff. These later changes were led by the CSP staff but undertaken in consultation with the PYN program manager.

**Staffing**

As noted, there are four Opportunity Works staff members who are employees of PYN: two instructors and two coaches. Instructor-coach pairs rotate between two of the four E³ Centers. The original intent was for the roles of the instructor and coach to be differentiated, where the instructor would provide more guidance and support while students were still in the college preparatory phase at the E³ Centers, and the coach would play a larger role after the students' transition to CCP. However, the roles have blended together, and now the only functional difference seems to be in the type of courses taught by each, where the instructor focuses on college material and the coach focuses on non-cognitive skills. The coach is also responsible for helping students develop their postsecondary plans.

At the time of the visit in November 2016, both members of an instructor-coach pair had recently resigned. PYN hired a replacement instructor, but she had to resign as well for personal reasons. Therefore, PYN was actively searching for a new coach and new instructor in early 2017. The criteria for the new staff members focused on five elements: positive youth development, experience and knowledge of non-cognitive skills (in order to straddle the instructor and coach roles), a record of related work with similar youth, teamwork and work style, and ability to respond to a hypothetical scenario that requires critical judgment.

Some attributed the initial staff turnover to philosophical differences within the team, who did not always see eye-to-eye as they were developing the program model from scratch. In essence, there were two distinct philosophies: 1) Offer a more rigorous program with high expectations to get youth to true college readiness by the end of the first 12 weeks of programming, and 2) Direct programming to build up participants' confidence and teach them how to learn within those first 12 weeks without
trying to remediate all of the academic deficiencies that had accumulated over years of insufficient education. The two staff members who left were in the former camp, and those who stayed were in the latter.

It was very difficult for youth when the staff members left their roles, and some expressed sadness and loss following their departure. Students had access to counseling and additional support through the E³ Center as well as to other PYN staff to help students during the personnel transition. Even though support was proactively offered, not all students utilized the support. PYN felt that the nature of the personal relationships involved may have deterred students from seeking help from others.

**Funding Sources**

The majority—75 percent—of the funds for the E³ Centers comes from TANF, and the other 25 percent comes from the Department of Human Services. TANF supports the fundamentals of the HSE programming and the wraparound support at the E³ Centers. These funding sources influence the outcomes the Centers track because they incentivize rapid HSE completion, short-term training, and job placement over postsecondary education.

The Opportunity Works activities are funded through SIF. Staff noted that the restriction on purchasing food has proven to be a barrier because it constrains their ability to host events. Match funds have come from the William Penn Foundation, and PYN is also seeking support from the Charles Mott Foundation.

In late 2016, anxiety was high when the TANF rules changed so that the funds could not support programming for young people over age 18 (these funds typically can be used for young people ages 16 to 21). This policy affected PYN programming for about a month before the rule was rolled back. The impact would have been devastating to the programming, since 76 percent of participants would have been excluded from TANF funding. The final decision allows them to serve youth who are above the age of 18, but they now have to collect additional enrollment documentation (e.g., proof of income, notarized proof of homelessness, etc.), which may prove to be a barrier for some youth. However, the funding is no longer operating on a waiver, which has allowed them to use the funds in a more permanent way. PYN sees this as a net positive.

The threat of changing TANF rules prompted PYN to begin exploring other funding sources and motivated them to look more aggressively for a fifth implementation site for the CSP with more diverse funding streams. The workforce funds are committed for the year in the previous June, but this may be a possible source of support in the future.

**Timing**

There are two phases of the programming for youth. Phase one is 12 weeks total, and students are in a classroom setting after the first four weeks. Phase two takes place over a semester at CCP. This means that the entire program experience, if a youth persists consecutively, runs for about two
semesters, though staff members may continue to support students beyond their first semester of college. Many youth do not proceed linearly through the program, dropping out or deferring college enrollment as needed to be able to address other barriers and increase their chances of success.

Phase one used to be 12 weeks of structured in-class time, with meetings one hour per day four days per week. However, in fall 2016, the in-class time was reduced to eight weeks to allow for more time for unstructured relationship-building between staff members and enrollees in the first four weeks.

The first cohort began programming in fall 2015, and the first phase-two semester at CCP took place in spring 2016. PYN enrolled their fourth cohort in fall 2016. Cohorts of about 20–30 students across all four E³ Centers start three times per year, in spring, summer, and fall. The summer cohort is somewhat smaller than the other two cohorts.

**Participants**

**Characteristics of Participants**

Staff stated that the young people “come from hardship” and have experienced “lots of trauma.” They have “multiple issues and layers” and “are not adults but have been dealt an adult hand.” Many students have issues with housing, child care, transportation, and a lack of structural support in other aspects of their lives. They may have experienced mental or physical abuse, and many are court-involved. Staff members stated that the young women in the program are often mothers and need to work, sometimes at jobs that are far away. Students of any gender who do not care for their own children may need to financially support other members of their household. For many of the people in the program, employment is necessary, but education may be viewed as optional, especially in the short term. The young people often struggle internally to reconcile short-term needs and long-term goals. Because of this, one member of program leadership described the program as “both an opportunity for them and another struggle.”

The students vary widely in their levels of motivation and resilience. Many lack a reference for why college is a good idea because members of their social system never went to college. When they do go into a college setting, they may not feel like they belong. They also have anxiety around academic subjects, especially writing and presentations. Since they do not want to fail anymore, sometimes they quit instead. Staff indicated that many of the participants “are used to quitting.” The staff tries to encourage them to see that even if they have failed many times before, they can do some things right, so they help the students make positive steps toward their life goals. Once they get to college, the CCP staff sees that students have a lot of grit and determination, with an attitude that they “need to” be there. There is a lot of positivity and excitement among students once they enroll.
E³ Center staff members also shared that the students very much want to please the adults that they respect in their lives, so when they give up or fail, they feel like they have let those other people down. They internalize this as an even deeper failure than if they had only let themselves down.

The program data also reveal useful insights into the characteristics of program enrollees. As of September 2016, 62 percent of the enrollees were female and the remainder were male. Over half (about 56 percent) identified as African American, and about one-third (36 percent) identified as Hispanic. Only about 4 percent were Caucasian, and the remainder were multi-racial or other. Of those who were at least 18 at the time of data collection, the mean and median age at enrollment was 19. Almost all—96 percent—had dropped out of high school. Only 1 percent had graduated, and 3 percent had a GED at program enrollment. Of those who dropped out, 63 percent dropped out at 10th grade or earlier. About one-third (34 percent) reported being pregnant or parenting, 9 percent were former foster youths, and 8 percent reported that they had been convicted of a felony.¹³

**Target Population**

Youth at the E³ Centers who are on a good HSE completion track are eligible to be part of Opportunity Works. The E³ Centers serve about 150–200 youth ages 16 to 21 who are disconnected from employment and education; the average age is 19.5, and the majority is between 18 and 20 (about 17 percent are under age 18). The restriction on enrolling youth age 21 and under is based on TANF funding. In all, there are approximately 45,860 opportunity youth ages 16 through 24 in Philadelphia, and the E3 Centers recruit from this population.

Being on a good HSE completion track generally means that the students score at least at the ninth grade level on both the math and literacy portions of the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) (this is “not basic skills deficient”) or have passed two HSE subtests. The practical cut-offs are that youth score at least at the seventh grade level on the TABE and ideally have passed at least one of the HSE subtests in the GED or High School Equivalency Test, but even this is not a hard-and-fast requirement. Youth who do not achieve the cut-off levels may be considered if they have strong recommendations from instructors and have been engaged with E3 activities, since motivation is one of the most important criteria for admission to the program. These concessions were made because there are relatively few youth at the Centers who have TABE scores that qualify them for the CSP, and because staff found that motivation is a more important factor in program retention and success than pure academic skills.

**Recruitment and Admission**

PYN aims to enroll 20 youth per Center per year in Opportunity Works for a total of 240 youth over three years. There were fewer than 80 enrollees in fall 2015, since the program began late in the year. As of early September 2016, there were 76 recruits who were at least 18 years old at the time of data collection.

¹³ Data on employment at intake are incomplete and cannot be reported.
Opportunity Works staff recruits directly from members of the E³ Centers, which are responsible for their own recruitment and intake. The Opportunity Works staff is involved in the Centers and tries to get to know students organically. They make announcements about the CSP at the monthly student meetings and during Center orientations. The CSP staff begins to get to know youth at the Centers and builds relationships well before they try to recruit them to the program. In addition, the Opportunity Works staff meets with the E³ Center instructors a few weeks before a new CSP cohort is going to enroll in order to get a list of promising students that they target for recruitment.

Youth also refer each other to the program. Even those who did not complete the program often speak of it highly and encourage their friends to join.

One of the major draws of the program is the promise of a free college course, sometimes even before the student has completed their high school equivalency. The E³ Center staff emphasize this heavily to students when talking with them about the value of the program. E³ Center staff report that the goal is to attract students to the program rather than to capture them in it. One way of attracting students is for the CSP staff to be highly visible within the Centers to allow students to get to know them personally.

The application process differs by site. In some cases, applicants complete a written application and need a recommendation from an instructor. In other instances, PYN staff reads the application out loud and takes down notes. Generally, applicants are required to complete some written component and attend an orientation or an interview as well. CSP staff obtains test scores for applicants directly from the E³ Centers. Any E³ Center member can apply, but the CSP staff seeks input from other instructors in making admission decisions. Student attendance at the Center and motivation are very large factors. Staff also interviews applicants to determine readiness. Most youth entering the program have not completed their high school credentials but are on a strong track to complete within a few months. The process of bringing youth into the program evolved over time, where members of earlier cohorts were identified by staff members and then invited to join, and a broader cross-section of youth were encouraged to apply for later cohorts.

Three of the E³ Centers have had robust Opportunity Works enrollment, but one Center has been more anemic. That Center is co-located with an alternative high school diploma program, so many students who would be good candidates for Opportunity Works are routed to the alternative diploma program instead. The CSP staff is figuring out how to negotiate this challenge. Currently, youth who do enroll in the CSP at that Center are transported to another Center nearby for phase-one classes.

At the other three Centers, it is very likely that all or almost all Center enrollees with eligible TABE scores or other indicators of readiness have been encouraged to enroll in Opportunity Works or have already enrolled. The program designers initially thought that there would be more eligible students in the E³ Centers than they have found. This has motivated them to start thinking about other appropriate venues to introduce the CSP, and they are exploring new partnerships.
Attrition

Retention has been a major challenge for the Opportunity Works program. Attrition in the first cohort was 71 percent overall. The changes to the program design were undertaken primarily to improve retention. Decisions to break the 12-week session into three modules and make only the second two modules formal in-class time were motivated by students' challenges in staying engaged for the 12-week "marathon." The staff believes that eight weeks of classes following purposeful relationship-building results in similar levels of preparation among students and improved retention. The staff also calls or texts many of the students every day to encourage them to come to class and stay engaged. They work with the E³ Center staff to help keep track of students and encourage them to maintain their enrollment in the CSP.

The main reason for attrition is that youth struggle to overcome personal barriers (especially personal loss, housing security, employment scheduling, and child care). The staff sees many of these things as out of their control and often out of the students' control, but they still encourage them to think about how they can take small steps toward their long-term goals.

Design differences between the Opportunity Works programming and the E³ Center models also contribute to attrition. Work and programming at the E³ Centers is designed so that students can drop-in when it is convenient for them, whereas CSP has attendance requirements. It is a challenge to help youth negotiate the difference between an attendance-based program and the drop-in nature of the E³ Centers that they are used to.

In addition, the notion of attrition and retention may be somewhat overemphasized. The "ideal model" of the program seems like an assembly line or a conveyor belt, but the reality is that students stop out or repeat pieces of the process. The staff aims to "plant a seed for a long-term effect" more than try to push them through the whole program at a pace that they are not ready to sustain.

Most of the youth who leave Opportunity Works maintain their relationships with the E³ Centers, so the staff can continue to track them and check in on their progress. They may encourage youth who have left to come back to Opportunity Works with a future cohort.

Program Experience

Education and Training Programming

PHASE 1

The E³ Centers offer HSE programming. The CSP provides instruction for Opportunity Works students in college-level English and in non-cognitive life skills. Each class meets for one hour, two days per week at the E³ Center for eight weeks (totaling four hours per week of classes). Staff report that one advantage of having students take two different classes concurrently is that it gives them some exposure to variation in professors' styles, expectations, and the materials needed for success.
The college prep class, as taught by the instructor who was on staff in late 2016, is oriented toward familiarizing students with college subject matter, reducing their anxiety around writing and presenting, and building trust. Each student in the class writes an essay by the end, but it is a heavily assisted process in which the instructor reinforces basic English lessons (such as how to form a good thesis statement). The goal is for the students to reach out when they run into trouble in college, so the instructor can continue to build their skills and confidence and allow their role to fade out over time as the student becomes increasingly self-sufficient. The college preparatory experience aims to build college-related experiences, such as critical thinking, reading levels, note-taking skills, familiarity with a syllabus, study skills, first-day expectations in college, college communication, email, study habits, ability to engage in a discussion, and experience giving small and large presentations. The staff aims for 80 percent attendance.

The other instructor who is no longer with the program took a stronger college preparatory approach, acting as a caring adult who held students accountable for doing the work on their own and keeping up with college-level expectations. This instructor emphasized both English and math skills. As reported by students, this could be confidence-boosting, but it was a more “trial by fire” approach than the nurturing tact taken by the remaining instructor. This stricter approach may have resulted in higher levels of anxiety and lower levels of confidence among students about their ability to handle college-level work, based on student and other staff reports.

The College Success class is divided into three sessions that are common across E³ Centers. Session 1 is about personal goal-setting, where students get in touch with their goals and hopes for their career and education. Session 2 relates to postsecondary education and how that links to one's own personal goals and ambitions. Students begin formal in-class time in this session. Session 3 focuses on career-related content. The capstones for each of these three sessions include a dream board that is a visual collage of the students' aspirations combined with a presentation to their peers; a narrative essay on a topic of the instructor's choice, such as a response to a couple chapters of Malcolm Gladwell's book Outliers to have students think about education issues; and a persuasive presentation based on a prompt. Students were particularly enthusiastic in the focus groups about the dream board activity. These activities have shifted somewhat over time, but the staff has developed common rubrics for each capstone to assess the students’ performances.

In addition, the students go on campus visits in Phase 1. Several students in focus groups were especially excited about the visits to Bucks Community College and Temple University.

PHASE 2
After this end of Phase 1, students can enroll in a "first college experience" at CCP. In the first college experience, students enroll in credit-bearing courses based on their testing level and academic needs. CSP students enrolled at CCP take classes alongside students outside of the Opportunity Works program. PYN pays the tuition for this first experience, which is an important incentive for students. Students continue to receive support from Opportunity Works staff during this semester and utilize key cognitive strategies, research methods, and digital literacy skills learned in the first phase to successfully complete their college class.
The CCP courses vary widely, since students have access to the entire CCP course catalog, as long as they qualify in their Accuplacer placement exam. Many students enroll in developmental education courses, but some place into 100-level college courses. The number of courses a student takes in this first semester depends on their placement. If the student placed at a college level on the Accuplacer test, then they take one course (i.e., three credits), whereas if they test into developmental education, they take a linked developmental curriculum, which is two courses (i.e., six credits). In rare instances, a student may take nine credits if they are an English language learner and test into developmental education. The tuition rate is $99 per credit for dual-enrollment students and $153 per credit for matriculated students. The developmental courses are credit-bearing at CCP, but the credit would not transfer to other institutions.

CHALLENGES
The CSP staff has faced some logistical difficulties at CCP, such as matching up the timing of when classes start relative to when students are ready to enter classes, fitting students into the schedule of Accuplacer testing, and navigating capacity limitations in CCP’s developmental education classes. The timing of when the Opportunity Works students take the Accuplacer makes it so that they sometimes cannot get into the courses that they want to take. In that case, they might enroll in an alternate course or defer for a semester. The staff develops action plans with the students to help them stay on track, even when their desired course schedule is not possible. CCP staff members are aware of these logistical challenges and have been working with PYN to navigate them.

Another issue is that once students engage in college courses, it is difficult for the E³ Centers to maintain their interest in completing their high school equivalency. They may begin to miss HSE preparation classes or lose focus on their HSE altogether, despite encouragement from E³ Center staff and CSP staff to maintain the dual focus. E³ Center staff thought that this undermined the students’ progress even in the college program because if they had not mastered the high school-level skills (e.g., finding the main idea in a passage), then they could not be successful in college-level work (e.g., writing a well-organized essay). If the CSP staff could emphasize to students how the lessons in the college preparatory work were transferrable to their E³ Center work, that would be helpful. On the other hand, E³ Center staff members report that students who are in the CSP who do maintain their ties with the E³ Center motivate their peers who are not in the program to aspire to achieve more in their education.

E³ Center staff in one Center noted that the students exhibited stress about meeting the high academic demands of the CSP and navigating the contrasting styles of the (now-departed) coach and instructor. The expectations for students may not have been laid out clearly up front, including the expectation for students to achieve some type of work-life balance. Other Centers echoed the sentiment that the expectations for students need to be clear from the beginning.
Support Services

The goal is for support services to be timely and proactive, because the PYN staff recognizes that they are asking a lot of youth to participate in this intensive program while they work to complete their HSEs and meet other demands of life, such as children and jobs.

CSP staff get into the details when tracking students, meeting every week with each other and plotting each individual student’s progress on two “matrices” that the staff developed. The first matrix is “internal.” It plots student motivation against their academics in high-medium-low categories. The idea behind it is that students cannot improve their academics unless they improve their motivation, so the staff uses the matrix to see where they need to focus attention. Motivation is measured based on class attendance and work effort. Students with low motivation may receive a text from staff at the same time every morning, for example. Staff can tailor the academic intervention for students who have high motivation. The second matrix is “external.” It tracks student barriers against student support. The idea behind this is that students and staff cannot reduce barriers without increasing support. Though the barriers and support are more external to the student and the staff has less ability to influence them, the tracking helps staff focus their energy on connecting students to external resources that are necessary to be successful in the program, in college, and in their long-term goals.

The CSP staff regularly meets with students individually and in groups to help them with issues that arise or just to check in. Students and E³ Center staff describe the CSP staff as available to students at any hour, day or night, which builds trust. The staff calls the approach “intrusive advisement” to build a “relationship of trust.” The CSP staff often becomes the young people’s “first call” when a crisis comes up, because they spend so much time with them. The staff aims to be a positive and supportive resource and to use their personal knowledge of systems to help young people work through crises. These systems might include child care, cash assistance, housing, and others. The E³ Center also helps, since they often have more expertise in community resources. The E³ Centers often offer direct supports in one or more of supportive service areas, such as housing and justice system navigation. However, student needs are so extensive that the CSP staff members have advocated for PYN to hire a full-time social worker or consultant, which they believe would help youth become much more successful on their external matrix.

Opportunity Works staff takes an even more active and individualized role after students have enrolled in CCP courses. For example, staff members meet with students 10 minutes before class to ensure they are on time, provide transit supports, and intervene with faculty if necessary. Initially, the Opportunity Works coaching staff proactively connected with the CCP professors, but they then determined it was a better approach to take a step back and encourage the students to lead communication, except in emergencies, when the Opportunity Works staff might step in. For example, when a student’s house caught fire and that person had to miss class, the coach helped mediate the situation with the professor.

The youth work with the CSP coach to make a postsecondary plan, which can be a more or less formal process (though it is a touch point in the data system). The coach works with youth to
determine their plans while at CCP and, about halfway through the first CCP semester, their next steps to remain on a college path. The staff helps the young people meet with the financial aid office and complete their FAFSA. The idea is to work with students to set small goals that lead to larger ones.

Staff members continue to support students as long as needed, but the CSP staff slowly tries to phase out their role once the student becomes more confident and resourceful. The staff members’ stated goal is to make themselves no longer necessary by empowering students to know how to find help for themselves in the longer-term. In addition, the E³ Center staff indicates that they are available for student support in the long term as needed.

CSP members also continue attending class or receiving services at the E³ Center, where they access intense academic support geared towards assisting them with satisfactory completion of their CCP class. The E³ Centers also provide job readiness training and paid work experiences to sustain their lives and involvement in the program. The CSP staff team up with the E³ Centers to provide basic support to students. They help with books, offer bus tokens, provide food, and pay the HSE exam fees. They also helped students purchase college supplies on a case-by-case basis.

Throughout both phases, the youth receive incentives, such as gift cards or special events. The incentives are based on youth behaviors rather than outcomes. For example, a young person would not be rewarded for getting an A on a paper but instead for following the right process and putting in the effort. The staff especially tries to incentivize attendance; sometimes they will give a surprise incentive for someone who has displayed particularly good attendance. Often the incentives take the form of $10 gift cards.

CHALLENGES
A challenge noted particularly in one Center is that the case managers at the E³ Center sometimes gives somewhat less attention to students in the CSP, since they have the more concentrated support of the program staff. However, these are often the students who need the most support as they juggle multiple responsibilities and try to meet the higher expectations of college-level work. This offsets some of the additional support offered by CSP staff. On the other hand, E³ Center staff expressed a concern that when the students begin to turn to the CSP staff for their needs, it breaks the E³ Center bond with the student and can also make the E³ Center staff members’ jobs harder, particularly if the CSP staff are not communicating with the E³ Center staff about individual students on a regular basis. It seems that some clarity around the division of responsibility for student support and around communication would be valuable between the Center and program staff.

At other Centers, the coordination seems to be stronger. One E³ Center staff member noted, “This might be the strongest support in [the students’] lives, between the advisor, mentor, coaches, and staff. We recognize that and ensure that we have locked arms and touched base on a frequent basis about their lives.”
Participant Path through the Program

Once students are admitted to the CSP, they have a two-day orientation before class starts. In this orientation, the staff explains the program and the grant effort to them and builds up the cohort to be a cohesive group. The idea is to “build steam” for the program. At the same time, some staff members believe that the connection between the student and the caring adult (the coach or instructor) has been more important to the students’ ultimate success than the support of other cohort members.

All students begin by taking the TABE to assess literacy and numeracy. The engagement with E³ Center services depends on whether or not the student has a high school credential. If the student does well and does not have a high school credential, they might immediately take an HSE practice test and prepare to take the GED or High School Equivalency Test in a short timeframe. If they are not ready for the HSE exams, then they are “rostered” for academic classes at the E³ Center based on their skill level and areas of need. If they have a high school credential, Opportunity Works staff encourage the youth to maintain a relationship with the Transitions Coordinator in the E³ Center, pursue empowerment activities, and take advantage of available services.

All Opportunity Works youth, regardless of credential status, take part Phase One of the program. As part of the phase one, all members sit for the CCP placement test (the Accuplacer), review their scores, register for CCP online, and begin to select one or more courses. The courses available depend on the student's placement on the Accuplacer. In the summer semester, there were special courses for students who had not completed their high school equivalency, so the students' high school completion status as of the first day of the semester also determined their course enrollments.

In Phase Two, youth are rostered at CCP, as described above. The CSP staff continues to work with students throughout their first semester or two at CCP.

There are celebrations with awards at the midpoint and end of the program. The staff makes up the awards and prints them off, but they are reportedly meaningful to the students. The awards are customized and humorous, such as the “Phoenix Award” for someone who stayed with the program after going through a house fire and the “Comeback Kid Award” for someone who had such low attendance they almost were dismissed from the program and then turned around their behavior and investment. In addition, CCP hosts a celebration once the semester is 20 percent completed. The staff believes that the students want to feel noticed, cared for, and supported, and not forgotten or neglected.

Participants’ Perspectives

Participant perspectives emerged through two focus groups, one with three participants and the other with five. All focus group attendees were male. They shared that many of the youth in the program come from difficult personal situations, consistent with the staff members’ descriptions. Several have housing problems, and one participant in the focus group described himself as homeless. A couple of others had turned to illegal activity for lack of perceived options. Many have children, which is
reportedly particularly challenging for female participants. The students come from backgrounds where their parents did not complete high school and did not know how to advise them to succeed in secondary school or beyond. Many wanted a stepping stone to a better life, “because not even McDonald’s is hiring with only a high school diploma,” as one participant stated. However, they also admitted that they often have trouble asking for help.

MOTIVATIONS TO JOIN THE CSP AND EXPECTATIONS
The focus group participants’ motivations to join the CSP were mixed. Some already wanted to go to college as their end goal and were drawn to the program after hearing about it at an E3 Center event. Others received recommendations from E3 Center staff or friends they trusted, even if they had not considered college before. Many had met the CSP staff around the E3 Center and thought they seemed like “decent people.” Nearly all potential enrollees were drawn by the free tuition and the chance to “test the waters” in college.

Being introduced to the CSP provided a new avenue of opportunity for some. As described by one focus group participant, “When I did my GED, I thought I was done. When they told me I was being selected, it helped me envision myself as a more successful person.” Another shared what he tells his friends about the program, “I tell them that if you want to get out of the ’hood...if you want to make yourself successful, you gotta do these classes. These classes right now, no matter how hard it’s going to be, just do it.”

The program advertises “college-level work,” but many people do not have a point of reference for what that means. One participant shared, “It’s advertised well because it’s vague enough, but it’s specific. They say it’s going to be college work. If you take that lightly, [the CSP staff are] not [underemphasizing it]. It’s telling you exactly what you’re going to do.” Once students gain some perspective of real college-level work at CCP, almost all realize that the CSP is actually more of an intermediate step, in terms of the level of rigor and expectations, and many value the bridge. One person reflected, “To take your GED English and go to English 101, there would be a gap,” and the CSP bridges that gap. Many who were at CCP discussed at length the difficulty of the college classes, which were very different from their high school or E3 Center experiences.

The program prepares young people not only for the academic load of college, but also the social expectations of college. Lessons about punctuality, not talking on one’s cell phone in class, and emailing professors to tell them when they would be late or absent were new and useful to some students. One student shared, “The college culture concept and the concept of emerging adulthood itself—there were all these things we had never thought of. To have not only the academic part of college but also the other part, like ‘Oh snap! You might be super late or your son might be sick [but you have to be able to deal with it].’ It was critical to have that part too.” Another shared, “I could see college as a relationship between you and the professor.”

PROGRAM EXPERIENCE
The CSP was quite different from students’ experiences in the E3 Centers. One student reflected on how the course experience in the E3 Center contrasted with the CSP. He said that in the GED class in
his E³ Center, “everyone is quiet and you do your work,” but in the CSP classes, they have discussions and good arguments. They move beyond the concrete facts necessary for the GED or HSE exam and on to critical thinking. At the same time, the reinforcement of skills, such as essay-writing, can be useful for the GED exam. Another student described how the college exposure was distinct, “An obvious difference between E³ and College Success is that [the CSP staff] will actually go with you to colleges and take you there. I found that helpful, to see different places.”

Students found their program experience challenging but rewarding. Many emphasized the importance of time management. In particular, some students struggled to keep up with their GED completion work and the CSP. It became even harder to stay engaged in the GED at the E³ Centers once they entered CCP. A student indicated that he tried to trade his attention between the two sides, but the staff forced him to focus on both. This resulted in “double the homework and double the knowledge.”

Personal Challenges and Supports

Besides time management, transportation was a major struggle for several students. One had to learn about new bus routes he had not taken before. Another rode his bike to the E³ Center and CCP every day. The train strike in fall 2016 was particularly disruptive for many students. One student shared that his housing situation was a barrier, but that he was determined to overcome it, “I’m homeless, but I came every day. They encouraged me to find a place to sleep. But I kept coming and did the best for me. I wanted to show everyone I could do it, homeless or not.”

The students in the focus groups—who are probably some of the more motivated students—shared that the struggle was worthwhile. One said, “I feel like all of us are struggling in our own way, but I feel like this is a good struggle because, for me, it was time management and the GED and others with employment. So we were struggling to get something that meant so much more to us.” Another was very proud of his personal and academic success, “When I was at CCP and meeting with [CSP staff], I felt happier, like I was doing something. I felt like I was here and proud of myself. The whole experience was rewarding to me. I got my transcripts in the mail the other day and my GPA was a 4.0.”

Students appreciated that CSP went out of their way to support them. One described, “They would give you the phone numbers, and they said that at 3 AM they might not pick up, but they will pick up most of the time. I texted at 10 PM and said I’d be a little late and he texted me right back. I was like ‘WHAT?’” The staff also helped students in their first semester or two at CCP with assignments, for example by proofreading essays. This level of support was beyond the capacity of the E³ Center. At the E³ Center, students could make an appointment for support, but the staff did not proactively track students and reach out like in the CSP.

STAFFING

The staff members are critical to the success of the CSP. Many students thought that the staff were “cool,” “family-like,” and said that “they care.” Generally, the staff takes the extra time with students and goes above and beyond. There was a former staff member that elicited some mixed feelings among participants, but the feedback on the other three original staff members was universally positive. The students felt validated by staff members, with one stating “It’s not the paycheck for
them. It’s bettering us as people. We’re not just students to them; we are human beings and young adults that are going out in the world.” This was different from their experience with other teachers students had outside of the context of CSP. One explained, “That’s what inspired me... Regular teachers see kids from ghetto, they see no potential, why teach you? The teachers here didn’t make us feel that way; they didn’t care where we are from. So we can see bigger and better things.” One student in the focus group described his instructor as the “best teacher I ever had” and then broke out into song.

PROGRAM ATTRITION

Despite all of the positive aspects of the program, there has been high attrition. A few of the students in the focus groups had not completed the program, even though they spoke of it highly. Usually, the primary barrier was needing a job for financial support or having challenges with children and child care. Others had transportation problems or were just not prepared for the large amount of work and high expectations. Some students who stayed expressed resentment at those who left because they perceived that the students who did not complete must have not really wanted it in the first place if they could not push through. Other retained students thought it was good for people to quit during the first phase of the CSP because the CCP phase was much more challenging, and those other students definitely would not have made it through at that point. Some who left expressed an intention to re-enroll in the program with future cohorts. One student actually completed the first phase but decided to repeat that part of the program to strengthen his confidence and readiness for college-level work at CCP.

CHANGES TO LIFE GOALS AND TRAJECTORIES

Overall, enrolling in the program seems to have changed various students’ life trajectories. One shared, “Both my dad and mom didn’t go through high school. My mom dropped out a week before graduation and my dad dropped out at 16. When I got to high school, my parents like had no idea what to do now. I’m grateful for College Success because without it I would have been a military dog, I guess, because that’s what my dad did.” Many had never thought of college as a possibility for them. One shared, “My goal was originally just to get GED, work, come home, eat...now my goal is to take college classes and finish the BA. I want to have a nice life that my kids can be proud of...College Success taught me the actual meaning of life: there isn’t just one door to walk through, there are many doors. My college door had a Master lock. [Staff member] broke that lock for me.” Another explained, “Before coming here, I wanted to get my GED and work under the table. After College Success, I really do want to go to college and do want to finish the GED. I want to be better in life.” Finally, a fourth reflected that his experience is influencing others, “It’s the best program I have been in. I really want to go to college. I didn’t think about it before, but now I encourage others to do it.” Several of the focus group members described themselves as “broke college students,” a sign that they have internalized an identity as college-goers.

At least one student saw himself in college all along, but found that the CSP offered a new path for financing. He stated, “The majority of my goals stayed the same. The only thing that has changed is the way I pay for college. I was thinking about doing the National Guard,” but then he learned about
the FAFSA and financial aid. For him, as for the student quoted earlier, college provided an alternative path to military service.

The staff and the program diverted some students from illegal activities. One student described, “I told [staff member] I’m going to start [illegal activity] and she said ‘No, do what you need to do.’ It’s been seven months and I’m still not doing [this illegal activity].” Another shared, “I was [engaged in an illegal activity] and [staff member] called me out. She told me that I had a purpose. I didn’t see it, but she told me that’s not all to life. Now I can see something else.” That second student concluded that the program allowed him to see that there is “more to life than the streets,” even though “I said this program will never change me, but it did.”

Students in one focus group described their dream boards, which included a wife, kids, dogs, cars, house, money, the ability to travel, and things to look forward to. One was very specific, aiming to get a BA in postsecondary education or culinary arts, study abroad, and enroll in Temple’s foreign exchange program for teachers to become language teachers in Japan. Another shared that he wants to complete a master’s degree in computer programming. A third would like to be a psychologist.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT
Students were generally very positive about the program, but they offered a few constructive suggestions.

Several thought it would be useful to add math reinforcement to the in-class portion of the CSP. This would not only reinforce math skill, but also help improve their note-taking skills. They noted that the note-taking skills necessary for math are quite different than those needed for English language and composition.

Another suggestion was for more trained supportive services staff. A student described, “I would add a more dedicated life skills counselor because I started off with nine classmates and ended with two. That’s a testament to how difficult it is, but also that there is something to be done to keep people in the program—to have someone in the office to help you map out your life and conceptualize it to make it easier so you didn’t just quit. That would have been valuable and would have held on to more people. I saw people who wanted to do it, but they couldn’t.”

Overall, students thought that it may be challenging to get people to commit to the program. Some students thought that the approach of having staff recommend students, reaching out to those identified individuals, and inviting them into the program was a better than open enrollment because the program becomes a privilege. This would increase investment. Several students thought that anyone can succeed, but they have to be able to put in their own effort, which requires a firm commitment.

Some students who worked with the staff members who transitioned out of the program expressed more hesitation around their readiness for CCP. They thought that the program should be much longer, at least twelve months instead of six, or maybe meet for three hours per day instead of
one. The focus group that worked with the other instructor-coach team did not express these same concerns.

Finally, finding the balance where staff members set clear expectations and push students without seeming callous seems to be critical. Students also thought that it is important to have staff around who "know the ghetto." They do not necessarily have to be from the ghetto themselves, but they need to know what the young people have gone through.

Data

PYN administers a data system using Efforts to Outcomes (ETO), which all of the E³ Centers feed into as part of their general contract. This existed before the SIF grant and was largely designed to inform PYN in their grant-making role. Because of this, the ETO focuses more on measures that relate to performance-based pay and compliance than on program-critical elements. The data include student attendance, case notes and follow-ups, student outcomes, benchmarks, credentials, and placements. At each E³ Center, there are between five and seven people who enter data, but each Center does this differently. CSP staff also enters information into the ETO system. However, the E³ Center staff and the CSP staff rarely if ever use the ETO system. Even though E³ Center staff have access to the system and can see all entries and case notes, including for CSP students, most staff at the E³ Centers do not believe that they have access to the CSP data. CCP also does not have access, though they are able to share students’ registration status, attendance, and grades with the program staff. PYN pulls data from the ETO system monthly.

Most of the E³ Centers have their own, much more robust, internal data systems managed by a dedicated data person. For example, at one Center there is an expectation that staff enter at least two case notes per student per month, which they often exceed. The Centers also routinely conduct 12-month follow-up for all participants by calling them and using social media (Facebook, Twitter) to reach out to them. Staff members enter the follow-up information into the data system.

The Opportunity Works participants' profiles are pulled into the program within the system, which allows partners to track progress on touch points. The PYN leadership envision that there could be a “conspiracy of support” to share updates across partners and meet youth where they are. In practice, only the PYN leadership seems to use the data.

In addition to the ETO system, the CSP staff use their homegrown matrices for data tracking with each other. The CSP staff also use Excel to track attendance in order to monitor student engagement proactively rather than reactively. The content of these tools is not shared with E³ Center staff, though one E³ Center has tried to adopt similar matrix structures for their pipeline students (i.e., those who are not yet ready for the CSP). The CSP staff does not track program services in detail, though this has been noted as an area for future development.

PYN has used the ETO data to track the characteristics of youth who left the CSP and analyze patterns to improve retention.
On a larger scale, the PYN leadership would like to share data not only with the E³ Center providers and PYN staff but also across the entire Project U-Turn network. The goal is to undertake a strategic planning process to move Project U-Turn beyond high school completion and to create strategies for young adults to move onto postsecondary and career success though shared metrics that will inform the effort to scale the postsecondary bridging strategy.

**SCALE AND SUSTAINABILITY**

There are many promising avenues for scale and sustainability. Major concerns have been about meeting the target enrollment numbers and accommodating the structures of the E³ Centers’ programming. In addition, one E³ Center has had low enrollments. Bringing on an additional service-providing partner will potentially address these concerns and allow the PYN staff to test out the model in a different context. Efforts are underway to bring on a new partnership in early 2017.

Another important avenue of scale and sustainability relates to funding. The E³ Centers are funded by TANF and Department of Human Services, which constrains enrollment to youths ages 16 through 21. In addition, the TANF funding stream proved recently that it may be more volatile than anticipated, though the temporary crisis resulted in TANF serving as a more permanent source of support. Nonetheless, exploring alternative, sustainable funding streams through workforce systems, philanthropies, or other sources will be valuable to growing and sustaining this effort, particularly after the SIF funds end.

Expanding the postsecondary options for students is another key area for growth. If program enrollment could expand sufficiently, then CCP could hold special classes for CSP students. In addition, Harcum College is a potentially promising partner for postsecondary expansion, given their existing relationship with several of the E³ Centers. Other postsecondary institutions in the city may also provide viable opportunities for youth. Students and E³ Center staff noted Temple University in particular as a valuable potential partner.

Within the current program structure, the staff is rebuilding after 50-percent turnover (and then rapid turnover of a replacement staff member). Considering how to retain staff will be critical to maintain relationships and trust with partners and young people. In addition, as program designers are considering staffing, there may be the potential to create new roles, such as a social worker or life skills coach. The CSP staff and members of the program both noted this as an area for potential growth in the program model.

PYN's is currently working to further refine and codify the existing curriculum. They would like to collaborate with someone from CCP to develop an implementation guide or blueprint of what staff members are teaching youth “that they can leave to someone else to replicate.” They believe this will help with alignment and sustainability going forward.

The young people enrolled in the program had many insightful suggestions for programming. The PYN staff has expressed a desire to bring in more “youth voice,” and this would likely be a valuable
source of insight to identify areas for future development. Increased youth buy-in may also help with program retention.

There has been some notable spillover from the Opportunity Works effort already. The E^3 Centers are looking at lessons from Opportunity Works and the CSP to improve their transition services. All of the E^3 Centers have college transitions staff, and some have tried college prep classes in the past. These classes have achieved varying levels of success, primarily because staff capacity has been an ongoing challenge. Thus, the E^3 Centers were glad to see that the postsecondary bridging component could function well through this demonstration. They generally took the CSP experience as a learning opportunity for the future. A staff member at one E^3 Center appreciated the opportunity to “create a pathway for the next level after the GED.” For students, lessons such as study skills and time management that are taught in the E^3 Center are reinforced in the CSP, which the E^3 Center staff sees as a win-win. At least one Center has committed to find a similar opportunity for youth to gain college exposure in the case that CSP is at some point no longer available in the future. Another example of program spillover is that SDP has begun to emphasize postsecondary bridging for their accelerated programs.  

Eventually, PYN would like the re-engagement Center to be equally oriented toward HSE as well as SDP accelerated diploma programs. Success in the postsecondary bridging effort may facilitate this change.

Lessons

Several important lessons have emerged from this effort, particularly around communication, integration, and staffing.

Communication has been fairly strong in many places, but there are some opportunities for improvement flagged by staff. Communication begins with inviting the right people to the planning table, which may be partners at the leadership and direct service levels, other stakeholders, and possibly young people themselves. It also relates to setting expectations, including the nature of the program, how it will fit within existing structures, and how staff will coordinate to create supportive scaffolding for youth. Expectations need to be clear to program staff, partners, and participants. Finally, communication relates to tracking and follow-up. Tracking may include information-sharing around changes in young people’s situations or program structures. This can be through regular meetings, reports, or data system information-sharing. The “conspiracy of support” envisioned by PYN cannot manifest unless the partners achieve consistent communication and meaningful data-sharing. The line-level staff from at least one E^3 Center has been particularly concerned about communication. Not only would the appropriate incorporation of these staff into discussions about planning,

---

14 On the other hand, this may muddle the impacts of the postsecondary focus of the Opportunity Works effort, since the comparison group for the impact evaluation is largely composed of SDP students.
expectation-setting, tracking, and follow-up alleviate some of these concerns, but perhaps staff would benefit from an opportunity to talk with each other across Centers about their CSP experiences.

PYN wants to do a better job of integrating the CSP with the direct service work, which is likely an important element of program success. This may relate to the previous point about communication. Finding a strong synergy between the resources offered by the HSE provider and the CSP can create particularly strong support systems for youth. Misalignment may cause confusion and make it harder for students to keep up with their efforts to complete their secondary credential while engaging in college-level work. It may also wear down partnerships and undermine co-ownership of the effort, which makes scale and sustainability more difficult. Strong buy-in among partner leadership is critical for successful integration and co-design.

Finding program staff members who set high expectations, understand young people’s backgrounds, and demonstrate that they care seem to have been critical to CSP success. In addition, it has been shown that the program is smoother when Opportunity Works staff members work well with each other and undertake creative program design and problem solving as a team. This ensures that young people in the program have similar experiences and that the program continues to evolve thoughtfully and responsively. Other key characteristics identified for staff include an ability to embrace limitations, open-mindedness, good communication and follow-up with partners, and an ability to develop and/or utilize functional tracking systems. For the program as a whole, maintaining a reasonable staff-to-student ratio will be important to be able to offer a similar level of services and decrease the chance of staff burn-out.
# Appendix: Philadelphia Logic Model

## Inputs
- Partners: PYN, E³ Centers (Congress, IEVS, PHMC, & CIS), CCP (Inv. of Access & Community Engagement), JFF, Aspen Institute, Urban Institute
- TA & PD from JFF & Aspen
- Data from evaluation
- E³ Center programs
- CCP Dual-Enrollment Program & ACE Program (summer)
- CCP space
- ETO data system
- Back on Track model
- Funding: SIF grant & local match
- Youth from enriched prep phase (possibly from other sources in future)
- Existing PYN staff
- Community supportive service providers (Plan: Caring adults & mentors)

## Implementation Activities
- **Functional Activities**
  - PYN established data-sharing agreements & MOUs with partners
  - PYN & partners participate in Project U-Turn
  - PYN & partners develop early warning tools & assessment procedures
  - PYN hires & manages college success coaches, instructors, & project manager
  - OWI staff & partners input data to & extract from ETO & other internal data systems
  - PYN & partners attend regular stakeholder mtgs (including w/ E³ directors) & JFF/Aspen mtgs
  - PYN engages in program design, review, & TA from JFF coach
  - PYN raises match funds, budgeting, & finances
  - PYN & partners engage in capacity-building projects & professional development
  - PYN plans for scale & other development
  - PYN does site visits at E³ Centers & CCP
  - PYN & partners engage with Urban evaluation
  - Plan: PYN receives data from CCP
- **Programmatic Activities**
  - OW staff do outreach & recruit E³ members, conduct orientation
  - College success instructor gives academic class to students (2/week)
  - College success coaches give cognitive workshop to students (2/week), offer individualized coaching to youth during coursework, tutor, engage with faculty
  - Coaches & instructors individually (visually) advise & case manage students, informed by data; refer to supportive services; remediate barriers
  - Students continue E³ membership as needed (participation in GED, empowerment, job readiness, & course attendance)
  - Students go on campus visits (CCP, St. Joe's, Thomas Jefferson) & attend alumni panels
  - Students do practice tests for Accuplacer
  - Students enroll in coursework at CCP - may be dual-enrolled or matriculated
  - PYN hosts milestone events at CCP (3-4/semester)
  - Students are incentivized through tickets

## Bridging Outputs
- **Student-Level**
  - Students develop clear, realistic, & detailed post-secondary & career plan
  - Students complete homework
  - Students have satisfactory academic progress & acceptable attendance in courses

- **Short-Term Outcomes**
  - Student Awareness/Agency Outcomes
    - Students have communication skills that are appropriate to post-secondary
    - Students receive classes as an emotionally safe space
    - Students perceive themselves as potential college students
    - Students develop an understanding of how they learn best
    - Students exhibit behaviors such as agency, persistence, & time management
  - Support Systems
    - Students have (or can identify) supportive peers & adults
    - Students can construct a supportive network
    - Students identify & rely on professional staff in post-secondary
  - Academic Preparation
    - Students have strategies to succeed academically & seek support
    - Students can ask for help & seek support
    - Students have time management & planning skills (academic & life coordination)
    - Students can plan effectively
  - College/Career
    - Students have a GED
    - Students feel like they belong in a post-secondary setting
    - Students matriculate at a post-secondary institution
    - Students take interest in a program of study
  - Subject Knowledge
    - Students are intellectually engaged with their subject matter

- **Medium-Long-Term Outcomes**
  - Students can generalize skills from interventions to other aspects of life
  - Students can successfully identify & access support services - in the college, public social services, or other general services
  - Students are capable of navigating post-secondary & employment
  - Students have positive views of post-secondary education & convey those to their children; see post-secondary as valuable to their children
  - Students attain a post-secondary credential
  - Post-secondary increases employability, including soft skills
  - Students utilize post-secondary learning in their career
  - Students are employed in well-paying jobs of choice
  - Students have good balance between family, employment, & school

Contextual factors: E³ Center performance, GED testing standards, willingness of CCP faculty to help, CCP's support & structure, state budget situation/availability of public funds, youth's personal barriers, availability of course sections at CCP, PYN staff turnover, PYN's dual relationship as a funder, local politics & policies, TANF funding (affect E³ Centers), WIOA funding, seasonal/calendar changes (holidays, etc.)
San Francisco is implementing the enriched preparation component of the Back on Track Model for their Opportunity Works programming. The Opportunity Works program in San Francisco works with out-of-school, largely justice-involved, Latino and African American youth across the Bay Area. The program offers significant enriched preparation activities for these youth to get them back in school, help them obtain their General Educational Diploma (GED), move them away from their criminal past, and clear their records to achieve success in the future. The program supports these activities by working closely with an education partner, the Five Keys Charter School, also referred to here as Five Keys, to provide classroom activities and help students obtain their high school credential. They also work with several other partners in the community to ensure that participants receive supports to help them escape poverty and move past a justice-involved life. Funding is supplied from a variety of sources, including the City of San Francisco, the California Department of Children Youth and Families contracts, and private industry entities including Google.

There are a few different paths for program participants. A significant percentage of participants are justice-involved and are first identified while in custody at the local county jail. Staff often meet with youth during their 72-hour holding period and introduce them to the program. Other youth remain in custody for a longer period of time before they are either identified by custody staff, or custody staff learns that they were previously involved with the Bay Area Community Resources (BACR). Other youth without a high school diploma or GED are identified by the sheriff’s department and referred to the Opportunity Works program. These transition-aged youth receive schooling while in custody through a Five Keys program to help them obtain their high school credential. Five Keys also creates a re-entry plan to provide direct referrals to support services in the community. In addition, they coordinate with other service providers including case managers, therapists, counselors and the student/participant themselves. This creates a more successful outcome for youth while transitioning out of custody and re-entering the community.
Many other participants in the Opportunity Works program do not have criminal backgrounds but lack a high school credential. They are recruited through several of the organizations that comprise the Opportunity Works initiative, described below. They come to the main BACR San Francisco site, Communities in Harmony Advocating for Learning and Kids (CHALK) building, and meet with a case manager who conducts an intake and orients them to the program in order to gauge their interest and see if they are a right fit.

Once these students complete an intake, they are enrolled into Five Keys Charter School. They also work with a case manager to provide support services or refer them to the various partners in the collaborative that can assist them with services like tattoo removal, substance abuse counseling, immigration assistance, housing, etc. Some participants are also referred to vocational training through partners in this collaborative, in fields such as construction.

Context

The program primarily operates in the Bay Area, specifically San Francisco and Oakland. While it's hard to fully gauge the number of opportunity youth in San Francisco, it is believed to be close to 500. CHALK serves 250 people a year, and while most are not Opportunity Works participants, a good portion can be considered opportunity youth.

One of the main challenges in the Bay Area is the lack of affordable housing. Due to the recent tech boom and lack of available land, housing prices have skyrocketed in San Francisco, making it extremely difficult for low-income individuals to find affordable places to live. Other problems include the availability of affordable childcare—an issue raised by youth participants. Further, while the city of San Francisco has a relatively affordable and accessible public transportation system, many youth cannot safely get to services or school across San Francisco due to the higher rates of crime in some areas.

Another barrier revolves around the mental health issues many participants face. Staff at the San Francisco sheriff’s department noted that there have been young people who have never been diagnosed with mental health barriers prior to entering custody, and the services they need are beyond what the Opportunity Works program can provide for them. For example, when doing intake custody staff found a couple of potential participants they thought were a good match for Opportunity Works, but once the youth arrived at the facility, they were diagnosed with a severe mental illness and had to be housed in a medical unit, precluding them from joining the program and attending Five Keys classes. Additionally, many youth face violence in their lives and their neighborhoods, contributing to traumatic experiences that staff find difficult to handle. These have been major barriers for enrollment into the program.

A major asset sustaining this initiative is the strong buy-in and support from the local community. The City of San Francisco has supported this initiative strongly through funding and political support and seems poised to continue this initiative after the SIF funding ends. Additionally, there is strong
Support from the Mission District and the variety of partners that comprise the collaborative. There has been a lot of work among the partners to develop a service continuum within the Mission District to successfully provide assistance to the Latino community which will be described in fuller detail below. Further, there is support from the local business community, including Google, which has provided $500,000 over three years to support the program.

**Partners**

**Backbone: Bay Area Community Resources (BACR)**

BACR, founded in 1976, delivers intensive direct services to approximately 33,000 children, youth, and adults annually in the seven counties that comprise the Bay Area of San Francisco. Through their subsidiary, CHALK, they provide the main coordinating functions for this initiative and also host most of the case managers and much of the educational training services provided to participants. BACR works closely with Five Keys Charter School whose instructors provide the GED instruction and academic planning for participants. As the main provider of overall services in the Opportunity Works collaborative, they are the primary recruiter and help identify youth throughout the community who would be a good fit for the program. They also provide education-focused case management, academic support, job readiness training, paid work experience, career coaching, enrollment in education pathways, and job placement and retention to approximately 250 people per year.

**Collective Impact Effort: Roadmap to Peace (RTP)**

The Opportunity Works initiative is part of Roadmap to Peace (RTP), a larger initiative that began in San Francisco two years before Opportunity Works started. As described by staff at the Instituto Familiar de la Raza (IFR), the RTP initiative was the first collective impact effort funded in San Francisco that sought to bring together various partners from within the Latino community. Within the RTP model, each partner organization works together to improve the lives of all participants within the initiative. The Instituto Familiar de la Raza (IFR) serves as the backbone organization for the RTP. The initiative brings these partners a common vision for sharing information, collecting data for shared measurement, communication, and a core staff who works together. According to staff, they were implementing a collective impact model before they knew what collective impact was.

There is a strong history of collaboration between most nonprofits that serve Latino youth in the Mission District of the Bay Area. The RTP is mainly comprised of organizations that had previously been working together in an informal manner and some new organizations that were invited to participate. RTP started organically, whereas most collective impact models are top down and supported by the government at the city or county level. RTP was built through communication through town halls and community meetings to imagine from a community perspective what collective impact would look like.
Collective Impact Effort: Black to the Future

The main services offered through the Opportunity Works program are provided through the RTP initiative. However, the RTP grant only focuses on Latino youth.

As a result, African American youth who are part of the Opportunity Works program are not considered to be part of the RTP initiative, and they are also not eligible to receive some of the supports provided to Latino youth. As a result, the city is funding a separate but similar program, known as Black to the Future. This initiative—although not funded by Jobs For the Future—will carry out many of the same responsibilities as the Opportunity Works programming and the RTP but will have different organizations leading it. To ensure greater success for Black to the Future, the organizers have a full year to develop partnerships and secure services before they begin enrolling participants. This should increase their ability to better serve African American youth in their community.

Programming Partner: Instituto Familiar de la Raza (IFR)

The primary backbone organization for the RTP and a key programming partner for the Opportunity Works program is IFR, which was founded in 1978 as the first integrated community-based mental health clinic in San Francisco. They currently operate six programs for children, youth, adults, and families, and serve over 3,500 people a year, primarily in the Mission District in San Francisco. As the main backbone organization for the RTP, they bring together the various partners that provide support for the Opportunity Works programming. While few participants actually receive services directly through IFR, they do provide some mental health support services.

Programming Partner: Five Keys Charter school

Originally established in 2003 by the San Francisco Sheriff’s Department as the first charter school in the nation to operate inside of a county jail, today Five Keys is a charter management (nonprofit) corporation that operates three public charter schools within the San Francisco Sheriff's Department, one in the Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department and 26 community satellite campuses in partnership with the re-entry and workforce development community in San Francisco and Los Angeles.

Additionally, through contracts with the San Francisco Mayor’s office of Economic and Workforce Development, Five Keys coordinates the education needs of the San Francisco Workforce Development community. Through a contract with the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department, Five Keys provides all the career, technical, educational, and life skills programs for inmates in the Los Angeles county jails15 (Five Keys Charter “About Us”). They also provide these services to community members attempting to obtain their GED. They attempt to maintain a low student-teacher ratio and have successfully helped hundreds of recipients receive their GED in past years. For this Opportunity

15 From the “About Us” section of the Five Keys Charter School webpage: http://www.fivekeyscharter.org/about
Works initiative, Five Keys is the main provider of educational services. They will also note participants who come into their schools who could be referred to CHALK for services.

**Programming Partner: San Francisco Sheriff’s Department**

The sheriff’s department runs the local county jail and attempts to identify youth to see if they lack a high school credential and would be a good fit for this initiative. Youth receive educational services from Five Keys Charter School, and CHALK case managers advocate for youth in custody, provide supports for them once they are released, and help connect them to other support services.

**Other Organizations**

Other critical partners include the Central American Resource Center who works primarily with Latino youth providing services such as tattoo removal, assistance in escaping violence, and immigration services. Horizons are another organization that provides counseling to youth who have faced past substance abuse issues. The Mission Neighborhood Health Center provides health services to participants and the Mission Neighborhood Centers provides parenting support to young fathers. Another service provider, Homies Organizing the Mission to Empower the Youth, helps provide services to bolster youth development and violence prevention.

**Nature of Partnerships**

The partners in this initiative seem to have a very strong relationship. The IFR emphasized that when RTP began, Memorandums of Understanding were an important part of the collaborative approach to establish policies and procedures. They are working together to ensure that they’re creating a process that everyone can buy into.

RTP has representation from the community in varying degrees. They cross train case managers and staff across the partners to ensure that a similar set of services is available to the participants in the RTP initiative (including the Opportunity Works program youth), and services are provided in a similar fashion. IFR staff mentioned that they are still evolving and refining, but trying to document what is the “RTP way” so that it can be transferred across the partners. Partners are working to create a standard RTP trajectory for how participants will experience the initiative, and they are working on building RTP standards of care because every young person should have similar touch points within the RTP partnerships.

Communication is critical to the intervention in San Francisco in part because of the longstanding relationships between the partners and the fact that the RTP was developed prior to the onset of the Opportunity Works program. Partners have mentioned that they are constantly in communication with each other to facilitate the recruitment of potential participants and the provision of services and they speak weekly with staff at CHALK. For example, if someone goes through the county jail, the custody case manager can check that person’s potential eligibility for the program and then call up the main program service coordinator to begin the enrollment process. Partners at various service
organizations have very close personal relationships as well as work relationships allowing for many simultaneous patterns of communication, some of which are more formalized than others.

There haven't been too many challenges as all of these organizations have history in the Mission District of at least 20 years. Both the Mission Neighborhood Centers and Mission Neighborhood Health Center have operated for over 30 years. While these organizations were familiar with each other, RTP’s inception was the first time they all convened to provide services on-demand and make an impact with respect to providing wraparound services. With any startup effort there are some challenges, but the familiarity among partners has eased the process. In addition, each organization has had the same goals for the youth they are serving and a similar target population. The only communication challenge discussed during the October site visit was that the pre-planning phase for implementing this initiative could have been longer, which is something that the Black to the Future initiative seems to be taking into consideration before they begin implementing their program.

Program Design

Difference from Existing Programming

RTP and the collective impact model that it engendered are entirely new initiatives for San Francisco that were spurred by the high levels of gang violence in the city a few years ago. The goal of the intervention is to capitalize on a sense of community. RTP staff is developing a collaborative case management system in a shared database where different providers have real-time access to information on each young person.

As part of the RTP initiative, Opportunity Works fills a specific gap in targeting opportunity youth and providing them with a variety of supports to assist them in reintegrating post custody or reconnecting to educational and employment services. One of the Five Keys instructors noted that prior to the Opportunity Works services, many of her students were in programs that just did not work for them—a theme highlighted by the students in the focus group. Many previously went to a continuation high school which did not support or tailor services to them directly. Through case management services provided with Opportunity Works funding and supported by the Five Keys school curriculum, the youth appear to be more engaged and likely to succeed.

While the Opportunity Works program complements much of what RTP already does, it provides additional support beyond that of the RTP. For example, Opportunity Works funds the additional academic supports provided to participants as they seek to enroll in further education, once they have completed their high school credential. The vocational training some participants receive is also funded entirely by Opportunity Works and is not available to regular RTP participants. Opportunity Works participants also benefit from more intensive case management than their RTP colleagues, as four case managers are funded through Opportunity Works.
It should also be noted that African American participants in the Opportunity Works program do not have access to as many supportive services as Hispanic participants. This is due to the fact that many of the partners who comprise both the RTP initiative and that of the Opportunity Works collaborative are not able to serve African Americans. However, work is being conducted through other initiatives, including the Black to the Future program, to link participants to similar support services in the coming years.

**Back on Track**

The model employed by San Francisco aligns with phase one of the Back on Track Model—enriched preparation. The partners view the Back on Track model as being completely within the bounds of the work they have been doing the past few years under the RTP initiative. They see the Back on Track model as trying to foster a system in which the youth are being engaged early on and have services provided to get them on the right path. For partners, the Back on Track Model is exactly what the RTP initiative and now the Opportunity Works program has aimed to do, and they saw SIF funding as a complement to what they were already doing. As a result, the partners were very pleased with the availability of the SIF funding. As one leadership partner noted, "When we look at it, it's a natural fit for all of these programs to come together. This is a model in getting them all together, getting them to work, [having] systems in place; it was a natural fit to have all of these [organizations] come together on one thing. Staff has known each other for years and work together. This was a long time coming, but should have been here years ago."

**Goals**

The goals for the youth as expressed by the partners tend to revolve around similar themes such as helping them obtain a high school credential, preparing them for an independent lifestyle, connecting them to further education or vocational training, providing safe passage for a life away from violence and gang activities, and linking them to supportive services to ensure that they have wraparound services in their life. Staff would like to see participants in custody be released from jail, clean up their records, and attain stable employment. Partners would like parenting participants to reconnect with their children.

A Five Keys instructor noted that goals will differ for participants based on where they came into the program, but one goal is to see students in school or working towards a long-term, stable career that will provide them with more options.

As expressed by some partners, the goal of this collaborative is not only to help the youth, but also to make it a national model that can be replicated across the country. Many felt very positively about this program and believed that it could be implemented elsewhere.
Development Process

The SIF project was announced about a year and a half after the RTP initiative began, and a grant writer for the BACR noticed the similarities in the Opportunity Works project and that of the RTP. The partners in the RTP believed that the Back on Track model would easily complement the work they were doing through the RTP initiative. Partners explained that they found the process of applying for SIF funding easier than the RTP funding because the infrastructure and partners were already in place.

The partners selected for the Opportunity Works program were determined from the same list of partners used in the development of the RTP initiative. As described by a backbone staff member, "Everybody knew each other and kind of worked together informally through referrals and sharing information [prior to the beginning of the RTP initiative]. This was the first time we [were] doing everything so collaboratively. Each organization has committed to working in a network with resources to ensure a collective impact."

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Originally the development of the service model for the Opportunity Works program was transferred from the RTP model. The collaborative decided to use their preexisting curriculums as well. This included the work of the Five Keys Charter School, the partners who provide the supportive services, and CHALK. Additional portions of the curriculum that are only part of the Opportunity Works program include vocational training and postsecondary bridging, which were developed by the Opportunity Works collaborative and have been clarified as the program has progressed.

Staffing

There are currently 14 staff members for the San Francisco Opportunity Works program who are partially funded by SIF grant funds. They include the project director, the project manager, four case managers, two academic/career coaches, one administrative support personnel, a program accountant, a workshop coordinator, a career pathways manager, a youth outreach worker, and one AmeriCorps employee. It is important to note that of these 14 positions, only the AmeriCorps position is fully funded by the SIF grant (however only for the first year of the program’s operation). The other personnel have parts of their salaries covered by other grants and contracts.

Funding Sources

The total budget for the Opportunity Works programming is $1.08 million. Funding for the Opportunity Works match comes from several sources. In addition to the funds provided through the SIF grant, CHALK has been able to leverage funds through the California Department of Children Youth and Families contracts, the city of San Francisco, state workforce funds, and some small foundation support. Additional funding support is provided by Google, which has provided $500,000 over three years for this program to support some of the vocational training provided through this initiative. The program is also able to leverage services through the partners in the collaborative
because they provide many of the supportive services for this program without receiving additional funding.

Because the Opportunity Works initiative is part of the larger RTP initiative operated by these partners, much of the funding that supports the RTP program also helps fund the Opportunity Works program. For example, the collaborative has received $3 million for the RTP initiative through the Department of Children Youth and Families. IFR has been able to use some of these funds to help support Opportunity Works programming. Additional funding for the supportive services received by the participants comes from a variety of different sources, including city and state funds, raised funds from private donors, and some organizations’ contracts. The city of San Francisco is also putting out an RFP which lasts from 2018–2023 to help sustain the work they are doing and help to support the collaborative effort.

Timing

The program began enrolling participants in classes in mid-2015 through the Five Keys Charter School. Participants enroll on a rolling basis and there are no cohorts. Students can begin services as soon as intake is completed.

Students’ completion of the program depends on their track and whether or not they are in custody. Some participants can complete their high school credential and be linked to further employment, education, or training outside of the Opportunity Works program in as little as 6 months, while other participants may take up to 18 months. Much of this depends on how many credits they need to complete their high school credential and their commitment to attending the educational services provided by Five Keys. Additionally, some participants will be put back into custody after being released which can slow down their ability to obtain services and complete their credential. On average, staff believes it takes 12 months for someone to finish the program.

In addition to the expansion of program participants to include African Americans, not just Latinos, there has been a change in the way services have been delivered. The program initially thought they would work with participants in high school to assist them in getting their diploma, in addition to working with students through the Five Keys Charter School. Since mid-2016 only Five Keys has been certified as a vendor able to provide educational services for the program. CHALK has therefore stopped trying to work with local high schools in the area and is instead only focusing on disconnected participants who are 17 to 24 years-old.

Participants

Characteristics of Participants

According to the data received from San Francisco, approximately three-quarters (76 percent) of participants are Latino, while the rest are African American. The majority of youth (80 percent) are
male (because initially the program only recruited men), and 20 percent are female. The median age at program entry is 20, and the program serves youth from the ages of 16 to 24. Most of the youth (60 percent) are not on probation, while the rest either are on probation or have their status pending. Additionally, the majority of the youth participants (80 percent) are not current or former foster youth, and many are parents (68 percent).

During the site visit, it was clear that participants often have issues with mental health, substance abuse, and trauma that went unmet by traditional service providers.

**Target Population**

Initially the program targeted only Latino males ages 16 through 24, students who are out of school, and those with past gang or justice-involvement (although this is not a perquisite for program inclusion). In spring of 2016, the program started enrolling 17 to 24 year-olds, with 50 percent being Latino and 50 percent being African American. Of the Latinos, 80 percent will be male and 20 percent will be female, while of the African Americans, 80 percent will be male and 20 percent will be female. The expansion to serving African Americans and women is due in large part to the inability to get other partners in place to actually provide educational services to participants.

**Recruitment and Admission**

Recruitment differs based on the participant's entry point, but generally comes through two different sources. The first source is through the sheriff's department in the San Francisco county jail when a potential participant is arrested or in custody. During processing, students go through a needs assessment and are screened for their demographics and education status. If the participant is a good fit for this collaborative, the Assistant Director of Reentry and Operations at the county jail contacts staff at CHALK. A CHALK staff member comes to the jail and does intake, where they assess the potential participant’s eligibility and interest in obtaining a high school credential. If they do meet the requirements, they will be admitted into the program.

Many other participants are recruited through the various organizations in the Opportunity Works initiative. They also meet with CHALK case managers who assess their interest and eligibility. They also take a Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) and other needs assessments around housing, transportation, and readiness to obtain a job and attend further schooling—specifically the General Assessment of Instructional Needs (GAIN).

These tests are meant to gauge participants' level of need and target services accordingly, not to screen or exclude participants. For example, the participant's score on the TABE test will help inform their Five Keys instructor of the level of assistance needed to help that student obtain a high school credential. If participants are willing and able to engage in the Opportunity Works program and express a strong interest in completing the services provided to them, they are enrolled.

At this point the program has not had any issues with excess demand or waitlists and has had to loosen their enrollment requirements to boost admission.
Attrition

Retention is largely conducted through the SIF-funded case managers at CHALK who provide supports to participants as they go through the program. Case managers appear to be willing to provide a lot of their own personal time to assist the students, including giving them rides, speaking with them, and providing overall counseling as a means of keeping them in the program. Case managers often go above and beyond job requirements to create a supportive environment for participating youth.

Some participants face unexpected life events that keep them from completing the program, like needing child care or caretaking responsibilities. For the GED program, participants must come to class at least once over a period of two weeks. If they do not attend during that time period, they are dropped from the program. Participants can always re-enroll. Staff believes that fewer than 20 percent of program participants have dropped out thus far, and the continual support provided by the case managers and other support staff has been successful in keeping attrition at a low rate.

Program Experience

Education and Training Programming

While the typical week for an Opportunity Works participant may vary by person, participants receiving Five Keys services at the main CHALK office check in about twice a week. Instructors explain that participants turn in work samples every 10 days, but are encouraged to come in twice a week to discuss their progress and goals. In the beginning, students need to get their transcripts and be tested in reading and math. Students work to raise their test scores and study for the GED test. At the Five Keys sites, most of the students will come in a couple times a week for a few hours, or about six to eight hours each week until they get their high school credential. Their instruction will differ based on how far they have progressed in obtaining their degree. As they get closer to completion, more instruction will be hands-off, with the instructor helping them fill in the gaps to get their credential. If they started at a lower level, the instruction will be more hands-on and more intensive. Sometimes the instructor will bring the students together in the class to do a shared lesson that can apply to all, but generally, much of the instruction is one-on-one, with many taking advantage of the computers available at Five Keys classrooms.

While students are receiving the Five Keys instruction, they usually meet weekly with the CHALK case manager to assist them in receiving services, either through CHALK or through one of the partners. At CHALK, participants receive incentives for attending classes and financial support for transportation.

While receiving their high school credential through CHALK, some participants also receive vocational training from other partners in fields such as construction. When participants complete their high school credential, they are supported by case managers in entering employment or helping
them apply for college. Case managers help conduct mock interviews and reach out to prospective employers. Students can also receive nine credits at the San Francisco State University through critical thinking classes which can count towards their college degree if they seek to receive a degree there.

Services differ for participants who are in custody when they enter the program. While in custody, participants receive classes from a Five Keys instructor one to two times a week, and also do some independent study. Five Keys classes are offered in a particular residential pod that houses opportunity youth.

Success and completion differ depending on the participant but generally involve obtaining a high school credential, being linked to either employment or a training program, clearing or overcoming one’s previous criminal record, and working to ensure safe passage back into the community. Some participants receive additional vocational training while in the program while others receive continual support from CHALK case managers to either obtain a job or continue to higher education at a local university such as San Francisco State.

Support Services

CHALK and their partners offer a variety of support services. CHALK case managers often refer participants to their supports and provide a warm handoff. Staff at both CHALK and partner organizations described the referral process as seamless.

Horizons provides individual and group counseling for those facing substance abuse, as well as programs addressing gender-specific violence against women and girls. The Central American Resource Center works with Latino youth to help with tattoo removal (a critical service for many previously involved in gang-related activity), as well as immigration and legal services. They also work with youth to reduce recidivism and develop individual service plans for reentry. The Mission Neighborhood Health Center provides medical services to participants, especially if they lack insurance. The Mission Neighborhood Centers also provide fatherhood support and programs for young fathers. Homies Organizing the Mission to Empower the Youth provides safe passage for participants attempting to exit the gang lifestyle through street-level intervention and prevention through universal contacts during late night outreach, daily canvassing of schools and neighborhood hotspots to defuse potentially violent situations, and make referrals to other support services. IFR provides supportive services for those with mental health issues. Finally, the Five Keys Charter School provides in-custody case management for Opportunity Works participants who are in custody when they enter the program.

Participants can access a variety of supportive services through CHALK itself, including financial literacy courses, court advocacy support, barrier removal, and life skills training. Participants also receive financial support when they meet certain program milestones, which provide a morale boost to many participants. For example, participants can receive $100 when they first enroll in the program, an additional $300 for every quarter they are in the program, and $600 for completing vocational training. A participant can receive up to $1,900 in financial support.
One challenge staff highlight is the need for affordable housing for participants. However, overall, CHALK’s relationship with these partner organizations has been a very strong component of this initiative, including the SIF-funding for finance case managers at the Central American Resource Center, Horizons, and Five Keys.

**Participant Path through the Program**

There are two main paths for participants in the program. The first path is for a participant who enters the program while in custody at the San Francisco County jail. If that person is identified as a potential program participant while in holding at the jail and meets the criteria for program entry, they will receive instruction in jail at least once a week to help them obtain their high school credential and be housed with other youth taking Five Keys classes. Participants will also meet weekly with the in-custody case managers to talk about current education or any barrier around education, parenting, or legal issues that they need to resolve. In-custody case managers can help participants with some of those issues, as well as moving them to different housing within the jail. For participants with a release date in 30 days, the in-custody case manager will discuss a re-entry plan with them and CHALK, which includes education, employment, training, parenting classes, court fines, probation commitments, etc. Once participants leave custody, they receive the same services as out-of-custody participants, including educational services at a Five Keys Charter School within the city and meeting with the CHALK case managers on a weekly basis.

The other path is for participants who enter the program without being in custody. Many of these participants are referred to the CHALK headquarters by local service providers. They go to the main CHALK headquarters for intake, which identifies their education levels and needs and gauges their ability to succeed in the program. Participants are assigned a CHALK case manager, and receive instruction in obtaining their high school credential at the CHALK headquarters by a Five Keys instructor.

**Participants’ Perspectives**

One student focus group informed the research in San Francisco, consisting of both males and females who received instruction at the CHALK office through the Five Keys Charter Program. All of the participants were either African American or Latino.

The participants are obtaining their high school credential with the help of the Five Keys Charter School. Some expressed a desire for additional education, with one noting her desire for additional education and to take on a job supporting people like herself by stating, “I actually want to go to college—and I didn’t want to do that before—and become a case manager.” Three students were also receiving a construction training certificate through a CHALK-run initiative in Oakland. The male participants seemed to be more interested than the female participants in receiving vocational training in addition to obtaining their high school credential.
The focus group participants were happy with the services they received. One said, "CHALK tries to work with you. If you need safe passage, they’ll bring you a van. They will pick you up and safely drop you off, or if you can't come because of [your] schedule, they'll work with your schedule." Another student appreciated the full spectrum of services provided, saying, “This is the first program I’ve been in like this. All the other ones focus on one thing. This focuses on damn near everything you need.”

All the focus group participants would recommend the program to their peers, and many had already done so. The students appeared to be happy that they had a strong voice in guiding the services they received, with one noting, “It’s more youth-led, youth voices. Other organizations have adults set up to be the main person, even the youth are supervisors It’s youth led. Other organizations don’t know how to [do] that. It’s always an adult being the top person. But here, we’re all youth and on top.”

When asked to describe the program, students described it as a safe place where they could feel comfortable with other people, including people from different neighborhoods and backgrounds.

Overall, the students had very positive experiences in the program. When asked what could be done to improve the program, one student mentioned she would like a bigger space to receive her education. Currently the Five Keys program for Opportunity Works participants is located in one room at the CHALK office. A few other students wished that they could receive additional housing support through the program but understood some of the organizations’ constraints. However, almost every participant really enjoyed the program.

Data

The internal data system utilized by the RTP is the Contract Management System (CMS). This system captures some of the participants in the Opportunity Works programming. CMS only captures Latino participants and not African Americans, so the collaborative is building a database through Salesforce to track black participants. However, since it is currently being developed, their manager of supportive services, retention and case management has to manually track the services provided to African Americans as well as some of the services not captured through the CMS system, such as supportive services provided to participants, scores on several intake assessments, and employment status. According to staff, CMS is good for capturing information on baseline demographics, program involvement, activity participation, and services received. However, it is not great at capturing specific gains or outcomes which is critical in understanding the efficacy of the program.

In terms of data coordination, Five Keys has added training around the data system so any participants enrolled in Opportunity Works can have their profile accessed by key partners. For example, partners can access real-time information about where a student is housed, what courses they are taking, and other services they’ve received. This has helped with providing court advocacy.

The CMS system was developed in tandem with the entire RTP initiative over the past few years. However, the data collection efforts for the Opportunity Works program specifically are still on-going.
At present, there is an RTP team looking at data consistency to improve the data collection efforts that are being undertaken across the RTP Initiative.

The sheriff’s department and the in-custody case manager use the data they collect from recently processed youth to see if they are eligible for Opportunity Works programming.

**Scale and Sustainability**

The Opportunity Works program easily fits within the service model of the city of San Francisco. The Opportunity Works target population represents a small percentage of the population served through the RTP initiative and the partners that comprise it. For example, CHALK serves 250 participants annually, and Opportunity Works at present represents less than one-fifth of that population. Other partners, such as Horizons, work with over 5,000 people a year, of which Opportunity Works are a small part of the caseload. Partners have been able to develop and implement this program, but found the caseloads to be too small in the beginning, in part due to the more stringent eligibility requirements for the Opportunity Works program.

With the Opportunity-Works-funded portion of the collective impact project ending in 2018, staff mentioned that the City of San Francisco is putting out an RFP that provides a five-year funding stream. This could sustain the work of the RTP from 2018 through 2023. Staff noted that they have a lot of support from DCYS staff and the other supporters of this initiative, so they believe they are in good standing to receive the award. Because they were the first collective impact effort that the city has funded, they have been approached by the city to apply. However, it is not clear at this point how or if the additional services funded by the Opportunity Works program, including additional case management and postsecondary bridging, will continue without the Opportunity Works funds. This will become clearer when the funding is more clearly delineated in the coming year.

The RTP collaborative is working on a new component known as “RTP warriors.” The goal is to involve more youth in leadership roles with respect to outreach and safe passage. The warriors will get involved in the core RTP services but will also receive instruction in political education and civic engagement. They will attend candidate’s nights for the Board of Education and will help lead the program once they’ve graduated and transitioned to active alumni. They are developing an orientation plan so every youth enrolled in RTP will meet the warriors who will help guide the participants through the program and hopefully create a pipeline for more warriors and advocates to develop a diverse support network within the RTP.

One of the big opportunities for continuing this program, and even potentially scaling it up, is the potential capacity for partners to serve this population. At present, the Opportunity Works initiative is just one part of the RTP initiative and represents a relatively small part of the portfolio of programs run by the partners in this collaborative. As discussed above, the partners that comprise this initiative serve several thousand young people annually, with Opportunity Works participants representing less than 1 percent for some of them. Opportunity Works funding helps support the current work of many
of these partners and funds case managers who not only support the participants but help build stronger relationships between CHALK and these organizations. The ability for Opportunity Works to expand and serve more participants certainly exists.

One challenge does appear to be the availability of participants for this program. The initial guidelines for recruitment and admission into the program seemed to exclude a large potential applicant pool based on age, gender, and race.

Lessons

Although the Opportunity Works initiative has done a very successful job of successfully providing a variety of services to the population it serves as well as fitting seamlessly within the RTP framework that was developed a few years ago, there are some challenges in the program. Due to enrollment challenges in the first year, programming in San Francisco was widened to include women and African Americans. However, the programs found that providing the same level of wraparound services to African Americans was difficult because CHALK does not have the same relationships with partners that serve African Americans as they do with partners that predominantly serve Latinos. Additionally, the partners chosen to participate in the RTP were chosen to serve the needs of Latino youth, which do not always align directly with the needs of African American youth. Staff mentioned that some black participants may not feel comfortable at these organizations. The Black to the Future initiative—currently in its planning phase—will hopefully include more organizations that serve African Americans.

One of the main lessons is the need for strong partnerships to help deliver a variety of services to participants. The partnerships developed as a result of the RTP and the preceding years of serving the Mission District have been a major benefit to this collaborative. Because of the partnerships, the collaborative is able to identify the needs of participants, provide a continuum of services, and communicate frequently with each other.

One challenge has been implementing the program in the way it was initially envisioned by CHALK. Initially, Opportunity Works providers were supposed to enroll participants in a Five Keys program to reach their high school credential. If they were 18 year-old or younger, then they would be enrolled in a local high school. This has not happened due to issues with recruitment and a lack of partnerships with enough schools. As a result, only Five Keys provides educational services to participants. Nevertheless, participants and staff appear to be pleased with the progress of the initiative.

Partners indicate that one key to the success of this program has been the collaborative approach of the partner organizations. Organizations in this initiative had been providing services to the Latino community for decades before the Opportunity Works funding. They emphasize that their collaboration and effectiveness in offering this program was based on years of meetings among the partners, community leaders, and the population as a whole. The Opportunity Works initiative, and its umbrella organization, the RTP, were able to coalesce all of these partners into a single collaborative
that has brought together these various different entities to serve these youth. Meetings are held between the partners fairly frequently, sometimes weekly, and CHALK works as a conduit to ensure each partner works to better the initiative as a whole. One partner noted that she felt as if the Opportunity Works initiative is a model program because of this communication. According to her, "I feel like we’re in a really blessed position to be able to offer wraparound services to youth. They feel that they know that they have all of the support. CHALK and everyone else, they feel it, and outcomes and things are changing."
Santa Clara County is implementing postsecondary/career bridging component of the Back on Track Model for their Opportunity Works programming. The organizational structure of Opportunity Works within Santa Clara County is one of concentric circles. Kids in Common is nested under Planned Parenthood. The Opportunity Youth Partnership (OYP) is nested within Kids in Common. Opportunity Works is then nested within the OYP. While the program is formally an enriched preparation program which focuses on integrating high-quality college- and career-ready instruction with strong academic and social supports, there are associated aspects that mirror a postsecondary bridging model, including building college and career-ready skills.

In Santa Clara County, the Opportunity Works program consists of three education navigators who serve disconnected youth in the region, motivating them to complete their high school diploma, and connecting them to needed support services. The three education navigators are embedded within local institutions and have a supervisor at their host site—Silicon Valley Community Foundation (SVCF), Fresh Lifelines for Youth (FLY) or Conxión To Community. These organizations serve pregnant and parenting youth (Conxión), foster care youth (SVCF), justice-involved youth (FLY), and homeless youth, the four system touch points that render disconnected youth eligible for participation in the Opportunity Works program. This structure was adopted intentionally to leverage the specialized learnings of these Community-Based Organizations to bring that knowledge to the Conservation Corps (Corps) and the Opportunity Youth Academies (OYAs).

Youth who have one of these system touch points trigger a referral to the Opportunity Works program when they enroll in one of the two main educational service providers for dropouts in the region—Conservation Corps (Corps) or Opportunity Youth Academies (OYA). A school staff member will then connect them to the education navigator they feel can best serve the student’s needs. One education navigator focuses on justice-informed youth, one on foster care youth, and one on justice-involved youth. Students with these touch points are typically referred to the corresponding navigator.
However, because over 40 percent of students have interactions with the multiple systems mentioned above, this is not always the case. For example, some may be both justice-involved and a foster youth—thus complicating which navigator they are referred to and a decision must be made as to which navigator best works for them. It is also common for students to be referred to navigators due to proximity to one of the navigator’s base locations. One navigator is based mostly at the Corps and the remaining two navigators are based mainly at certain OYA campuses. However, navigators spend a great deal of their time travelling and often meet youth at other locations such as community centers and restaurants depending on the needs of the student.

The education navigator works to motivate the youth to complete their education and also provides referrals to other service providers in order to meet the unique needs of the student. The goal of the program is for students to receive a high school diploma, enroll in postsecondary education, and be excited about setting and working towards future goals. Opportunity Works students remain on their education navigator’s caseload while they are pursuing their high school diploma and for three months after beginning postsecondary education in order to provide a more seamless transition. Developing concrete pathways to postsecondary institutions is still under development.

The Opportunity Works programming is funded by the Social Innovation Fund (SIF) and a matching grant from Santa Clara County to support the data component of the work.

Context

Santa Clara County is a broad county that is home to 15 different cities. Opportunity youth live throughout a wide geographic area, meaning that the education navigators need to spend a significant amount of time driving to satisfy the service needs of youth. When asked about program challenges, a member of the OYP’s leadership stated that “transit issues are equity issues. Our schools aren’t located where our kids live.” One education navigator was estimated to spend 25 percent of her time at work driving.

The philanthropic community in Santa Clara County is relatively resource-poor as the region is generally perceived as a wealthy area, although this wealth is not evenly distributed, and there are communities of substantial need.

Within the education realm, before the start of the OYP and the coalescing of member organizations, the options for high school dropouts in Santa Clara County were limited. Youth who dropped out could return to a community school if under 18, enroll in a General Education Diploma program if over 18, or pursue adult education. These three options were relatively inflexible.

In the community, career paths posed to low-income youth are limited and include jobs such as medical assistant, construction worker, and probation officer. Often these are the only careers young people have had exposure to through family or system contact. Exposing the youth to additional
career patterns and explaining the benefits of postsecondary degrees has proven a challenge, since it is a new undertaking in the region.

Even when exposed to career pathways, youth often feel that they do not need a high school diploma. As the economy in Santa Clara County is currently booming due to the tech industries based in the area, it is relatively easy to find employment above minimum wage without a high school diploma. However, the cost of living for a single adult is $19 an hour in the region, and thus even a well-paying job may not be enough for many. Nevertheless, many youth feel that this is enough of an income to meet financial needs and do not feel the external motivation to work for a high school diploma. Education navigators must actively dispel this myth and convince youth of the need for higher education in order to acquire income stability and maintain high-paying jobs as the economy shifts.

Partners

**Backbone Organization: Kids in Common**

Kids in Common was formed in 1999 as a nonprofit focused on data-informed advocacy for youth in Santa Clara County. In 2005, after the dot-com bubble burst and funding from private companies dried up, in order to increase financial stability, Planned Parenthood agreed to serve as Kids in Common’s financial sponsor, providing money to support the organization out of general operating expenses. Kids in Common remain a program within the structure of Planned Parenthood.

Kids in Common are a small organization with four full-time staff. While most of Kids in Common staff time is dedicated to the OYP, Kids in Common has several other ongoing projects. Quarterly, Kids in Common convenes the vision council, a group of 50 cross-sector representatives from Santa Clara County, to discuss issues affecting area youth. Subgroups often emerge out of these council meetings to focus on specific events or topics. Subgroups have been tasked with items such as hosting an annual college day, analyzing juvenile justice policy decisions, etc. In addition to hosting the vision council, Kids in Common staff work on a data book which tracks 13 diverse indicators of child well-being in the county. This data book is used to measure progress on a set of outcomes, and prioritize regional investment. Most of the work conducted by Kids in Common staff focuses on data and strategic planning as opposed to direct service provision.

**Collective Impact Effort: Opportunity Youth Partnership (OYP)**

In spring 2013, Kids in Common first convened the OYP. Education partners, service organizations, and some governmental representatives joined the coalition in order to communally discuss how to approach education and youth welfare from a collective impact framework. These partners were not actively selected; rather it was a “coalition of the willing." Kids in Common was crucial in solidifying this partnership. As with many collective impact efforts, shifting from a culture of group meetings to a culture of true partnership and equal power has been a challenge. This frustration is apparent when it
comes to sharing data across different institutions’ cultural norms, which remains a hurdle though 14 of the 18 core agencies participating in the OYP have formal data sharing agreements. To address this roadblock, ASR Analytics was brought on in December 2014 to serve as the central data repository. They conduct a large data collection with those 14 partners twice per year, feed data into the newly launched Aspen 100 collective impact cohort, and provide quarterly Opportunity Works reports that analyze the data from the education navigators and attempt to identify patterns and provide additional accountability.

While many organizations are present, true partnerships between service organizations in Santa Clara County is a relatively recent development and not everyone has agreed to come to the table yet. For example, government officials only participate tangentially by attending some leadership council subgroup meetings but are not invested in the partnership overall. Kids in Common are working on expanding the OYP to increase the breadth of resources and expertise.

As Kids in Common is the main facilitator of the OYP, they are uniquely placed to serve as the backbone for the Opportunity Works program as they were already engaged with the target population and actively recruiting the necessary partners.

**Programming Partner: Opportunity Youth Academy**

The Santa Clara County Department of Education opened the first OYA in August 2015 to address the need for additional options for dropout recovery education. However, upon operation, the Santa Clara County Office of Education realized that most OYA students were over the age of 19, excluding them from generating state revenue. After six months, 120 students were enrolled in OYA, but only 20 were eligible to generate state revenue. This was very costly to the County Office of Education, drawing $1.5 million from the general fund. This was not a sustainable model, but the County Office of Education was committed to providing options for older disengaged youth. So, the County Office of Education submitted a charter petition, which was accepted in August 2016, allowing OYA students ages 19 through 24 to collect state funding through encouraging workforce partnership.

Currently, over 200 students are enrolled across the OYAs four campuses and a fifth site is under development. Two OYA sites are co-located with regional service organizations and open until 7:30 p.m. (two days per week), allowing working youth a more flexible schedule. The remaining two campuses are operated as storefronts and are open until 4:30 p.m. Out of the 200 students, the Associate Director estimated that 34 were Opportunity Works participants.

The target population for the OYAs is students who have been disengaged for at least six months. However, upon opening, the OYAs did accept some direct enrollment students. This caused tension between OYA administrators and public school district superintendents as state funding is dependent on the number of enrolled students. Therefore, some traditional schools felt that the presence of the OYAs was decreasing their revenue stream. This challenge has been resolved as the OYAs clarified and reasserted that their target population was already disengaged youth. Many youth are referred to
OYAs through their probation officers upon release from detention facilities. The OYAs provide flexible options for disengaged youth.

As the OYAs expanded, it became a regional model. Other county offices asked to come and visit to see how to replicate the demo site within their own counties.

Prior to July 2016, if individuals wanted to co-enroll in the OYA and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, they had to enroll in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act first so that they would be considered out of school at time of workforce enrollment. However, SIAtech - a charter school located in Arkansas, Florida, and California- participated in state-wide policy advocacy to allow students to remain Workforce-Innovation-and-Opportunity-Act-eligible even while enrolled in an OYA. This change allows OYAs to capitalize on student’s initial interest and enroll immediately instead of waiting for workforce acceptance. SIAtech also offers dual enrollment in community college and high school classes to provide students with a career ladder.

Apart from education and credit advancement, OYAs provide a light level of navigation, linking to services such as transportation, childcare, mental health, employment, housing, gang prevention, mental health service provision, evening recreation activities, and postsecondary career planning. Many of these services are provided by partner organizations.

While OYAs are largely praised among other partners, they have faced several challenges. While OYA administration intentionally entrenched their decision making processes within the larger OYP, they have recently begun actively engaging necessary stakeholders outside of the partnership. This was prompted by a conflict with the Mayor’s Gang Prevention Task Force over the site location of the fifth OYA campus. After engaging the task force, the conflict was resolved and attributed to a misunderstanding due to lack of collaboration. The OYAs are now very intentional about integrating diverse stakeholders from the get-go.

The OYA has been and will continue to be a key player in the realm of education for disengaged youth. OYA leadership was very appreciative of the SIF-funded education navigators, stating that, “If we had more navigation we would use [it]. Whenever [the Associate Director] has an opening, we want to fill it. If we had four more caseloads, we’d fill them.”

**Programming Partner: Conservation Corps (Corps)**

The Corps hosts students on two campuses across Santa Clara County and has been in operation since 1987. Students are able to pursue two pathways at the Corps. They can either work full-time towards a degree in a traditional high school setting, or pursue a dual work-education pathway. This dual pathway means students will alternate between taking classes and working with in the Corps’ job employment training program. Additionally, Corps students also access an on-site AmeriCorps program. Funding for the Corps comes from state attendance.

Because the service population at the Corps overlaps to a large extent with Opportunity Works and already addresses many formal dropouts, the Corps was approached to participate in the OYP as
an early stakeholder. However, the Corps declined to participate as they were undergoing internal transitions at the time. Two years later, when seeking SIF funding, the Corps was approached again to be a partner. At this point, the Corps decided to join the OYP, engage with the collective liberation mindset, and attempt to merge education growth at a systems level with their new internal transitions.

Students are recruited to the Corps from East Side Union High School District in Santa Clara County, juvenile justice institutions, the Bill Wilson Center- which provides housing, education, counseling, and advocacy, and word of mouth to more than 5,000 people annually in Santa Clara County. A few students transition to the Corps through a warm handoff from another education institution, but most youth are formal dropouts. When students enroll at the Corps, they are interviewed by a recruiter and given preliminary assessments around target subjects. Then, the Principal or Director of Curriculum and Instruction has a conversation with the students about their background, postsecondary interest, and general level of need. If the level of need exceeds stabilization and requires a full breadth of services, the student is then referred to an education navigator. Youth who are not assigned an education navigator are still able to access drug and alcohol counseling and AmeriCorps mentors on-site. Corps staff supports the education navigator component and wished to continue with the service stating that, “The youth who worked with an education navigator had better graduation rates and did overall better in school than they had in the past. Historically students in job training struggle in school. Those who work with [an education navigator] have more success than job training in general and use that to impact peers.”

**Programming Partner: Fresh Lifelines for Youth (FLY)**

FLY was incorporated as a nonprofit in 2000 in order to teach youth in juvenile halls about the law and prevent young people from becoming involved with the justice system. Programming then expanded into a 12-week program for high school students (and now middle school students as well) aimed at teaching risks and rights. This program now feeds into a coordinated 10-month leadership program with wraparound case management, field trips, and integration of positive adult role models. Other services offered at FLY include one-on-one mentoring, an aftercare program, and a law program with case management components within James Ranch—a long-term incarceration facility. FLY program alumni are invited back to participate in a speech committee, youth advisory council, development program, or to help run programming themselves. FLY has 56 employees over a three-county region and serves thousands of youth.

FLY became a part of the OYP in order to bolster its work around credit advancement, a component they identified as lacking in other programming. As FLY is a well-respected organization in Santa Clara County focused on justice-involved youth, a main touch point for opportunity youth, they were approached to apply for a mini request for proposal, or request for proposal, to receive an embedded education navigator. Currently, 30 percent of an education navigator’s caseload is reserved for FLY youth. FLY understands the goals of education navigation to be recidivism reduction complemented by high school diploma attainment. FLY staff would like to complement data collection
and already-established partnerships along the lines of the collective impact theory with more direct and tangible approach to partnership building moving forward.

FLY programs generally serve youth ages 13 through 18. Expanding Opportunity Works eligibility to youths ages 16 through 24 pushed FLY programming outside of their typical service population, an obstacle for FLY employees. FLY has long-standing relationships with the juvenile justice system, but because Opportunity Works students were now older, they were instead within the adult justice system, outside of FLY’s typical purview. FLY staff noted that it has been difficult to involve probation officers and has been a protracted process to get the adult justice system on board.

**Programming Partner: Silicon Valley Community Foundation (SVCF)**

The SVCF was established in 1987 and provides diverse programing directed towards foster youth including academic coaching, an emerging scholars program, Relationship Inspiring Scholar Excellence coaching, and scholarship provision. The main referral network for the SVCF is through education re-engagement centers (the Corps and OYAs). The Opportunity Works project is a new area of work for the SVCF. They have traditionally served foster youth who remained in school but were looking for an opportunity to learn how to serve those foster youth who became disconnected, in order to reconnect them to their robust postsecondary services.

All programming works to render foster youth self-reliant by adulthood through youth-advised innovation, cost-effective social solutions, and cross-sector collaboration. A core focus of this effort is on education and carrying foster youth through high school and onto career pathways. However, Opportunity Works youth is a new population for SVCF as they don’t typically work with formal dropouts. Most of their programming focuses on already-enrolled youth.

Currently, apart from the education navigator dedicated to foster youth, SVCF employs 10 interns, 3 high school coaches, and 5 higher education coaches. Funding for the general budget comes from grants, private donations, corporate partnerships, and an endowment. All staff members are provided with training around the organizational goals, pathways, and referral systems. The education navigator was invited to participate in these trainings and is actively included in SVCF culture building.

The youth who are referred to education navigators through SVCF are typically farther behind in their schooling than other youth the fund serves. Many of these students need an additional four or five years to complete their high school degree. As these youth remain with their education navigators longer than OYA students who typically complete their degrees in shorter periods of time, fewer youth at the SVCF are able to receive education navigation services.

The fund prohibits education navigators from driving youth to classes which leads to transportation and accessibility complications when referring youth to service partners. Providing youth bus passes, more cohort-based programing, and college tours are areas the fund would like to expand into if granted additional future funding.
Programming Partner: ConXión To Community (Conxión)

ConXión to Community (formerly known as Center for Training & Careers) is a local community-based nonprofit corporation with a 30+ year track record within underserved communities in Santa Clara County. ConXión has established itself as a culturally and linguistically competent provider of case management, education, employment, job training, mentoring, family wellness, and prosocial activity services for at-risk youth and their families. Its facility houses a variety of education, workforce, behavioral health, culture, and youth programs and is centrally located with easy access to freeways and public transportation.

Specific on-site support services including Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, and Cocaine Anonymous recovery meetings in English and Spanish; daily breakfast; a weekly support group called Talking Circles; domestic violence prevention classes; weekly food distribution; civic engagement opportunities; and referrals to community resource agencies. ConXión also includes diverse programing including a day worker center for the homeless, recreation and cultural events, summer employment coaching, Dress for Success-which provides clothing, a food pantry, and a parent hub including Toys for Tots and Christmas donations. This constant engagement with diverse service provision allows youth to stay engaged past immediate stabilization needs.16

Other Organizations

Other than the two main education providers—OYA and the Corps, and the three main community services providers. FLY, SVCF, and Conxión—the Partnership engages with other organizations. These stakeholders include probation officers, high schools, the mayor’s office, and social workers, among others.

Nature of Partnerships

As there are many diverse stakeholders involved in this process, early on Kids in Common implemented weekly team meetings in order to develop a cohesive model for navigation service delivery. Kids in Common recently began implementing monthly student success team meetings in order to provide an institutionalized communication process between education navigators, their supervisors, Kids in Common staff, and appropriate school representatives from the OYA or the Corps. Further, Kids in Common hosts a monthly Opportunity Works Learning Community meeting that invites all of these parties to attend. Representatives are encouraged to attend these meetings to build community and arrive at common understandings of the work. Meetings are used to review data, problem solve, and strategize.

As a part of the broader OYP’s work, Kids in Common also convenes its Design, Implementation, and Services Committee at monthly meetings. These meetings include 18 core partners, including all Opportunity Works partners and many other service providers. As of November, this group has

16 http://conxion.org/about-us/
launched the Aspen 100 collective impact cohort, a cohort of high-need young people from those entered in the larger OYP data collection, including Opportunity Works students. All partners signed a Memorandum of Understanding to participate and agreed to work with the cohort for two years with goals of keeping young people in service and dramatically improving student outcomes through increased collaboration.

The weekly education navigator meetings, the Design, Implementation, and Services Committee meetings, the monthly student success team meetings, and monthly Opportunity Works Learning Community meetings, which include all partners listed above, have been helpful to ensure that there is constant communication and shared expectations between organizations. However, each organization has its own history of collaboration and approaches communication differently.

Since its inception, OYA administration has been integrally involved in developing synergies with the OYP. Individuals from over 25 different partner agencies attend the quarterly OYA advisory committee meetings. These advisory committee meetings include reports on key metrics and strategy discussion. For example, the entire committee had a role in deciding that 220 credits would be necessary for a high school diploma; other alternative education centers only require 180 credits. In addition, OYA representatives meet monthly with the Associate Director of the OYP. The OYA principals are even more closely involved with the progress of Opportunity Works youth, meeting near weekly with Kids in Common staff and occasionally attending the weekly education navigator team meetings hosted by Kids in Common. It is sometimes a challenge for OYA administrators to attend these meetings as they consistently take place during the school day. The education navigators and OYA staff at each location recently implemented student success team meetings on the first Friday of each month where all of a student’s advocates communally discuss the student’s progress and goals.

Historically, the Corps did not have an ideology centered on collaboration and instead was focused internally on competency. Partnering with Opportunity Works funding provided the Corps an opportunity to broaden their reach in the community and increase concrete partnerships with interdisciplinary service organizations in the area.

FLY has integrated relatively seamlessly into Opportunity Works programing as a whole. All FLY programming embodies a data-driven approach which often mirrors the philosophy of Kids in Common. Two of the 5 Kids in Common staff transitioned into their current roles from working at FLY, carrying over some of the work culture and easing the partnership between the two organizations. Opportunity Works staff stated that they had an open relationship with FLY and were able to collect the necessary data seamlessly. FLY staff also has a close relationship with the Corps allowing them to share best practices and referral networks.

The SVCF is palpably dedicated to establishing collaboration and is willing to prioritize communication. They have longstanding relationships with the Family and Children Service agency, local housing organizations serving foster youth, and the Hub (a local multidisciplinary service provider), and they successfully brought these services into the OYP. Through the OYP, the SVCF formed new relationships with the OYAs and educators who work with other disengaged populations.
As Conxión is a partner entrenched within a niche community of Santa Clara County, they do not have as much of a focus on fully entrenched players within the OYP. However, they have a lengthy history of working across sectors to connect with employers and develop meaningful training opportunities when funding has been available.

Program Design

Difference from Existing Programming

Santa Clara County has one of the more nascent collective impact efforts in comparison with other SIF sites overall. There is not a strong history of communal culture among service providers in Santa Clara County. Therefore, SIF funding was an important step in truly cementing the different stakeholders that comprise the OYP. The Opportunity Works funding was an innovative way to highlight the launch of the OYAs and solidify a commitment to maintaining a robust network of education options for disconnected youth in the community.

SIF funding was used to hire three education navigators as well as provide some compensation to their direct supervisors at the community service organizations. These navigators provide barrier removal, academic and personal coaching, emotional support and encouragement, and referrals to other services in the community.

While some education providers in the OYP already provide a level of navigation, existing caseloads are much higher than those of SIF education navigators. For example, OYAs have their own navigators who serve as dual guidance counselors and case managers. However, OYA navigators are tasked with providing a very light level of support spanning orientation, needs assessment, and sporadic check-ins. For example, if a student is routinely absent, that will trigger an OYA navigator check-in. The OYA navigators have a caseload of around 150 students.

In comparison, SIF-funded education navigators have a maximum caseload of 32 youths. This allows the SIF education navigators time to coordinate between partner agencies that interact with the youth on their caseload. One youth stated that he was appreciative that his education navigator convened all of his advocates in order to synchronize his service plan. By strategizing alongside his caretaker, probation officer, social services case worker, and school guidance counselor, the education navigator provided the youth with a coordinated set of allies, allowing him to get high-quality care without having to sit through what he deemed to be repetitive conversations about his life.

Back on Track

Back on Track is a model familiar to Kids in Common and integrated into formal presentation pieces. However, education navigators, partner agencies, and youth are not necessarily familiar with that terminology, though they adhere to the principals of a Back on Track model in practice.
All education navigators and partner agencies clearly expressed that their primary goal was securing a high school diploma for youth and felt comfortable prioritizing education while recognizing that some stabilization efforts were necessary at times along the way. OYP leadership stated, "I don't have an interest in aligning resources to young people not pursuing school. I don't think we can help them that much. When a kid signs up and says, 'I want to go to school,' I want to be able to say, 'here is the menu. What do you need?" All partners do provide some support services or referrals to community organizations to youth enrolled in their education programs.

Many stakeholders view a high school diploma as the first step to set the youth on a path towards career readiness and further postsecondary training. The backbone agency expressed the desire to solidify a bridging component in the future with a structured focus on postsecondary transition. Education navigators are already progressing along that pathway by continuing to meet with youth three months into enrollment in postsecondary education.

Goals

The goals for the youth as expressed by the partners tend to revolve around similar themes such as helping them obtain a high school credential, connecting them to a suite of supportive services to assist them in obtaining financial independence, linking them to further education or vocational training, and helping them support their families.

The education navigators noted that a main goal of the program is to make sure they’re not only enrolled in classes and receiving services through the SIF program, but also that they have a stronger sense of self, identity, and confidence.

The case manager through the SVCF noted that because they work with so many foster youth, a key goal for the youth is building self-confidence and fostering ideas of themselves as leaders and deserving of moving into postsecondary education and careers.

Staff at FLY mentioned that critical goals entailed helping justice-involved youth get clean records and improving the behaviors of youths in their programs so that rates of recidivism and criminal behavior are reduced.

Development Process

In 2013, Kids in Common became the backbone organization for the Opportunity Youth Partnership in Santa Clara County with funding from the Aspen Institute and the local community. This funding stream was identified by a Kids in Common Representative at a prior Aspen convening. Originally, Kids in Common dismissed the opportunity to apply for funding but reconsidered after encouragement from the OYP executive committee. After receiving SIF funding, Kids in Common issued a mini request for proposal within the OYP in order to discern which organizations would be interested in participating. Conxión, OYA, and the Corps were then awarded funding and chosen to receive education navigators. The goal was to implement a program within Santa Clara County that followed
the Back on Track model developed through the Aspen Institute, following specifically the enriched preparation structure.

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

The education curriculum of the partner organizations remained unchanged after receiving the Aspen grant. The education navigators do not follow the same pathway towards engaging youth and instead tailor their services to the needs of those on their caseload.

The structure of the OYAs is a hybrid, blended learning model through a partnership with SIAtech. SIAtech is a California accredited online charter program for older workforce-eligible youth. The OYA’s use of SIAtech curriculum and instructional model coincided with the OYA charter petition. The OYAs are now able to collect state attendance funding for youth ages 16 to 24. In May 2015, SIAtech was awarded a $6 million charter grant by the Santa Clara County Department of Education to provide its online curriculum to the OYA program. The online curriculum allows students to complete lessons on their smart phones or laptops which their teachers can then review and provide feedback on in real time. The teachers are able to modify each module to fit the student’s specific interests and education goals. These custom lessons are then made available through the web-based platform for other teachers to use and build off of to better engage their students. SIAtech teachers receive ongoing training as a cohort through telecommuting, web-based meetings, and a support network of other teachers. This allows teachers to problem solve as a team and address challenges.

The structure of the Corps is more aligned with that of a traditional high school. Students enroll in traditional style classes in a classroom setting in order to receive credits.

Staffing

Staffing for Opportunity Works has been relatively consistent. A former education navigator transitioned to an Opportunity Works manager role with the backbone agency, leaving a hiring opening for a new education navigator. Other than that, there has been little staff turnover within the OYP. Opportunity Works funds are used to pay the salaries of all three navigators and a small percentage of their direct supervisor’s status. Their supervisors are embedded within education partner organizations but are committed to spending some time on the Opportunity Works program. Additionally, three staff members funded by Kids in Common spend a significant portion of their time on the Opportunity Works program.

Funding Sources

The Aspen money secured for the partnership was matched by money from the county specifically to support the shared indicator work of the collaboration. These funds were bolstered by $35,000 from the SVCF.

The partner organizations provide funding for education, primarily through average daily attendance state funding. The partners also provide some additional funds to supplement the Aspen grant. For example, FLY provides money for food and employee benefits. Conxión pays for additional
services for participants in addition to those covered by Opportunity Works, such as additional job development services. The SVCF reimburses their education navigator for mileage and youth snacks, as well as supplements her salary on top of what the SIF funding provides.

There have been some constraints on the Aspen funding that have created challenges for partners in Santa Clara County. Several partner agencies were frustrated that they could not spend grant money or matched money on food for youth or meals during meetings. Financially, Kids in Common is a relatively small organization with an annual budget of $700,000 including the OYP funding. When SIF funds are constrained, this makes it difficult for Kids in Common to find money for additional services for youth. Once the model is solidified, the backbone organization is hoping that they will be able to leverage the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and title waiver funds in order to expand the program, secure future funding streams, and allow staff members to spend more time with opportunity youth and less time seeking funding. Additional services needed include food and transportation provisions for youth.

Timing

In spring 2013 the OYP was first launched, spurring the first collective impact effort in the Santa Clara County region. As the partnership embarked on an unpaid planning period, they learned of and applied for funding from Aspen in October 2014.

In August 2015, the first OYA campus opened, creating additional options for disengaged youth in the region. The OYAs helped to set the foundation for SIF case enrollment. The first Opportunity Works client was enrolled in programming in October 2015.

The length of completion for each youth depends on their level of disconnection and education. However, it is expected to take generally 18 to 26 months for a participant to obtain a high school credential and a job. At this point, since most participants have just entered the program, it is somewhat difficult to gauge the minimum amount of time a student will need to complete the program, but the backbone agency is only contracted to serve participants for up to 26 months.

Participants

Characteristics of Participants

As of October 24, 2016, program data was available for 71 Opportunity Works participants. The mean age of participants was 20.5 years. Forty-nine percent of participants were female while 51 percent were male, revealing a relatively even gender distribution similar to county demographics.

The vast majority (84 percent) of program participants were Latino. This is significantly higher than the 2011–15 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates which estimated that 26.6 percent of Santa Clara County identified as Hispanic or Latino. Only a small proportion (6 percent) of program participants identified as African American. Therefore, the majority (90 percent) of clientele fit within
Jobs For the Future’s focus of reaching people of color, defined as African American or Latino, between the ages of 18 and 24.

The Opportunity Youth Partnership targets system-impacted youth, meaning youth who meet one or more of the following system touch points:

- They are pregnant or parenting (38 percent of participants),
- are or have been in the foster care system (40 percent of participants),
- are or have been involved with the criminal justice system (62 percent of participants),
- and are or have been homeless (18 percent of participants).

Many participants have touched two or more of these four risk categories. Roughly one-quarter of participants were impacted by multiple systems as of October 2016.

In October 2016, 94 percent of participants were enrolled in a high school or adult education program, while 5 percent of participants were enrolled in college. In addition to school enrollment, 64 percent of program participants had a job. The mean hourly wage for those working was $11.72. The high rate of youth who were employed may reflect the flexible hours of the OYAs and the popularity of the AmeriCorps work program provided at the Corps.

The general population of Opportunity Works youth was smaller and more disconnected than originally anticipated by staff members. Opportunity Works staff shifted enrollment strategy in order to attract more youth who were already motivated to pursue an educational career path and has less severe stabilization needs.

**Target Population**

The target population for the OYP is students who have been disengaged from formal education but are now actively motivated to pursue a career path. At the start of the program, there was some dissonance between program staff, referral sources, and parents around who was appropriate for the program. Schools and service providers were referring the “hardest to reach kids” who were not necessarily ready for the program. Simultaneously, parents looking for other options were attempting to enroll their students who were already engaged in public school but needed another option.

In addition to these discrepancies, in March 2016, the backbone agency was under pressure to meet enrollment deadline. So, enrollment criterion and specifically the definition of “disengaged” were expanded, and some clients enrolled were not prioritizing education and needed stabilization. These youth were not a good fit for the model and eventually filtered out of the program through attrition. Overall, the resulting caseload was more disconnected than program staff had initially anticipated. As enrollment climbed, program staff clarified with referral streams what constituted an appropriate referral. Now, clients who are referred have a strong focus on education and motivation to return to school.
There are 22,000 disconnected youth in Santa Clara County, but many do not fit into the subpopulations that comprise the initiative undertaken by their county. It is therefore difficult to fully gauge the extent of the target population in Santa Clara County. Initial estimates placed it potentially at a few thousand.

**Recruitment and Admission**

Enrollment in Opportunity Works began in fall 2015. It took longer than anticipated to develop concrete processes for enrolling youth, in part because many were more disconnected than the program had initially anticipated. This challenge was resolved in March 2016 as partnerships with the OYAs and the County Office of Education were finalized and followed by a steady uptick in clients.

The goal of the model is for youth to enroll in a school and if they have a system touch point (pregnant/parenting, foster-involved, criminal-justice-involved, homeless), then an education provider will refer them to an education navigator. This process works slightly differently at each of the education partners. For example the navigators at the OYA recently implemented a new policy where they will refer one person to the education navigator per week who they feel is most suited for the services. The Corps, on the other hand, refers a steady flow of participants, leaving it to the education navigator to discern which clients are the best fit for the program and to reach out accordingly.

After the names of the students are passed along, the education navigator will reach out to the youth, plan an intake meeting, and briefly discuss the youth’s employment history and education goals. After this initial meeting, if the youth is still interested, the navigator will conduct a self-sufficiency matrix, discuss the program, and then formally enroll the youth. Some students are actively interested in the process and are able to complete this entire process in one hour-long session. Other youth need more time to feel safe and comfortable with the navigator and so the intake process may span two meetings. These meetings can occur at school, home, or at a restaurant, depending on the comfort of the youth.

Each education navigator specializes in youth with a certain system involvement. For example, the education navigator embedded in FLY is more likely to receive youth involved in the juvenile justice system. Youth are assigned to education navigators based on their primary system touch point, the availability of education navigators, and the location of their education facility. The maximum caseload for an education navigator at any point in time is 32 youth. At the time of the Urban Institute’s site visit in October 2016, one education navigator had a caseload of 15 and another had a caseload of 18. The third education navigator was recently hired and was working on building her caseload. At the time of the site visit, all case managers were expecting new referrals in the coming weeks.

**Attrition**

As of June 2016, Santa Clara County staff initially expected about 35 percent of students to drop out during the first year, 25 percent the second year, and 14 percent the third year. However, as of June 2016, only 15 percent of the students had dropped out thus far, which staff considered a low rate.
They credit their intensive case management as a success in reducing potential program attrition. However, staff anticipated a large drop off in coming months as the new Opportunity Works Manager dove into the details and used the data to help education navigators identify students who were essentially no longer participating.

Program Experience

Education and Training Programming

To remain enrolled at the OYA, students must spend 20 hours a week on material, either at home, or at one of the four campuses. At some sites, there may be small group instruction or peer support groups to tackle communal subjects. On a typical school day, between 8 and 24 youth will come to class in-person. The average student will come to class in-person 2-3 times a week for a total of 6 hours per week. Teachers have a cap of 38 students on their roster at any one time, and most teachers are already instructing close to the maximum number of youth.

At the Corps, some students work full-time towards graduating with a high school diploma, while other students enroll in both education classes part time and either recycling or solar energy workforce projects part time with AmeriCorps. After graduating high school with a diploma, students have the option to stay at the Corps to pursue job training. The average length of stay to complete a diploma is 8 months, as most students only need 50 or 60 credits at the time of enrollment. Students range in age from 17.5 to 27. Currently, 300 students are enrolled at the Corps with roughly 75 percent attendance.

Support Services

When not meeting with youth to further education goals, education navigators reach out to teachers, case managers, and wraparound service providers. The greatest resistance to these team meetings comes from the schools and from probation officers due to their heavy caseloads and many competing obligations. Mostly, all team members affiliated with the youth are on board. One staff member mentioned that she created a spreadsheet for the providers involved with her clients. She claimed, “I send out an email, someone’s going to respond. That’s effective. People have a pretty positive view of my role.”

When youth have romantic partners, especially for pregnant and parenting youth, the navigator will work to include the partner or close family members in the team meeting as well. Family and partners can have a great degree of influence over youth. Education navigators realized that by including these vital relationships in the team framework, when appropriate, youth were less likely to face dissonance between their personal lives and relationships with their navigator.

When necessary, education navigators link students to external support services. Among other needs, education navigator’s work to secure housing referrals, mitigate court mandated truancy fines and community service requirements, expunge records, explore mental health and substance abuse
support groups, and secure stable child care. Locating affordable housing and child care are the most difficult needs for service providers to meet.

Some education navigators are able to provide transportation to help youth meet their appointments and attend service provider meetings. Unfortunately, education navigators embedded within foster care organizations are not able to transport youth due to agency restrictions. This poses a challenge since public transportation is sparse in the region, and service provider agencies are not always readily accessible.

**Participant Path through the Program**

Once referred to Opportunity Works, the education navigators begin by identifying needs and barriers and assessing education levels. After intake and initial data collection, the navigators create a postsecondary plan and any other necessary resources to set the youth on a path to postsecondary education. Navigators encourage youth to think about their career paths and explore postsecondary options while they are completing their high school credentials. Some youth choose to complete their Opportunity Works involvement after graduating high school. However, if the student chooses, the navigator can help them enroll in postsecondary education, secure financial aid, and transition smoothly to their new education institution. After three months of working to integrate the youth into a support network at their new education facility, the navigator exits the student from her caseload and completes them from the program.

The program goal is for the education navigator to meet with the youth a minimum of one time per week. However, this varies immensely. Some students text their navigator every day and meet in-person weekly, while others meet in-person every few weeks. The intensity and method of communication varies based on the students’ needs and availability. Meetings differ in duration lasting anywhere from half an hour to four hours based on what the youth is working on. Through such a high level of engagement, and working with a population that is highly traumatized, education navigators sometimes face the challenge of having to counsel youth instead of simply provide education guidance and referrals. Navigators posed this as a challenge as they do not have the necessary training or license to meet the therapeutic needs of their clients.

**Participants’ Perspectives**

Over two focus groups, Urban Institute employees met with three youth receiving their education through Opportunity Youth Academies and five youth at the Corps. All youth spoke very positively about the program and particularly the dedicated nature of their navigators whom they referred to as “ed navs.” Youth shared a variety of strategies and encouraging talks they had had with their navigators that motivated them to set and work towards education goals. One youth said of her navigator, “I wasn’t planning on going to college. She pushed me.”

One youth received an education navigator before deciding to leave school. His education navigator was able to convince him to return and graduate. He stated, “I was really hard-headed when I started [at the Opportunity Youth Academy]. I left. I didn’t want to do the program so I was working
at the time, two jobs. I have a daughter. [My education navigator] kept telling me, 'it's going to come back to school.' I was working graveyard shifts—16, 17 hours—paycheck-to-paycheck and she told me, 'if you don't slow down and take care of school. You're going to be older with a lot of work experience but no school. So I was like, 'ok pump the breaks and get school out of the way before I'm older.'"

When pressed to explain how his education navigator kept in contact with him while he was not enrolled in school, the student said, "If I didn't call her, she would contact me... She bugs me, but it's a good bug. You can't complain when people only wants what's best for you."

Since education navigators kept in constant contact with the students, filling the position of a caring adult role model and providing non-judgmental guidance and advice, many youth said that they felt very comfortable having candid conversations with their navigators and were more comfortable speaking with their navigators than their probation officers or guidance counselors. One youth summarized this point, saying, "Every time I have a problem, she's the first person that I call."

Students felt comfortable reaching out to education navigators for needs that did not fall strictly within the category of education. One student said they "provide everything you need to succeed in life" and help by listening to the students' struggles and helping them express themselves, set goals, and take concrete action steps. While the education navigators were able to meet many of the youths' needs, students still expressed that they needed monthly bus passes, expanded affordable housing options, and stable long-term child care.

Students appreciated the opportunity to have an education navigator and recognized that they were part of a select group of students chosen to be in Opportunity Works. Youth did not feel part of a cohort and were largely unaware of other youth who also received Opportunity Works services. Youth felt that they were not outwardly identified as Opportunity Works students and could meet with their navigators anonymously, which they saw as a positive thing.

Youths' opinions on their education institutions were slightly more tempered. Students within the OYA were appreciative of the flexibility of the program stating, "Last week I was in training so I had to sacrifice a little less school to get training, but they're flexible. I tell them what's going on, and they're like, 'ok, that's fine. Here's what to do.'" Another youth who graduated from an OYA stated that, "They let me bring my baby to school, so I was really happy about that." Youth also appreciated being able to work independently, in small groups, or through one-one-one lessons with their instructors.

However, the youth were dubious of the switch to the SIAtch online curriculum. One student expressed that the move away from paper-based lessons was a "really big issue, I'm on the south side of San Jose, other side of town, so I told my instructor that it was real difficult, and I felt like a lot of students will get cut off, because it's a real drag to come here just to do a few assignments on the computer. I want to be at home too if I could do a couple of packets, but they said, 'no, we're all switching to SIAtch.' A lot of youths weren't going to come because that was the main thing: they give you a packet, you go home, and get it back."

Youth who attended the Corps were largely content with their program. Youth liked that only 180 credits were needed to graduate as opposed to the 220 needed at traditional high schools. Students
also spoke highly of the dual job training program and the ability to receive solar panel installation training while receiving high school credits. This process allowed youth to maintain a career focus while attaining their diploma. However, students complained that the schedule was still rigorous with daily attendance expectations, and therefore did not provide the flexible work schedule that makes the OYA program so appealing.

Data

Kids in Common has a rich history of data collection. Before integrating with Planned Parenthood, Kids in Common was a data-informed advocacy nonprofit and maintains this program management approach. Kids in Common secured their matched funding from Santa Clara County specifically to focus on shared indicator work within the OYP.

The Opportunity Youth Partnership has 17 core partner agencies that have data sharing contracts and have been involved in data collection together for the past two years, preceding SIF funding. The resulting database is sent to the key data partner, Applied Survey Research, to analyze, and then they produce quarterly reports and fuller semi-annual reports. There are monthly meetings with this larger partnership to discuss data management.

Recently, the OYP initiated a program called the Aspen 100. Within this program, 100 youth ages 18 to 21 consented to having their data tracked for the next two years. The Design and Implementation Steering Committee, a subcommittee of the larger partnership, will meet each month, discuss each client, and brainstorm which partners have resources they can add to bolster the client’s success. This project is a way for agencies to thoroughly engage in the ways their agencies overlap and direct the services provided to youth. Aspen 100 will then use the data collected to inform strategic partnerships among the participating agencies moving forward.

Within the OYP, education navigators do a deeper dive into data collection specifically for the SIF youth by collecting additional data points around service receipt and education outcomes. Education navigators have to manually enter in data to a shared database developed in Excel by Kids in Common and ASR. From there, the data partner at ASR merges and cleans this data in the software package, SPSS, and then converts it back into excel. It’s expected that education navigators will enter data on a weekly basis.

The Opportunity Works manager is then tasked with supplementing the points collected by the education navigators with attendance data. This process is more burdensome with some education partners than with others. For example, OYA does not provide attendance records or credit progress directly to Kids in Common. Rather, the education navigator or the Opportunity Works manager has to make a request to the school office coordinator who then passes it through the internal bureaucratic networks to the teacher who then must honor the request, personally pull the data, and send it to the office coordinator who sends it back to the education navigator who must then enter the information manually into the OYA database. Some teachers are willing to tell education navigators some pieces of
information informally over the phone such as credits accumulated for a particular student, but they are not allowed to produce a report. The Corps is an independent charter, so they have a little bit more leeway and are typically more willing to provide data than the OYAs which are dependent charters. Pulling attendance data is a very time consuming monthly task. The Opportunity Works manager then merges the education reports with the information provided from the education navigator. This data is included in the data points sent to ASR for the larger OYP database.

Kids in Common has weekly meetings for Kids in Common staff, all education navigators, and the education navigator’s direct supervisors at each school. Once a month, these meetings are focused on collectively reviewing data. This provides education navigators with room for peer learning and a space to check individual bias. For example, education navigators can see if they are spending more time with a particular student or a certain type of student and discuss if these are the clients with more needs, or if these are the clients that are easier to work with, or are already closely bonded with the navigator. This information is then used to tailor service delivery and workshop challenges. When reviewing the data, some navigators stated that the amount of trauma youth experienced was not a point captured well within the data. As weekly meetings continue and Aspen 100 continues, education navigators will continue to standardize data collection efforts and refine data points.

Scale and Sustainability

At this time, Opportunity Youth Partnership is not exploring opportunities for expansion. Rather, the partnership is looking to solidify internal processes and cement its current service provision strategy. The only increase in scale to date has been adding the position of Opportunity Works manager as a staff member embedded within Kids in Common. In terms of enrollment numbers, new students are consistently added to the education navigator’s caseloads. However, the total enrollment numbers are still falling behind originally established targets, which were 80 students the first year, 95 the second year, and 95 the third year, for a total of 270 students. Looking ahead, the greatest anticipated change is the opening of the fifth OYA campus at Gilroy. This will provide education navigators with a new referral stream and hopefully further increase enrollment numbers.

While the partnership is consistently seeking additional funding for collective impact efforts, there are currently no new funding streams in place to render education navigator services sustainable after SIF funding ends. This is a gap that Kids in Common hopes to fill in the coming year.

Lessons

Advice to Others

1. The areas of the OYP that are most successful are areas that involve institutionalized forms of ongoing communication cemented at the beginning of the program, such as monthly team meetings. Additionally, meetings are held weekly amongst the navigators to strategize best
practices and also improve data collection efforts. This should be a best practice for any partnership and collective impact effort.

2. The education navigators stressed the importance of fully understanding the demographics of the service population as well as the collective work environment and institutional cultures of all partners before engaging in community navigation work.

3. Youth and service partners lauded education navigators who were able to engage all partners without sparking competition. An attitude of communication, empathy, and passion is necessary in any navigator.

4. A positive program addition would be additional training so that education navigators can become familiar with skills such as motivational interviewing as well as specific opportunities within the regional resource network.

Challenges

1. There are still some challenges in communication across the partners. For example, one FLY employee expressed that she/they only communicates with Kids in Common employees in spurts that ebb and flow, leaving gaps in the conversation. Kids in Common recognized the challenge of communicating between a large group of key stakeholders with varied institutional cultures and instituted weekly team meetings as a solution. Kids in Common also set up formal monthly meetings with education providers. Increased communication should remedy communication challenges.

2. Collaboration and collective impact theory is a relatively new phenomenon within Santa Clara County. Therefore the work of establishing trust between partners and assigning roles is taking time and is further frustrated by challenges typical of collaborative work.

3. The constraints of SIF funding and matching grants prevent the use of funds for purchasing food. Education navigators have found that sharing a meal is helpful to break down barriers between youth and service providers and can be crucial to forming bonds between students and education navigators. It would be helpful if this funding restraint was lifted or an additional pot of money made available for meal compensation.

4. Since youth participating in the Opportunity Works program have a greater level of need than anticipated, additional supportive services are needed to address the high levels of debt youth have, as well unmet housing needs, child care needs, and mental health service needs. New mental health programming is being launched in the county, and Opportunity Works is connected to this via the broader OYP. Many service providers recognize the lack of mental health services in the current referral system. As education navigators have such a high degree of contact with students and assume the role of trusted adult, they are often placed in uncomfortable situations where they must provide counseling that exceeds their training and expertise.

5. The limitations of Santa Clara County, including the paucity of public transportation, the high cost of living—especially in terms of obtaining affordable housing, and relative lack of a long-
term structure in place to serve the unmet needs of youth has been a stultifying factor for the program. The Opportunity Works program must traverse these citywide issues and support their participants despite a relatively modest amount of funds.

6. When the OYP originally applied for Aspen funding, they anticipated that the Gilroy OYA site would be open and accepting students by the time of student enrollment and assigned an education navigator to that site accordingly. However, the site construction was delayed considerably as was the student enrollment process. This was largely due to the lack of Wi-Fi connection in the region and the need for additional construction of Wi-Fi infrastructure. Due to the significant delay, that education navigator proceeded to take on students at other OYA and Corps campuses. This specific education navigator became spread too thin and did not have the necessary resources or direction to communicate sufficiently with management at all three sites. This led to a lack of quality care in the opinion of some, and a feeling among management at some sites that the navigator was insufficiently meeting her work targets. For example, youth were reaching out to school staff at the Corps instead of their education navigator when in crisis, since the education navigator could not be contacted. Other education navigators were able to balance work at the Corps’ two campuses in a seemingly effortless manner. This led to some staff taking on extra work, which made it difficult to offer a consistent level of attention and service to youth. In the future, if education navigators are going to be working at multiple sites, a suggested best practice may be to implement structured communication networks with necessary stakeholders from the inception of the partnership.

7. As the OYAs must adhere to the standards of charter schools and the teachers' union, it is more difficult to foster an environment that deviates from traditional academic standards. The Opportunity Youth Partnership finds it a challenge to collaborate with the OYAs around innovative education strategies, new teaching tools, and constant data sharing.

8. It has been an ongoing challenge for FLY staff to engage students outside of their traditional target age for service provision. Moving forward, they would like to find a way to constrain their involvement in the OYP to youth under the age of 18.
Appendix: Santa Clara County Logic Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inputs</th>
<th>Implementation Activities</th>
<th>Outputs</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • Funds/matching funds  
  • Staff  
  • Partners (Kids in Common, SJCCS, COE, CTC, FLY, SVCF, TF)  
  • Youth participants  
  • Data system  
  • Community resources (broad stabilization supports)  
  • Re-engagement education  
  • Partner expertise with the population | Functional Activities  
  - KIC gets MOUs in place with partners  
  - Partners have common understanding of roles, core metrics & outcomes for each partner  
  - KIC sets up a data system (navigator side)  
  - Partners establish protocol for referral flow  
  - Critical system partners understand & support the work of the program, & come together to develop multi-faceted support team  
  - KIC secures anchor institutional funding & philanthropic support  
  - KIC develops contracts & metrics with agencies, housing, education, navigator  
  - Partners hold weekly meetings between education navigators & school site liaisons  
  - School administrators & education navigators collaborate  
  - KIC provides internal training for navigators  
  - KIC secures matching funds | ENRICHMENT  
  Student-Level  
  - Student completes education & obtains HS credential at COE or SJCCS  
  - Students are linked to supports in the community  
  Program-Level  
  - Staffing the data tracking tool consistently  
  - Better alignment of services for the OYP  
  - Partnerships are built with critical system partners  
  (Plan: Post-Secondary Short-Term Outcomes)  
  Support System Outcomes  
  - Students identify their post-secondary support network  
  Education/Career  
  - Obtaining a secondary credential  
  - Enrolling in post-secondary education or training  
  - Persisting through the first period of post-secondary training  
  - Participants obtain positive early work experience & find career-potential employment |
| | Programmatic Activities  
  - Staff provide personalized academic counseling  
  - Staff provide linkages to support services in the community  
  - Navigators provide support to address education barriers  
  - Navigators liaise with school to support students  
  - Students enroll in classes at the COE or SJCCS  
  - Students maintain continuous contact with navigators & receive personalized coaching  
  - Navigators & business liaisons provide support in obtaining & keeping employment | | Enrichment Medium-/Long-Term Outcomes |
| | | | (Plan: Post-Secondary Medium-/Long-Term Outcomes)  
  - Participants report a greater sense of emotional & financial stability  
  - Participants obtain a greater sense of holistic stability  
  - Participants have greater sense of self-efficacy & ownership to influence the course of their lives  
  - Participants report that they feel comfortable building interpersonal relationships & growing in their careers |

Contextual factors: Local labor market, re-engagement landscape & incentives, housing shortage, high cost of living, large ESL population, no centralized public transportation or social services due to spread of the city, enormous catchment area for SIF, operating at a regional level with all of the bureaucracy that entails
March 2017

The Social Innovation Fund (SIF) is primarily supporting a Postsecondary Bridging intervention provided by Seattle Education Access (SEA) in the context of the Reconnecting Youth initiative, part of the broader opportunity youth effort in South King County, Washington. SEA partners with Open Door re-engagement sites all around South King County that provide education through community college instructors on high school courses or GED instruction. There are also case managers working with students on basic needs, stability, housing, and the supports they need (e.g., transportation) to be successful in a postsecondary program.

SEA is adding college prep navigators and retention services to supplement the existing services provided at Open Doors re-engagement sites. While youth sometimes interact in group settings, SEA’s intervention is mostly conducted one-on-one—talking about participants’ education histories, participants’ reasons for leaving traditional pathways, developing a plan to be successful, and getting credentials to stay in college. SEA also works with case managers at the Open Doors sites to make sure they have a coordinated plan to address any personal barriers to educational success that may exist for participants. The bulk of SEA’s intervention focuses on career exploration, including one-on-one coaching; career assessments helping students identify areas of interest and career pathways; provision of labor market information; connection to alumni and people in the field; use of information to make informed decisions about a specific program; and support for financial planning, scholarships, and budgeting.

SEA’s intervention is part of a broader collective impact effort called the Road Map Project. The project is a community-wide, “cradle to college” initiative that aims to improve postsecondary attainment in South King County and South Seattle, particularly among low-income students and children of color. The Community Center for Education Results (CCER) is and has always been the backbone organization for the Road Map Project since its inception. CCER partners with SEA to support their intervention by coordinating connections with the broader re-engagement network,
soliciting and securing funding, and establishing relationships with other partners in South King County.

CCER is utilizing SIF Opportunity Works funding for program and pathway development for opportunity youth. They work with SEA to deliver the intervention and rely on other Road Map Project partners to embed this intervention into the broader initiative.

Context

The South Seattle and South King County region includes seven school districts which collectively served 124,806 students in 2015. The student population is diverse and experiences significant economic hardship. Seventy percent of students are of color, and one-fifth are English language learners (ELLs). The majority (59 percent) of students come from low-income households.

CCER estimates that 20 thousand 16 to 24 year-olds in South Seattle and South King County—or one in five youths in this age cohort and region—are disconnected from education and work (i.e., “disconnected” or “opportunity” youth). Further, two thousand youth leave high school without a diploma each year.

Disconnected youth in the region face unique challenges. One-third of disconnected youth have one or more children. Over two-fifths have a history of mental health needs, and a quarter have a history of substance abuse. Due in part to a lack of affordable housing in the region, nearly one-third are homeless. Further, over two-fifths of disconnected youth have been arrested or convicted of a crime.

The city of Seattle, King County, and the state of Washington have made efforts to serve this population. In 2010, Washington passed the Engrossed Second Substitute House Bill 1418 which established the Open Doors Youth Reengagement Program which was meant to provide education and services to youths ages 16 –21 that have dropped out of high school or who are not expected to graduate by age 21. In South Seattle and South King County specifically, there are 15 Open Doors re-engagement centers. CCER leads the Road Map Project (described in greater detail below), a collective impact effort that focuses in part on establishing pathways for re-engagement and postsecondary attainment for disconnected youth.

Partners

Collective Impact Effort and Backbone: Community Center for Education Results (CCER)

CCER is a 13 person nonprofit organization that coordinates and convenes actors, conducts community advocacy, and cultivates and disseminates data to community partners.
CCER launched the Road Map Project in 2010 and did not initially focus on youth who had dropped out of high school. However, in 2013, CCER received an opportunity youth grant from the Aspen Institute to serve this population. CCER has used this funding and a local match to utilize the collaborative infrastructure of the Roadmap Project to develop a system of re-engagement pathways for opportunity youth. They co-convene a “re-engagement provider network” for the Roadmap Project with King County’s Employment and Education Resources Department. CCER has also received funding from the Raikes Foundation to provide technical assistance related to the Back on Track model.

Programming Partners

SEA, a non-profit organization that aims to provide “higher education advocacy to young people struggling to overcome poverty and adversity throughout King County,” is CCER’s principal programming partner for the Opportunity Works intervention. The organization targets youth in non-traditional education and career pathways and youth with gaps in their education to help them transition to postsecondary programs. SEA has been operating in Seattle for 13 years.

SEA takes the lead in implementing the Opportunity Works intervention and recruiting youth for the program, although SEA relies heavily on the Open Doors re-engagement sites (described in detail below) to help identify and refer youth to the program. SEA currently has a staff of 11, eight of which are devoted to Opportunity Works intervention. SIF funding primarily supports the salaries of “education advocates” who deliver the post-secondary bridging intervention.

SEA partners with Open Doors- and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)-funded case managers in South King County Dropout and Recovery Re-engagement Centers. WIOA has increased case management capacity, but only slightly. The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) was already in place before WIOA, and they were already putting a lot of WIA funding into out-of-school youth.

There are five implementation sites: Youth Source Renton, Seattle Interagency, iGrad, Highline Open Doors, and Acceleration Academy. The two programs that were the closest to full implementation when SEA began implementing the Opportunity Works intervention were Youth Source Renton and Career Link, a community-based organization (CBO) located at Highline Open Doors. SEA has been able to increase its capacity to serve youth at both sites because SIF funding allows SEA to have staff members at these sites twice as much as they did prior to receiving this funding.

Seattle Interagency, iGrad, and Acceleration Academy were added as partner sites throughout the course of the first year, and Federal Way Open Doors is a recently added partner site. SEA had done some initial work with iGrad, but had experienced some challenges. Since the Opportunity Works program started, SEA has expanded this partnership. None of the Highline Open Doors pathways that now exist for youth had been created when the Opportunity Works program began. SEA works with

17 Seattle Education Access. 2015. Link: http://www.seattleeducationaccess.org/about.php
the Career Link, the CBO associated with this program, but not the school district any longer. [Note: Urban needs to confirm accuracy of this statement.]

Initially, there were two very small CBO sites, Safe Futures and the Multi-Service Center, but these partnerships folded. These sites are no longer operational because they failed to achieve sufficiently high enrollment rates to be funded by Open Doors.

Seattle Interagency, a network of alternative high schools in Seattle, was set to house two implementation sites in SEA's original implementation plan, but SEA lost one of the partner sites. The remaining site is Seattle Interagency – Youth Care. While this was initially a challenge, SEA indicated that they believe they will be able to get the same number of referrals from Seattle Interagency despite having one less site.

Some of the newer sites (e.g., Safe Futures) had initial difficulty getting enrollment numbers up. SEA's intervention is dependent on the number of people at the Open Doors centers who come close to completing a high school credential and the number that are referred to SEA. If enrollment at the Open Doors centers is down or the students who are enrolled are not making enough progress towards a GED or diploma, this limits referrals to the Opportunity Works program.

Another difficulty that SEA faced with Seattle Interagency was that they felt like Seattle Interagency wanted to do work serving opportunity youth on their own. The work that Seattle Interagency is doing on college navigation and retention is different than the work that SEA is doing and did not mesh well with SEA's intervention with youth. Seattle Interagency wanted to make referrals to SEA once students had gotten to college, which would mean that students would have missed the bulk of the post-secondary bridging intervention that SEA is implementing. This existing college navigation systems was a challenge for partnering with Seattle Interagency, which is largely why SEA is no longer partnering with Seattle Interagency in this capacity.

SEA indicated that the programming partners that are most successful have a "college culture" or are working on creating that culture. The staff (program managers, case managers, etc.) sees the program not as a GED or high school completion program but rather as a college preparation program. Career Link, another site, has had great success with this conceptualization.

Program Design

Difference from Existing Programming

SEA's intervention has been embedded into services offered at dropout and recovery (re-engagement) centers. The centers were already focused on the drop-out and recovery services. The SIF funded SEA intervention focused on the Postsecondary Bridging and support through postsecondary completion overlays these efforts. SEA's goal is to continue expanding this intervention to new sites and to increase capacity at existing sites. SEA has also expanded their volunteer engagement capacity with
new staffing. This is allowing them to do more than just provide individualized education advocacy; they have been doing more mentoring on site, for instance.

**Back on Track**

Both SEA and CCER indicated that they saw the Postsecondary Bridging component of the Back on Track Model as being similar and complementary to the work SEA was already doing helping opportunity youth transition to post-secondary education. SEA's pre-college training and existing Postsecondary Bridging efforts aligned well with the Back on Track model, and given these similarities, SEA did not have to change its intervention to fit this model. The SIF funding has allowed SEA to hire new education advocates and to expand their existing intervention to new sites to reach more youth. There are a few small programmatic differences between SEA's intervention and the Back on Track Model, including that SEA stays with participants beyond the first year of postsecondary education, but SEA is largely following the same model. SEA also borrowed ideas from the Back on Track framework to build out their college-skill-building- and college-readiness-skills workshops for youth.

**Goals**

SEA, implementation partners, and participants reported congruent, though not necessarily identical, goals for program outcomes for youth.

SEA’s main focus is to help youth move from nontraditional educational pathways to postsecondary attainment. SEA leadership indicated that their goal for participants is to have youth complete high school or attain an equivalent credential, enroll in and attend a postsecondary course of study, and attain a postsecondary credential. More specifically, they aim to have 60 percent of those who enroll with SEA achieve 45 credits or attain a quality postsecondary credential by six quarters into their postsecondary education. SEA's education advocates shared similar attainment-oriented goals for youth. Advocates reported that within a year of the youth starting the program, they hoped youth would have enrolled in a postsecondary program, but some noted that their goals for youth are specific to each individual given that individuals face different barriers. Advocates also indicated that they hoped to have a strong relationship with youth after a year. Most agreed that after two years, they would hope that youth would have graduated or were still enrolled in the program, and after five years, they would have completed the program.

Partners at the Reengagement Centers also reported goals for youth related to increasing educational attainment, but their focus was more on reengagement and helping youth attain a high school equivalency credential rather than on post-secondary attainment. Reengagement center staff aim to help students pass their GED or reenroll in high school to attain their diploma. Several stressed that their focus was on helping youth reengage in an educational environment while identifying and addressing factors that contributed to disconnection with traditional educational pathways. Although staff members at the Reengagement Centers spoke positively about SEA’s work, staff members did not indicate that their primary goal is transitioning students to postsecondary education. Some spoke
of trying to promote a “college-going culture” at their center, but this seemed to be a tertiary consideration after reengagement and high school equivalency completion.

Although not necessarily representative of all youth in the program, youth interviewed as part of a focus group with the Urban Institute had varying goals for educational attainment. While each respondent said that they hoped to attain either a GED or a high school diploma, several came into the program already hoping to go to college. Some others said their desire to pursue post-secondary education was cultivated during their time in the program. Participants’ varying goals before and during the program seem to be consistent with both the SEA advocates’ and partner staff members’ perceptions of student goals with each group having indicated that goals varied by individual.

**Development Process**

CCER, United Way of King County, and SEA collaborated to pursue SIF funding for serving Opportunity Youth, and were each involved in planning this effort from the beginning. CCER had become aware of SEA in surveying the opportunity youth services landscape in South King County, and was intrigued by their efforts to help disconnected youth transition into postsecondary programs. CCER’s director of youth initiatives reached out to SEA’s program director to learn more, and they attended two Aspen convenings together. At one of these convenings, CCER and SEA learned of the opportunity to apply for SIF funding to implement the Back on Track Model. Given that SEA felt that the model was similar and complimentary to their existing work, the partners saw this opportunity as a “good fit” for them. United Way agreed to participate in this partnership as a fiscal administrative partner.

CCER wrote the grant request for SIF funding having already established a collective impact network through the Road Map Project using the Aspen funding described above. CCER indicated that SIF funding was a “perfect” and “obvious” opportunity to allow them to develop pathways for opportunity youth while leveraging the existing collective impact effort.

SEA developed the postsecondary bridging intervention model. As was mentioned above, SEA indicated that they did not have to change their existing pre-college or post-secondary support model for this SIF grant because these components were already baked into their existing intervention. However, because the SIF-funded intervention overlays programming at the Open Doors site partners, implementation of this intervention has been adapted at each site to fit the needs of the partners involved.

**Staffing**

CCER has two positions associated with Opportunity Works, but neither position is solely devoted to Opportunity Works programming. The director of the Opportunity Youth Initiative works to support SEA’s opportunity youth intervention and directs the Road Map Project more broadly. CCER devotes half of a data analyst’s time to the Road Map Project, some of which is related to Opportunity Works.
SEA has eight staff members devoted solely to Opportunity Works programming. Of these, six are education advocates that interact with youth and perform the intervention. The other two staff members are the co-program directors that oversee the work of the education advocates, liaise with partners and sites, and provide training and support to the education advocates. SEA also has 8 Americorps tutors that provide supplemental support to the education advocates. Some of these volunteers are embedded in the classroom, but most receive referrals from the education advocates.

Each of the re-engagement center partners also have staff members that contribute to the Opportunity Works programming in a supplemental way. Because education advocates are stationed at Reengagement Centers and recruit from the population of students therein, they rely heavily on the referrals of case managers and instructors at each of the sites. Although these staff members do not perform the intervention, they often refer students to supportive services, offer case management and support, and refer students to the education advocates.

**Funding Sources**

SIF funding has been used to develop SEA's Postsecondary Bridging intervention with opportunity youth. This funding has primarily been directed towards supporting the salaries of SEA's education advocates who perform the intervention, recruit students, and provide supportive service referrals.

United Way of King County receives funding from Jobs for the Future and has a subcontract with SEA to provide this intervention. United Way conducts the fiscal administration and largely leaves strategy and systems work for CCER to coordinate. United Way has experience managing federal grants including other SIF grants. United Way also launched a fundraising campaign around opportunity youth work in the region which provided the local match for the SIF funding.

CCER receives funding from the Raikes Foundation to support related work, including capacity building work with re-engagement programs around enriched preparation programming which is also in alignment with the Back on Track model. This funding goes largely towards staff salaries and providing technical assistance to partners. Raikes Foundation funding also goes towards financing positions at the county level to support opportunity youth work in the region in an effort to establish the county government as the leader for these efforts in the future.

The Open Doors partners do not receive any SIF funding, but are funded through a variety of other sources including United Way funding and Open Doors funding. As such, SIF dollars are not directly spent on providing supportive, wraparound services, or case management provided to students.

**Timing**

Enrollment began in July 2015 and occurs on a rolling basis. SEA introduces their program to students upon entry/enrollment at one of the re-engagement partners, and students can enroll in SEA’s program at any point. From the point of program entry, it is usually 6 to 9 months before the student
would enroll in community college (or apprenticeship program). Some sites are using diplomas, not GEDs, for high school credential attainment and SEA needs to figure out timing for these programs.

Participants

Characteristics of Participants

Participant survey data pulled on November 8th, 2016 indicates that participants in the program in many ways reflect characteristics of the broader opportunity youth population in South Seattle and King County:

- **Age** - On average, participants entered the program at just under 20 years old (19.8 years old), ranging from 17 to 25.
- **Gender** - Participants identified predominantly as female (59 percent) with males (40 percent) and transgender individuals (one percent) making up the difference.
- **Race** - Participants identified most commonly as Latino / Hispanic (35 percent), black (28 percent), white (16 percent), or mixed race (14 percent).
- **Income** - Most participants identified as low income (44 percent) or as either very low income or extremely low income (44 percent).
- **Educational attainment** - Most participants had not attained a high school credential or higher. Only one third had attained a GED, completed high school, or attended some college.
- **Employment** - Half of all participants were employed during the program with nearly all of these holding part-time positions. Most who were not working, reported looking for work.
- **Parenting** - Just over one fifth (21 percent) had one or more children.
- **Homelessness** - 41 percent of participants had experienced a spell of homelessness.
- **Criminal History** - Only five percent of participants had been to prison.

Target Population

The program targets disconnected youth, ages 16 to 21 in the South Seattle and South King County region. This population disproportionately consists of young men and boys of color and faces a number of unique challenges. Many are immigrants and refugees, some of whom are undocumented. Some are individuals with substance abuse issues.

SEA targets opportunity youth who have completed their second GED and are within six to nine months of attaining their high school diploma, although these are not strict requirements for participation. There are approximately 1,000 youth enrolled in the Open Doors re-engagement
centers from which SEA recruits. SEA indicated that the demand for services far outweighed their ability to provide services for this population in the region.

**Recruitment and Admission**

SEA takes the lead on recruitment with help from their re-engagement center partners. Participants are members of dropout recovery programs at the Open Doors Re-engagement Centers that have a primary goal to help youth finish high school or attain a high school equivalency credential. SEA relies on strong partnerships with these re-engagement centers for referrals to the program, but the actual mechanism by which students are referred looks different at each partner site. SEA embeds education advocates at the re-engagement centers to establish an SEA presence and to proactively make youth aware of SEA services. SEA aims to reach students as early as possible by presenting at orientation meetings, making classroom visits, and building in opportunities for one-on-one discussions with youth. In interviews, SEA advocates expressed the importance of establishing and maintaining relationships with re-engagement center staff and teachers to receive referrals. In the best case scenarios, teachers introduce students to the advocates or assign students to work with advocates directly. However, staff turnover at the re-engagement centers can sever these relationships and cause confusion about the role of an advocate among new staff, hampering referrals at least temporarily. At larger sites, these problems can be exacerbated because the sites are less centralized, making it more difficult to reach students and receive referrals. Students will sometimes self-refer, but this is not true for the majority of students.

While SEA does not use scoring to screen for program admission, they aim to recruit students who will have completed their second GED test at a particular site prior to receiving services or are within six to nine months of high school graduation. Projections are that about 50 percent of youth who participate in Opportunity Works programming will fall into each category. SEA’s intention is to recruit individuals who would be in a position to finish their program of study towards a high school equivalency credential by the time that they would start post-secondary work as part of the Opportunity Works program. These are not strict requirements for students, but most students who enter the program have these characteristics. Participants enter the program on a rolling basis, and there is no waitlist. For their high school completion sites, they tend to see higher enrollment in the fall, spring, and summer. For their GED completion sites, they tend to see higher enrollment in the fall and winter.

SEA aimed to recruit 664 new participants to enroll in the Opportunity Works program after 3 years. In year one, SEA expected to enroll 156 participants. In the following year, they expected to enroll 236 new participants and have 91 continue having enrolled in the first year. In the third year, they anticipated enrolling 272 new participants and to have 245 continue having enrolled in prior years. As of November 2016, SEA reported that they had served approximately 175 participants in the first year, exceeding their enrollment goal.
Attrition

SEA expected approximately sixty percent of year one participants to complete the program. Students are considered to have completed the program if they attained a high school credential and successfully enrolled in a post-secondary education program. SEA expected that approximately forty percent of enrollees would drop out of the program in the first year, and that they would see some retention improvements in years 2 and 3.

Students drop out of the program for a variety of reasons. The most common reason students leave is that they experience academic struggles. Competing employment obligations are another common reason for leaving. Students who are working in an entry-level position while enrolled in the program often make work their top priority and sometimes end up dropping out of school because of this. Employment is almost never conducive to a student’s education schedule given that many jobs have unpredictable schedules. In interviews, education advocates noted that financial issues, whether related to employment or not, contribute to attrition, and that youth are noticeably focused on money. Unexpected life events and motivational factors sometimes play a role as well. Education advocates identified that transportation, child care, and housing issues commonly contribute to attrition as well.

When students do drop out of the program, SEA tries to follow up with non-completers using social media, email, and text. However, this isn’t always effective, particularly if the individual changes their contact information. SEA’s geographically flexible model helps with follow up as well. Because SEA is not tied to a particular location, they can support student at any site based on their interests.

Program Experience

Education and Training Programming

SEA provides a postsecondary bridging intervention that overlays and is embedded into services offered at Open Door re-engagement centers that provide dropout and recovery services to youth in King County. SEA’s education advocates, who serve as college preparation navigators, work with students primarily one-on-one to learn about students’ education histories, identify their reasons for leaving traditional education pathways, develop plans to help students identify and achieve educational and career goals, and connect youth with resources, training, and people needed to acquire the support, skills, and credentials to do so. The intervention focuses on career exploration including one-on-one coaching, career assessments that help students identify areas of interest and career pathways; provision of labor market information; connection to alumni and people in the field; use of information to make informed decisions about a specific program; and support for financial planning, scholarships, and budgeting. Ultimately, the program aims to have participants successfully transition into a post-secondary education program, and support youth in attaining postsecondary credentials needed to acquire well-paying jobs.
Support Services

SIF funding does not go directly towards providing supportive services, but rather towards funding to hire education advocates who connect students to various supportive services either directly or in collaboration with Open Doors case managers. Students access a variety of supports at the re-engagement centers. In particular, students at each re-engagement center receive intensive case management to help with referrals, to provide a point of contact, and help them access supportive services and other resources that will help them pursue their educational goals. However, the composition of support services offered at the re-engagement centers and through referrals varies by re-engagement center site. Examples of support services offered include access and referrals to transportation assistance, emotional and psychological supports, child care assistance, assistance with acquiring a driver's license, and connections to career and internship opportunities in the community.

SEA staff and re-engagement center staff identified that there were a number of unmet needs in terms of support services. For instance, as a community, there is not enough housing or affordable housing in Seattle, and because having inadequate housing is not conducive to completing education, the community often falls short of providing adequate housing supports to their students. Further, because most financial grants don’t provide assistance with living expenses, students often have to work to support themselves and often still face significant financial challenges. In this respect too, these financial stresses can detract from students attaining their educational goals, and present an unmet need in terms of supportive services. Additionally, although child care is offered at some sites, it is not available at most sites. As such, there is not quality or affordable childcare available to most students.

Participant Path through the Program

Students enter the program by way of one of the four re-engagement centers with whom SEA partners. Typically, students who are identified by re-engagement center case management or teaching staff as promising candidates for the SEA programming are referred to the SEA education advocate associated with their center. Students are typically already aware of the SEA programming prior to entering the program because of the education advocates presence at the center. In fact, many are often not even aware that the SEA advocate works for a separate organization. General awareness sometimes leads to student self-referrals after a student has heard about the program at an orientation session or informal one-on-one meetings with the SEA advocate.

Students’ first meetings with an SEA advocate vary in their topical composition. In interviews, SEA advocates explained that this often depends on the context of the meeting, and the particular participant’s pre-existing understanding of the program. However, in most of these meetings, education advocates have an informal conversation where they learn about the student's education and career goals as well the student’s education history. SEA advocates often explain the SEA program in one of the first few meetings, and this initial conversation with students often extends over many meetings. SEA will meet with a typical student three to four times in total before enrolling them in the program to make sure that they are a good fit.
Next, if the student is determined to be a good fit, they are given a career assessment to help identify educational and career opportunities that the student may want to pursue based on their interest. Students are also assessed for potential barriers at the beginning of the program, and SEA advocates help refer students to community resources and supportive services that will help them attain their educational and career goals.

SEA also helps the student develop and pursue their education plan. Typically, the Education Advocate will help identify which tests (e.g., GED, Compass, SAT) the student must complete to reach their educational goals, connect the student with relevant tutoring services, and helps the student plan ahead so that the individual completes any required examinations prior to applying to postsecondary programs. SEA will also help students navigate the admissions process for their post-secondary education, help fill out financial aid paperwork, and identify scholarships and other funding sources to assist the student in enrolling in postsecondary coursework. Upon enrollment, SEA continues to provide one-on-one support and maintain relationships with the students through completion of the student's selected post-secondary program. SEA alumni also often informally meet with current students after being connected by an education advocate. SEA is currently developing a more robust and formalized system of connecting program alumni to current students.

Participants' Perspectives

The Urban Institute conducted a focus group with nine current and former program participants, all of whom were young men and boys of color. The group represented a mix of high school diploma and GED seekers and completers at different stages in the Opportunity Works program. Some were currently trying to transition to postsecondary education while other were program alums in the process of completing coursework for a post-secondary credential. SEA staff members stressed that this group was not comprised solely of the most successful students, but represented varying levels of program achievement.

Consistent with program design, students reported receiving tutoring, help with FAFSA and other financial aid application processes, waivers for placement tests (e.g., Compass test), tuition assistance, help identifying scholarships, transportation assistance, help acquiring books, and assistance with making connections. Indeed, students said that personalized connections to resources and people were something that made SEA's program valuable to them and different than other programs.

Overall, participants' reactions to the program were overwhelmingly positive. In particular, students expressed appreciation for the affirmations, enthusiasm, and helpfulness of SEA staff. One student said that what drew him to the program was the “(SEA education advocates’) enthusiasm when they portray themselves. They are really engaging. They motivate you to keep going. ... The affirmations help a lot too.” Many participants felt that the SEA advocates were committed to participants' education, and felt like and appreciated that the staff listened to their needs and catered support to those needs. One participant noted, “SEA really focuses on what you want to do. They really try to figure out what your game plan is and work off that. They listen.” Participants explained that the SEA advocate helped them refine their interests by letting them explore courses and careers.
through “trial and error” and helping them identify next steps based on their evolving interests. Participants also reported that SEA staff provided someone to talk to when they needed it. Moreover, many students reported spending significant time at their re-engagement center, and several expressed “feeling at home” as part of the program. Students also expressed appreciation for motivational speakers invited to the classroom, and several suggested inviting speakers on a more frequent basis.

Although largely positive in their assessment of the program, students expressed a desire for non-educational programmatic components to help them balance life stresses outside of the classroom. As one student put it:

“People .. be coming from the streets. A lot of violence going on. A lot with family ... It’s helpful to distribute some of the weight of outside life. Sometimes you’re frustrated about bad grades, stuff not going right in school, stuff not going right at home. ... It’s nice to have an outlet.”

To this end, participants suggested incorporating fun activities within the program such as movie showings or games to connect with peers and to distract them from the struggles that they face. A few participants indicated they wished staff would hold them more accountable in terms of attendance and completing work. For instance, one student said he wished program staff would call him if he failed to show up for class. This expressed desire ran contrary to reports from several re-engagement center staff members who had indicated that they felt the need to be flexible in areas such as attendance and accountability because of the life circumstances of their students.

Notably, while students expressed satisfaction with the program, they expressed frustration with the education system, credential attainment, and paths to well-paying jobs, more generally. In particular, participants expressed frustration with the need to attain educational credentials to acquire jobs as several held the perception that college was a place valuable more for networking opportunities than for skill or knowledge development. Remarkably, many students stressed the importance of personal responsibility in this context and a desire for personal improvement to meet their goals despite their frustration with the education system. Several participants expressed that the program was helpful to them, but that they felt that the onus was on them to make changes to improve their own lives and that the program is limited in terms of how much it could help participants do that. When asked why he participated in the program, one student answered, “A sense of disparity. A sense that the way you were living before wasn't really worth it. And that in order to progress, you need to educate yourself.” As another student put it after expressing appreciation for the program, in the bigger picture, to him, the program “is scraps. I'm hungry. I want the full course meal.”

Data

Originally, SEA was using excel spreadsheets to track participant information, and CCER was using a SQL database, which had student-level information from those who had been in the K-12 public
education system between 2005 and 2014. As of May of 2016, the SEA is using a Salesforce database to collect data on participants.

The Salesforce data system collects participant data on the individual level, and is used to conduct intakes, track student progress, and run aggregate data reports. Students complete their own intake which creates a Salesforce file within the system, and then SEA education advocates track their progress and tutors enter hours on that file. The SEA program director then uses the system to run reports on participants that aggregate the individual participant files. The program director and the education advocates are the primary system users. In practice, the education advocates are not using the system beyond entering data, but SEA hopes to use the data to inform programming more actively in the future for program improvement purposes.

CCER collects high level data (e.g., enrollment numbers, demographic information of participants, credential-attainment etc.) and shares this with the Roadmap Project re-engagement network. Members of this network have common metrics that they keep track of at a program level and share with the group in order to help the network as a whole. This information is not used on a program level in short feedback loops to improve program-level outcomes. CCER said that they are trying to increase the data capacity of the whole enterprise with these partners, but this is an ongoing effort. CCER indicated that they would ideally have a common data system for all reengagement systems within the county and that this could happen within the term of the SIF grant, but would not be financed using SIF funding. CCER also has data sharing agreements to receive student-level data with all seven Road Map Project school districts, Washington’s state education agency, the Washington Student Achievement Council, and the state’s longitudinal data system (Education Research & Data Center, ERDC).

Scale and Sustainability

CCER has developed plans to sustain programming directed at Opportunity Youth in King County in the long term including the SIF-funded Back on Track intervention carried out by SEA. In convening service providers, CCER wanted to create a sustainable structure to carry out this work, and has identified King County’s Employment and Education Resources Department as the entity to carry this work forward in the future. King County already operates three of the 15 Open Doors re-engagement sites in the county and CCER believes that the local government has the infrastructure and mission take on this work. CCER has been working closely with the King County government to develop a sustainability plan and to position the county as a leader of opportunity youth and re-engagement work in the region. King County received seed funding from the Raikes Foundation to hire a Re-Engagement System Manager and outreach position for this purpose, and has done so with the commitment that these would become county-funded positions in the long term. Further, because of an increase in the tax levy, $5 million a year will be directed at Opportunity Youth work for the next six years which will help pay for these positions and some other resources as well.
CCER and SEA would also like to expand their intervention to additional sites. They would like to expand the intervention county-wide to all Open Doors sites, but indicated that this would likely not be funded using SIF dollars. They also indicated an interest in expanding to new sites outside of the Roadmap Project region, but were unsure of where they would find the funding to pay for this.

Lessons and Challenges

Advice to Others

An important component to program success is open communication between the education advocates and the re-engagement center case managers who also serve students. While education advocates primarily assist students with bridging to postsecondary programs, case managers connect students to supports and services to help them overcome personal and circumstantial barriers to post-secondary success. There is designed overlap between these roles, which makes communication and coordination between case managers and education advocates particularly important. Having the education advocates participate as part of the re-engagement staff team (e.g., attending staff meetings, meeting with case managers, instructors, and program managers) contributes to improved coordination and communication.

Another hallmark of the SEA approach focuses on relationship building between the advocates and the youth. SEA advocates typically meet with youth three or four times before enrolling youth into the program to allow students time to decide if the program is a good fit for them. During these initial meetings, the advocate is working to get to know the youth informally and build trust. The strength of these relationships was evident in the feedback received during the focus groups, in which youth reflected on the value, importance, and strength of their relationship with the education advocates.

Students (focus group participants) expressed a desire for non-educational programmatic components to help them balance life stresses outside of the classroom. They suggested incorporating fun activities within the program such as movies or games to connect with peers and to distract them from the struggles they face. They also suggested more job shadowing and motivational speakers.

Several interviews surfaced the observation that programs and services for youth need to be designed to look differently from the educational experiences youth had encountered in their past. "If programming looks like a traditional school, it’s just a change of setting."

The decision to embed SEA advocates in Open Doors Centers has proven effective in terms of providing a more seamless experience for youth participants. Most youth are unaware that the SEA advocates work for another agency.
Challenges

SEA has faced some challenges and learned some lessons about implementing this model. In particular, SEA has experienced difficulty finding enough youth at the re-engagement centers that are ready for their intervention. CCER and SEA were confident about helping youth to bridge into post-secondary programs once they had started SEA's program, but they did not expect to face such a great challenge in finding eligible youth.

As SEA has grown, they have faced challenges with preparing new education advocates to implement their post-secondary bridging intervention. Over time, SEA has gathered a better idea of what an advocate needs to support students in terms of resources and relationships. Towards this end, SEA has implemented an onboarding process that helps education advocates become familiar with the work, build awareness of community resources in and outside of the region for referrals and support, and to help navigate relationships at the re-engagement centers at which they will work.

A related challenge is that the enriched preparation part of the pipeline is described as very weak. CCER and JFF are working to develop and refine an action plan around this, and United Way of King County and Raikes Foundation are expected to provide resources to enable JFF to do more on-site coaching around enriched prep.

SEA staff and re-engagement center staff identified that there were a number of unmet needs in terms of support services. For instance, as a community, there is not enough housing or affordable housing in Seattle, and because having inadequate housing is not conducive to completing education, the community often falls short of providing adequate housing supports to their students. Further, because most financial grants don't provide assistance with living expenses, students often have to work to support themselves and often still face significant financial challenges. In this respect too, these financial stresses can detract from students attaining their education goals, and present an unmet need in terms of supportive services. Additionally, although child care is offered at some sites, it is not available at most sites and as such, there is not quality or affordable childcare available to most students.

A staff member at one of the re-engagement centers elaborated on this point in the following way: “Youth come in and think their priority is GED and employment and many of these youth come back because they don’t make enough money….How do we get them thinking beyond survival jobs to more about careers, within classroom, tours, at colleges, and on-campus?”

As noted earlier, we observed some tension between youth self-determination and some more lenient expectations among some of the staff at the re-engagement centers (not the SEA advocates). It was clear from the focus group that most of the youth wanted to be held to high standards, while staff at re-engagement centers often talked about being more lenient and having tempered expectations around attendance and participation due to other unmet needs or unexpected life developments and priorities.
# Appendix 1: Logic Model

## Inputs
- Referrals
- Tutors
- Education Advocates
- Locations at Re-engagement Centers & CTCs (YouthSource Renton, Seattle Interagency, iGrad, Highline Open Doors pathways, Acceleration Academy)
- Funds for gap & emergency needs
- Supplies & materials for students
- SEA Values (lens for assessing how all work is done)

## Implementation Activities

### Functional Activities
- Staff recruitment, onboarding, & training
- Partner with programs serving target demographic
- Adapt service delivery to fit unique site needs
- Referrals from partner re-engagement sites
- Data collection & use
- Applying an equity lens to service delivery

### Programmatic Activities
- SEA staff do intake, assess learning/education history & goals, barriers, & support system; & establish roles & expectations
- SEA staff facilitate Career/Program Exploration (labor market info, WIOA use & support, one-on-one time with advocate)
- SEA staff work with students to develop Individualized Education/College Success Plan (addressing life barriers, enrollment steps, financial resources, test preparation/placement)
- SEA staff deliver College Readiness & Preparation 1-1 & via workshops (depends on site)
- SEA staff provide TA to & through college (on-campus support, troubleshooting, modeling system navigation)
- Students provide peer mentoring & support
- SEA staff provide tutoring (GED, SAT, COMPASS, college material)
- SEA provides financial assistance to students (gap funding, scholarships, materials & supplies)

## Bridging Outputs

### Student-Level
- Students engage in 1-1 meeting time
- Students complete WIOA assignment
- Students have Individualized College Success Plans
- Students receive referrals to community/on-campus resources
- Students attend & complete College 101 courses
- Students participate in on-campus orientation
- Students enroll in dev. ed. or pre-college courses as appropriate
- Students make on-campus connections to peer or near-peer mentors who are current or former SEA students
- Students receive tutoring
- Students receive funding support

### Program-Level
- SEA staff embedded at partner sites
- Referral processes defined across partners
- Questions are referred to SEA
- Youth experience culturally competent services
- Students are enrolled in SEA & student info is entered into data system
- SEA has case notes on students
- SEA has case notes on students

## Bridging Outcomes

- Sufficiently youth are referred to SEA to maintain enrollment & stick role goals
- Students are retained
- Student begins to identify & articulate academic & life barriers
- Student understands role of SEA education advocate
- Students identify a number of potential education/training pathways
- Students articulate pathway of choice
- Students experience reduced barriers to education success
- Students build support network
- Students have increased social network
- Students become college-ready (academically & with barriers reduced/planned for)
- Students feel they are making progress
- Students develop self-advocacy & other meta-cognitive skills
- Students develop understanding of institutional culture
- Students stay engaged in education
- Students independently navigate community & education systems
- Students develop understanding of institutional culture
- Students stay engaged in education
- Students independently navigate community & education systems
- Students show/report improved study skills
- Students test accurately
- Students test into college courses

## Medium/Long Term Outcomes

- Students achieve HS credential
- Students enroll in PS pathway of choice
- Students develop sustainable long-term funding plan
- Youth of color complete HS credential at rates similar to White students
- Youth of color enroll in PS education at rates similar to White students
- Youth of color persist in post-secondary education
- Youth of color persist in post-secondary education at rates similar to White students
- Students earn a PS credential, including certificate with value
- Youth of color earn a PS credential, including certificate with value
- Students achieve family-sustaining employment

### Contextual factors:
- Re-engagement system landscape & capacity; community/technical college landscape & education/training options; local labor market.