The Opportunity Youth Forum: Seizing the Moment to Advance a Movement
Snapshot: 2020 Aspen Forum for Community Solutions Opportunity Youth Forum

**ABOUT THE OYF NETWORK**

The OYF network is home to 5.9 million 16 to 24-year-old youth. 657,000 (11%) are opportunity youth, who are not in school and not working. Among OY:

- 24% are disconnected from high school
- 67% are disconnected from postsecondary education
- 9% are disconnected from the workforce

*Based on 2019 ACS data*

**COLLABORATIVE CHARACTERISTICS**

Collaboratives vary in focus area, size and experience, adapting to meet the unique needs of their communities.

**AREAS OF FOCUS**

Collaboratives prioritized youth involved in or experiencing:

- Justice system: 65%
- Foster system: 61%
- Homelessness: 55%

**SIZE**

Most common partner:
Community Based Organizations

Least common partner:
Government and higher education

Network median: 10 partners
Range: 6-100 partners

**TIME FOCUSING ON OPPORTUNITY YOUTH**

- More than 10 years: 12%
- 5-10 years: 58%
- Less than 5 years: 30%

**BACKBONE CHARACTERISTICS**

Backbone organizations are a critical component of the OYF network, providing a structure and team to coordinate the work of each collaborative.

**TYPES OF ORGANIZATIONS**

Community based organization: 24%
Intermediary: 18%
Education institution: 12%

Other organizations include:
- Workforce investment board
- Community foundation or funder
- Tribal agency
- Cross-organizational partnership

**BUDGET**

BACKBONE BUDGET
Network median: $2.7M
Range: $65,000 to $125M

BUDGET DEDICATED TO OY
Network median: $350,000
Range: $0 to $5.8M

**STAFF**

BACKBONE STAFFING
Network median: 25 FTEs
Range: 2 to 12,000 FTEs

STAFFING DEDICATED TO OY
Network median: 3 FTEs
Range: 1 to 20 FTEs

**TIME FOCUSING ON OPPORTUNITY YOUTH**

- More than 10 years: 24%
- 5-20 years: 52%
- Less than 5 years: 24%

**CORE VALUES**

Equity, youth-led change, and community power building are foundational to OYF. Collaboratives advanced in equity from 2019 to 2020, building on the national racial justice movement, while pandemic restrictions limited direct engagement – making youth-led change and community power building more challenging.

All collaboratives incorporated explicit acknowledgement of racial equity or other community-specific disparities in planning.

Healing-centered organizing is an important component of youth-led change for OYF. Most common healing-centered strategies:

- 68% of collaboratives provided training in youth organizing, advocacy, social justice or critical awareness
- 58% of collaboratives regularly incorporated celebration and positive acknowledgement
ORGANIZING FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE

The 2020 evaluation examined two dimensions of communities in the OYF network:

1) **Collaborative capacity**: the infrastructure and processes necessary for the collaborative to carry out its opportunity youth agenda

2) **Systems changes**: “shifts to the conditions that hold a problem in place”*—in this case, disconnected pathways and inequitable conditions that prevent young people from achieving education and employment outcomes


COLLABORATIVE CAPACITY

Remained strong in convening diverse members and promising in data use, with shifts in focus from external communication to internal capacity work, when comparing 2019 and 2020.

Systems changes: "shifts to the conditions that hold a problem in place"—in this case, disconnected pathways and inequitable conditions that prevent young people from achieving education and employment outcomes

COLLABORATIVE CAPACITY

Remained strong in convening diverse members and promising in data use, with shifts in focus from external communication to internal capacity work, when comparing 2019 and 2020. 88% of collaboratives reported at least some evidence of the capacities needed to support facilitation, planning, implementation, and management of their work.

The pandemic contributed to a reduced focus on external relationships and communications, compared with 2019, with collaboratives shifting attention inward—contributing to strengthening some aspects of data collection and use.

Collaboratives increased their ability to gather resources, support, and partner organizational commitment to advance OY work, compared to 2019—possibly related to the availability of pandemic funding for immediate community needs.

SYSTEMS CHANGES

Remained the most advanced in programmatic changes on behalf of opportunity youth, with an increased focus on narrative change and data use, when comparing 2019 and 2020.

71% of collaboratives redesigned programs to better serve OY. In response to the pandemic, collaboratives adapted programs, prioritizing supports for young people’s mental health and basic needs.

Increased national attention on racial inequity and injustice contributed to collaboratives engaging sector and system partners in new conversations about racism in local systems.

From 2019-20, the largest systems change gain was in Data Use. Collaboratives reported some evidence that:

- 84% Local systems used OY data for decision-making
- 74% OY data were used to inform system-wide practices
- 55% Systems used disaggregated data to improve programs for OY sub-populations
- 48% OY data drove policy decisions

Methods. Findings come from the 2020 OYF Self-Assessment. Thirty-three collaboratives answered questions about their collaborative capacity and systems changes. The Assessment included indicators grouped into four types of capacities and seven types of systems changes, assessed on a four-point scale.

For more information about the OYF network: https://www.aspencommunitysolutions.org/opportunity-youth-forum/