



EVALUATION  
REPORT  
2023

# The Opportunity Youth Forum: Collaborating to Transform Local Systems and Amplify Youth Impact, 2019-2023

Prepared for The Aspen Institute Opportunity Youth Forum | December 2024

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FINDING  
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CHANGE



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## The Opportunity Youth Forum: Collaborating to Transform Local Systems and Amplify Youth Impact, 2019-2023

For the past decade, Equal Measure has served as the learning and evaluation partner for the Aspen Institute's Forum for Community Solutions (FCS) and its Opportunity Youth Forum (OYF). OYF is a network of more than 40 local collaboratives focused on the educational and economic success of youth and young adults (Figure 1). OYF's goal for the next ten years is to reduce youth disconnection by 50 percent in OYF communities, resulting in 500,000 fewer opportunity youth by 2033.<sup>1</sup>

### About the Opportunity Youth Forum

The Aspen Institute's Forum for Community Solutions (FCS) launched the OYF in 2012, on the recommendations from President Obama's White House Council on Community Solutions. Since then, FCS has mobilized a national movement, convening and supporting a network of more than 40 communities dedicated to improving systems so all young people, including the nearly 1 million opportunity youth in OYF communities, can connect or re-connect to an education or career pathway.

FIGURE 1. MAP OF THE OYF NETWORK IN 2023



<sup>1</sup> Forum for Community Solutions, Opportunity Youth Forum, <https://www.aspencommunitysolutions.org/opportunity-youth-forum/>.



## KEY FINDINGS IN THIS REPORT

- The **youth disconnection rate**, or the percentage of 16–24-year-olds not in school and not working, in OYF communities, has **nearly returned to pre-pandemic levels**, with an almost two percentage point drop between 2021 and 2022 (13.1% to 11.4%). Prior to the pandemic, rates dropped between 2017 and 2019 (11.9% to 11.1%).
- Preliminary data indicates that **collaboratives reporting greater evidence of systems change in 2019 in their local communities tended to have lower youth disconnection rates in 2022**.
- There continues to be a consistent relationship between **strong collaborative capacity and the ability to improve local systems** serving young people (see Figure 7 on page 9).
- **Public policy change is at its highest level in five years**; it increased by eight percentage points from 2022 to 2023.
- The **path to changing local systems remains nonlinear**, with all OY collaboratives experiencing both growth and declines over the past five years (see: [2023 Equal Measure report](#)).

## OYF Theory of Change: How OYF Works to Improve the Lives of Opportunity Youth

The OYF theory of change (Figure 2) hypothesizes that investing in the development, learning, and support of cross-sector collaboratives will enable communities to change systems to better serve young people, especially young people of color. Improving local systems – education, workforce, human services, justice, and others – will result in fewer opportunity youth by removing barriers and improving access and success on educational and career pathways.

This report describes progress across the OYF network and trends in the three main elements of the OYF theory of change: collaborative capacity, systems change, and youth outcomes, and the relationships between them using data from the annual OYF self-assessment<sup>2</sup> and the OYF Common Measures.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The self-assessment has been administered annually to each collaborative since 2019 and focuses on collaborative capacity in four areas (*leadership, planning, and convening power; data and learning; raising awareness and strategic communications; and resources for the collaborative*) and local systems change in seven areas (*programmatic change; organizational change; narrative change; public policy change; data use; funding changes; and pathway improvements*).

<sup>3</sup> The OYF Common Measures use American Community Survey (ACS) data to calculate youth disconnection rates and the number of opportunity youth in each OYF community and have been calculated in 2017, 2019, 2021, and 2022. See: Forum for Community Solutions, OYF Common Measures, <https://www.aspencommunitysolutions.org/oym-common-measures/>



FIGURE 2. OYF THEORY OF CHANGE FOR PLACE-BASED COLLABORATIVES

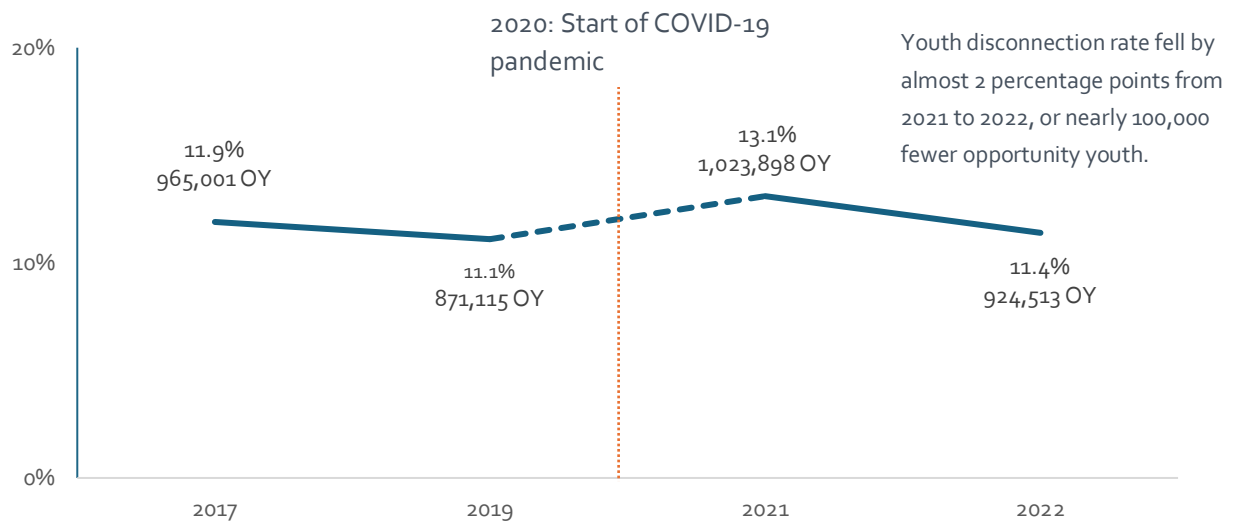


## YOUTH OUTCOMES

### Youth Outcomes in OYF Communities, 2017-2022

The Common Measures are intended to track and illuminate trends in youth disconnection over time and provide OYF communities with valuable community-level data to better understand opportunity youth in their communities. Across the OYF network, the youth disconnection rate<sup>4</sup> was 11.9 percent in 2017 and 11.1 percent in 2019; jumped to 13.1 percent in 2021 (due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic), and then dropped to 11.4 percent in 2022 (Figure 3). **The disconnection rate has nearly returned to pre-pandemic levels, falling almost two percentage points between 2021 and 2022 in OYF communities.**

FIGURE 3. YOUTH DISCONNECTION IN OYF COMMUNITIES ROSE DURING PANDEMIC BUT HAS RESUMED A DOWNWARD TRAJECTORY



Source: American Community Survey Data<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The percent of young people ages 16-24 who are not in school and are not working.

<sup>5</sup> Disconnection rates are based on the same set of 44 collaboratives in each year so that comparisons can be made over time. The Common Measures were not calculated in 2020 due to poor data quality of the ACS.



# Preliminary Findings: The Relationship Between Systems Change and Youth Outcomes

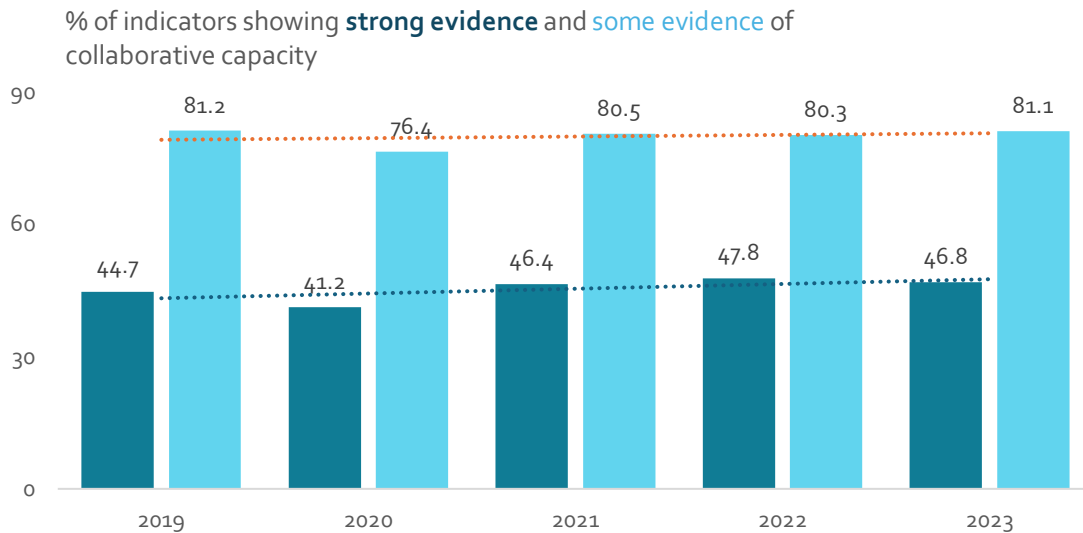
Based on the theory of change, we would expect OYF communities with *greater* success in changing local systems to better serve young people to have *lower* youth disconnection rates over the long term. We conducted exploratory analyses using data collected over five years to assess the relationship between systems change scores (based on self-assessment data of community change across seven areas, including narrative, policy, and funding) and community youth disconnection rates. One promising finding was a moderate correlation<sup>6</sup> between 2019 systems change scores (the earliest year we have) and 2022 youth disconnection rates (the latest year we have): **collaboratives with higher systems change scores in 2019 tended to have lower youth disconnection rates in 2022**. These findings should be considered preliminary; more data and a longer timeframe are needed.

Community-level change in youth disconnection is the goal and OYF aims to achieve that goal through **high-capacity community collaboratives** that work across multiple sectors and with community leaders and residents to bring about **changes in local systems** that impact opportunity youth.

## COLLABORATIVE CAPACITY OYF Network Trends Over Time, 2019-2023

Collaborative capacity, which includes indicators of *leadership, planning, and convening power; data and learning; raising awareness and strategic communications; and resources for the collaborative* has remained steady across the OYF network over the past five years (Figure 4). *Leadership, planning, and convening power* is at its highest level in five years, indicating a **network strength of collaborative participation, structures, and processes – the foundation of high-functioning collaboratives**.

**FIGURE 4.** NETWORK CAPACITY SCORES BY YEAR, 2019-2023



Note: Some evidence responses include describes us somewhat, well, or very well; strong evidence responses include describes us well or very well.

<sup>6</sup>  $r = -0.45, p < .001$



## OYF Collaboratives Trends Over Time, 2019-2023

Looking at trends in the network is complicated by its changing composition – new collaboratives join and others leave the network each year or undergo significant changes and thus do not participate in the annual assessment. One way to look at changes in capacity and avoid the problems of looking at the network as a whole is to look at how individual collaboratives have changed over time.

Over the last year (2022 to 2023):

- **Two-thirds of collaboratives** (68% or 23 of 34 collaboratives) **improved their collaborative capacity from 2022 to 2023**. Looking at the four types of capacities, these improvements were driven by increases in *data and learning* capacity – 85 percent of collaboratives improved in this capacity from 2022 to 2023. Fifty-nine percent increased their *leadership* capacity from 2022 to 2023.

Over the last five years (2019 to 2023):

- **Over half of collaboratives** (with five years of assessment data) **improved their collaborative capacity from 2019 to 2023** (56% or nine out of 16 collaboratives).

Collaborative capacity in individual collaboratives may go up and down year to year due to several factors such as changes in collaborative or cross-sector partner leadership, other staff changes, and fluctuations in funding. These changes can affect building and maintaining cross-partner relationships, momentum on key initiatives or projects, and the ability to invest in capacities such as data infrastructure.

## SYSTEMS CHANGE

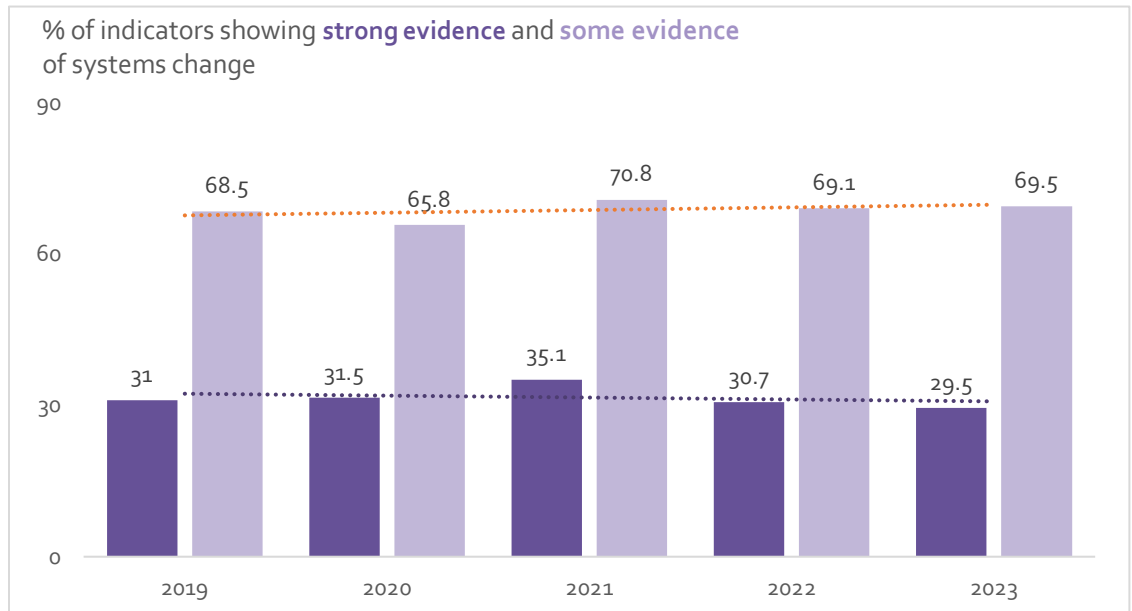
### OYF Network Trends Over Time, 2019-2023

Evidence of local systems changes is measured across seven areas: *programmatic change*, *organizational change*, *narrative change*, *public policy change*, *data use*, *funding change*, and *pathway improvement*.

Overall, network systems change scores were steady over the last five years (Figure 5). Systems change peaked in 2021 and has declined over the last couple of years. **Public policy change, however, is at its highest level in five years**; it increased by eight percentage points from 2022 to 2023.



**FIGURE 5. NETWORK SYSTEMS CHANGE SCORES BY YEAR, 2019-2023**



Note: Some evidence responses include describes us somewhat, well, or very well; strong evidence responses include describes us well or very well.

## OYF Collaboratives Trends Over Time, 2019-2023

In last year’s report, we found that the year-to-year systems change journeys were varied, with most communities experiencing some variation of “ups and downs” (growth and declines in systems change scores) over time. We continue to see these trends as we add an additional year of data (Figure 6).

**FIGURE 6. OYF COLLABORATIVES SYSTEMS CHANGE JOURNEYS, 2019-2023<sup>7</sup>**



**Zigzag.** Over half (53%, nine collaboratives) of collaboratives showed growth and decline over the time period (2019-2023). For some, this looked like a zigzag pattern with yearly alternating growth and declines; for others, it was ups and downs followed by two years of growth or decline (or vice versa).



**U-shape.** About a quarter of collaboratives (24%, four collaboratives) followed a “u-shape” pattern of declines followed by rebounds or periods of growth.



**Growth, then decline in 2023.** About a quarter of collaboratives (24%, four collaboratives) showed growth over four years and then a decline in 2023. At two collaboratives, this decline was large.

<sup>7</sup> Among collaboratives with 4-5 years of self-assessment data.



In looking at changes in individual collaboratives, the only **area of systems change where the majority of collaboratives improved from 2019 to 2023 was in *data use across systems*** (11 of 16 collaboratives or 69% improved). Similarly, *data use across systems* was the only area that most collaboratives (54%) improved over the last year (2022-2023). This coincides with an intentional multi-year effort by FCS to grow data capacity and use by OYF collaboratives.

The trend data continue to show the ups and downs of systems changes in local communities with sometimes dramatic year-to-year changes. As we shared in last year's evaluation report,<sup>8</sup> challenges to systems change work include: COVID and local natural disasters' impacts and recovery; leadership, staffing, and backbone transitions; unstable funding and resources; and the political context and climate. These factors can cause disruptions, the need to pause work, the loss of momentum, and the need to re-set priorities and strategies which can slow or reverse the progress of changing local systems. As we've noted before, progress, and especially in changing organizations, institutions, and policies, is not straightforward and linear, but a journey with many ups and downs.

## The Relationship Between Collaborative Capacity and Systems Change in 2023

The OYF theory of change posits that as collaboratives build their capacity to implement their opportunity youth agendas by strengthening collaborative *leadership, data, communications, and resources* that they will be better able to implement systems changes in their communities. In our analysis of the 2023 assessment data, we found that the relationship between collaborative capacity and systems change was consistent with prior years, where **collaboratives with greater capacity are statistically more likely to see greater evidence of systems changes necessary for opportunity youth to succeed** (Figure 7).

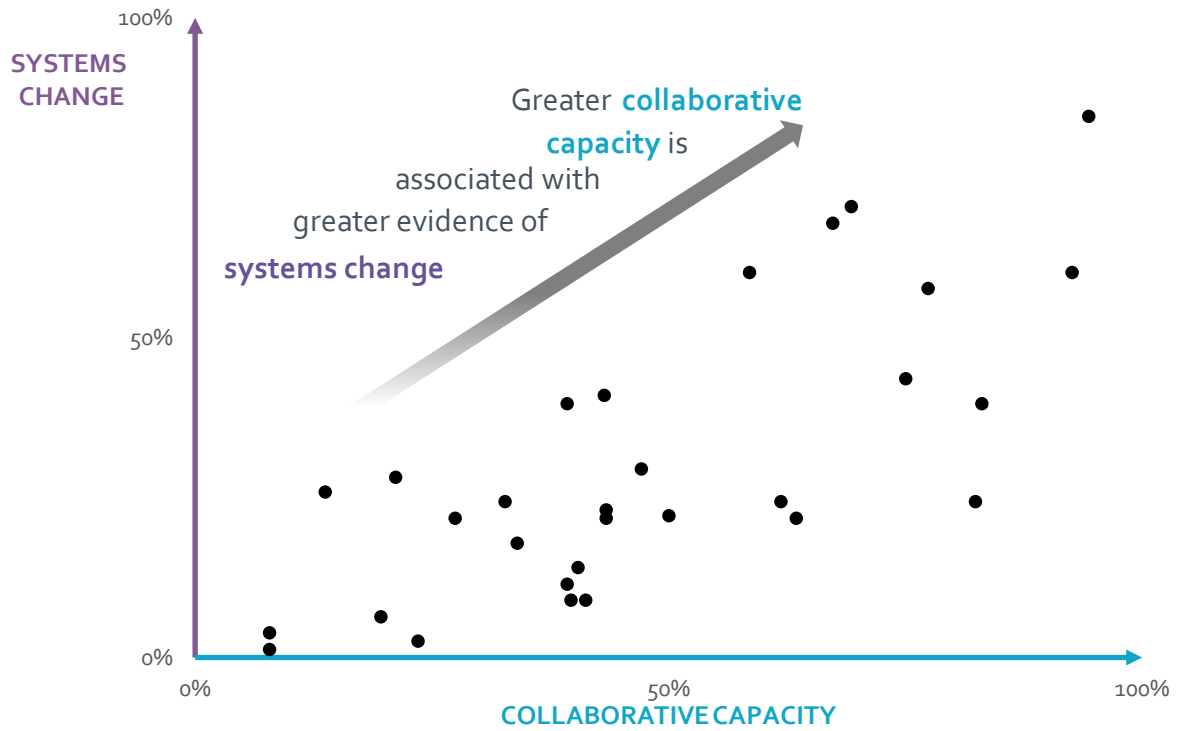
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<sup>8</sup> Equal Measure, Many Paths Forward: The Systems Change Journeys of OYF Collaboratives, <https://www.aspencommunitysolutions.org/report/many-paths-forward-the-systems-change-journeys-of-oyf-collaboratives/>





**FIGURE 7. COLLABORATIVES WITH HIGHER CAPACITY SCORES HAD HIGHER SYSTEMS CHANGE SCORES (2023)**



Note: Each dot represents a collaborative. The capacity and systems change scores indicate the percentage of indicators of capacity or systems change that are strongly evident in the collaborative or community in 2023 (see Appendix for more details).



# INTRODUCTION

For the past decade, Equal Measure has served as the learning and evaluation partner for the Aspen Institute’s Forum for Community Solutions (FCS) and its Opportunity Youth Forum (OYF). Launched in 2012 and based on the recommendations of President Obama’s White House Council on Community Solutions, FCS seeks to mobilize a movement: a national network of communities committed to improving and transforming systems so that all young people, regardless of race, gender, or income, have equitable access to education and career pathways.

Core to the OYF network is an understanding that *systems* – not young people – cause disparities in outcomes among population groups. Our nation’s systems, including K-12 and postsecondary education, workforce, housing, child welfare, and justice systems, are flawed and not designed for all young people – particularly young people of color and those experiencing poverty – to succeed. Instead, these systems, built on a foundation of outdated and racist public policies and historical narratives, create and uphold obstacles that keep too many young people from accessing the same opportunities as their peers from more privileged backgrounds. For the last decade, it’s been the mission of FCS and the 46 community-based collaboratives<sup>9</sup> that make up the OYF network (Figure 1) to change the institutions, policies, narratives, and systems that fail our nation’s most vulnerable young people.

FIGURE 1. MAP OF THE OYF NETWORK IN 2023



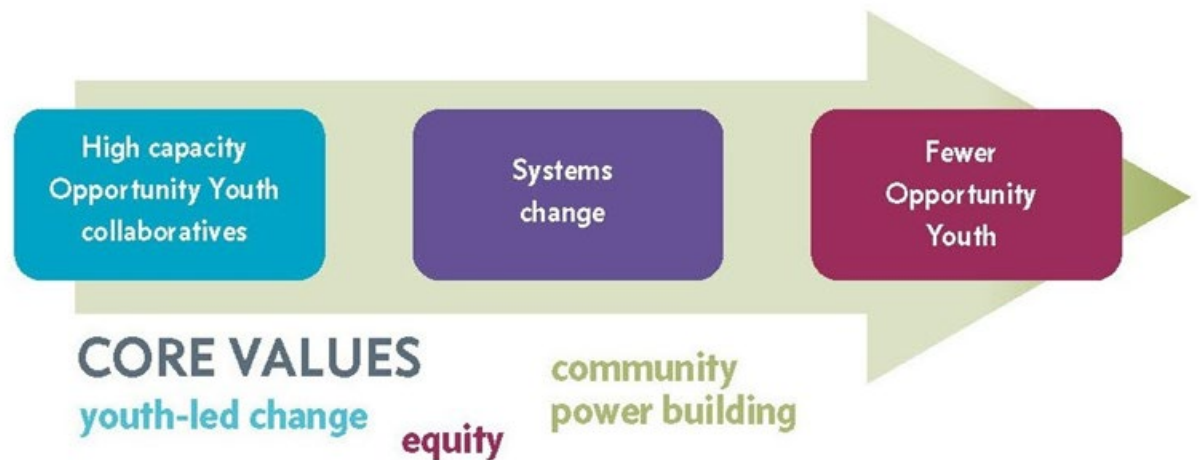
<sup>9</sup> The map indicates 46 collaboratives in the OYF network in 2023 (New York City has four collaboratives). Of these, 39 collaboratives completed the 2023 self-assessment.



## OYF Theory of Change: How OYF Works to Improve the Lives of Opportunity Youth

Since the OYF's inception, place-based cross-sector partnerships have used a collaborative approach<sup>10</sup> to connect or re-connect opportunity youth to education and career pathways. Underlying these strategies is the belief that disconnected and inadequate systems create barriers to education and career opportunities for young people. To successfully engage and re-engage young people, systems of individuals, programs, organizations, policies, and resources must change. By investing in the development, learning, and support of cross-sector collaboratives to change these systems, youth outcomes – connection to education and workforce pathways – will improve (Figure 2).

**FIGURE 2.** OYF THEORY OF CHANGE FOR PLACE-BASED COLLABORATIVES



The OYF evaluation focused on, and measured, the three interrelated elements central to the OYF theory of change, along with a set of embedded core values that guide the work.

1. **Collaborative capacity:** The infrastructure and processes necessary for the collaborative to carry out its opportunity youth agenda.
2. **Systems change:** "Shifts to the conditions that hold a problem in place"<sup>11</sup> – in this case, the disconnected pathways and inequitable conditions that prevent young people from achieving education and employment outcomes.
3. **Fewer opportunity youth:** The goal of OYF is to reduce youth disconnection from education and work. Over the next ten years, OYF's goal is to reduce the incidence of youth disconnection by 50 percent in OYF communities, resulting in 500,000 fewer opportunity youth by 2033.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Collaboratives vary in their structures and approaches with some taking a collective impact approach (<https://collectiveimpactforum.org/what-is-collective-impact/>). As the network has grown, the approaches implemented have become more varied. We are currently conducting a qualitative study with a sample of sites to get a better sense of the range of structures and strategies that OYF sites are using.

<sup>11</sup> Kania, John, Kramer, Mark and Senge, Peter. May 2018, The Waters of Systems Change, FSG.

<sup>12</sup> Forum for Community Solutions, Opportunity Youth Forum, <https://www.aspencommunitysolutions.org/opportunity-youth-forum/>



In addition, the OYF theory of change is undergirded by a set of **core values** – equity, youth-led change, and community power building – embedded in the strategies and efforts to change local systems that affect opportunity youth. The values were also assessed as part of the evaluation.

## Assessing the Elements of the Theory of Change

We drew findings in this report from two sources: an analysis of the 2022 American Community Survey data to report on the OYF Common Measures and the 2023 annual OYF self-assessment. We also looked at previous years' data to examine trends over time.

The Common Measures<sup>13</sup> use American Community Survey (ACS) data to calculate **youth disconnection rates** and the number of opportunity youth in each OYF community, and have been calculated in 2017, 2019, 2021, and 2022. The Common Measures are population-level rates – rates of disconnection in a defined community that can be tracked over time and disaggregated by demographic characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender, and age to understand disparities across different groups. The OY disconnection rate is one way to look at progress towards the goal of OYF – reducing the number of opportunity youth.

The self-assessment has been administered annually to each collaborative since 2019 and focuses on collaborative capacity and systems change. **Collaborative capacity** is assessed across four areas: 1) *leadership, planning, and convening power*; 2) *data and learning*; 3) *raising awareness and strategic communications*; and 4) *resources for the collaborative*. Seven types of **systems change** in local communities are assessed: 1) *programmatic change*; 2) *organizational change*; 3) *public policy change*; 4) *funding changes*; 5) *data*; 6) *narrative change*; and 7) *pathway improvements*. **Core values** of *equity, youth-led change, and community power* are embedded across the different capacities and systems changes.<sup>14</sup>

## Structure of the Report

In this report, we describe progress across the OYF network and trends in the three main elements of the OYF theory of change: collaborative capacity, systems change, and youth outcomes.<sup>15</sup> We start with the landscape of youth disconnection across the OYF network in 2022 and over a period of five years (2017-2022), exploring how changes in systems in OYF communities might be associated with youth disconnection. We then detail findings on collaborative capacity and systems change in a snapshot of 2023 and in trends from 2019 to 2023 and examine the relationship between them to better understand the evidence behind the OYF theory of change.

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<sup>13</sup> Forum for Community Solutions, OYF Common Measures, <https://www.aspencommunitysolutions.org/oyf-common-measures/>

<sup>14</sup> See Appendix for more details on the data sources and methodology.

<sup>15</sup> See findings on core values in the Appendix.



## KEY FINDINGS

- The **youth disconnection rate**, or the percentage of 16–24-year-olds not in school and not working, in OYF communities, has **nearly returned to pre-pandemic levels**, with an almost two percentage point drop between 2021 and 2022 (13.1% to 11.4%). Prior to the pandemic, rates dropped between 2017 and 2019 (11.9% to 11.1%).
- Preliminary data indicates that **collaboratives reporting greater evidence of systems change in 2019 in their local communities tended to have lower youth disconnection rates in 2022**.
- There continues to be a consistent relationship between **strong collaborative capacity and the ability to improve local systems** serving young people (see Figure 17 on page 29).
- **Public policy change is at its highest level in five years**; it increased by eight percentage points from 2022 to 2023.
- The **path to changing local systems remains nonlinear**, with all OY collaboratives experiencing both growth and declines over the past five years (see: [2023 Equal Measure report](#)).



## About the OYF Network

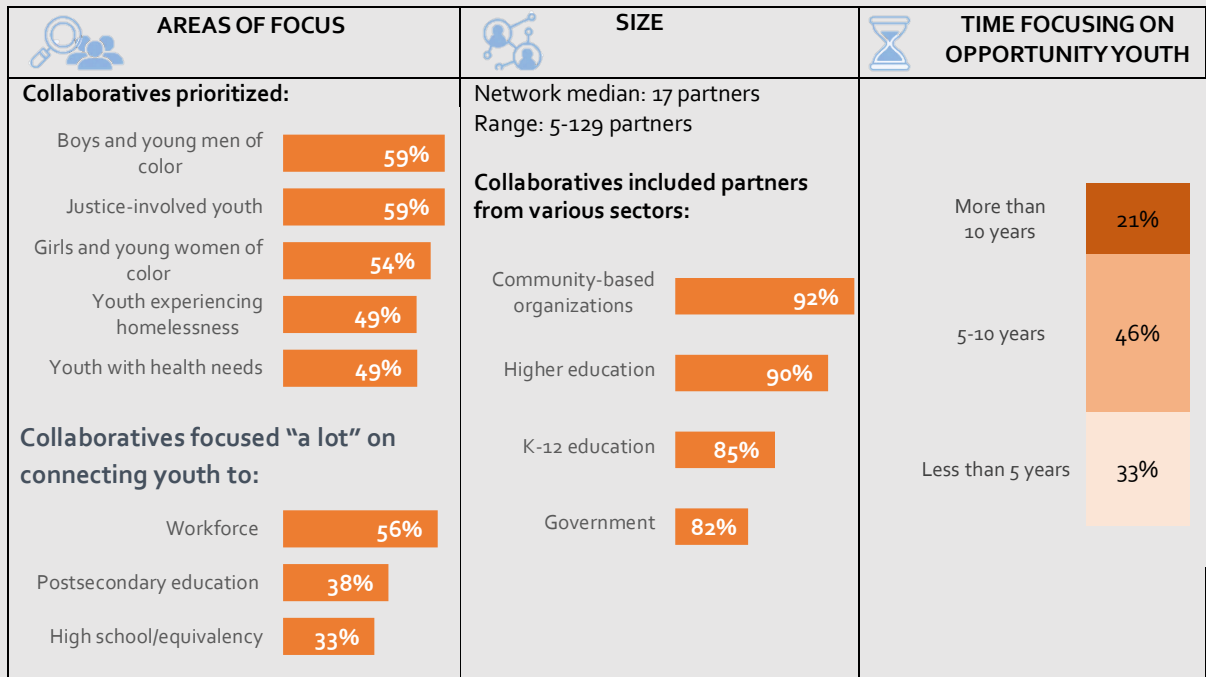
Since its launch in 2012, the OYF network has grown significantly. In 2023, 46 collaboratives were part of the OYF network, more than double the number of collaboratives when the network formed. While partners involved in the OYF network share a common vision, the communities in which they operate, the collaboratives leading this work, and the backbone organizations coordinating these efforts vary greatly.<sup>16</sup>

### COLLABORATIVE CHARACTERISTICS

In the OYF network, cross-sector collaboratives work to connect youth to education and employment opportunities. Collaboratives vary in their approach, experience working with opportunity youth, size, and areas of focus. Collaboratives were asked about the intended scale and reach of their collaboratives – if they are looking to make “comprehensive change” by aiming to improve outcomes for all youth or

if they were more narrowly focused on improving youth outcomes in a specific sector or focused on a specific project or program. The vast majority (80%) identified their collaborative as seeking comprehensive change. Six collaboratives described themselves as a “joint program”<sup>17</sup> and two as seeking changes within a sector. Additional collaborative characteristics are presented in Figure 3.

FIGURE 3. COLLABORATIVE CHARACTERISTICS SNAPSHOT (2023)



<sup>16</sup> See Appendix for additional background characteristics of OYF communities, collaboratives, and backbone organizations.

<sup>17</sup> Collaboratives that identified as joint programs did not complete the systems change questions on the self-assessment since this was not the kind of change they were seeking to make.







## COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS

Communities served by OYF collaboratives span the United States across urban and rural regions and collaboratives tailor their strategies for reconnecting opportunity youth to their local context. In 2023, 44 percent of collaboratives were located in urban areas and about a quarter (26%) were located in rural areas or small towns. Thirty-one percent were serving some combination of urban, rural/small town, and suburban areas.

## BACKBONE CHARACTERISTICS

The backbone organization is the lead organization coordinating the work of each OYF collaborative. Almost two-thirds of (65%) of backbone organizations' opportunity youth work in 2023 happened as part of a broader initiative such as part of cradle-to-career initiatives or workforce-focused initiatives, while about a quarter focused only on opportunity youth (24%).<sup>18</sup> A third of backbone organizations (33%) were community-based organizations; 28 percent were intermediaries, and 10 percent were educational institutions (Figure 4).

**FIGURE 4. BACKBONE ORGANIZATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS SNAPSHOT (2023)**

 <b>TYPES OF ORGANIZATIONS</b>	 <b>BUDGET</b>	 <b>STAFF</b>	 <b>TIME FOCUSING ON OPPORTUNITY YOUTH</b>
<div data-bbox="315 1024 548 1182"> <p>Community-based organization 33%</p> <p>Intermediary 28%</p> <p>Education institution 10%</p> </div> <p>Other organizations include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community foundation or funder</li> <li>• Workforce investment board</li> <li>• Local or tribal government agency</li> </ul>	<p><b>BACKBONE ORGANIZATION BUDGET:</b></p> <p>Network median: \$3.7M</p> <p>Range: \$130k to \$125M</p> <p><b>BUDGET DEDICATED TO OY:</b></p> <p>Network median: \$661,090</p> <p>Range: \$30k to \$24M</p>	<p><b>BACKBONE ORGANIZATION STAFFING</b></p> <p>Network median: 11 FTEs</p> <p>Range: 0 to 220 FTEs</p> <p><b>STAFFING DEDICATED TO OPPORTUNITY YOUTH</b></p> <p>Network median: 3 FTEs</p> <p>Range: 0 to 25 FTEs</p>	<div data-bbox="1243 1056 1539 1371"> <p>More than 10 years 23%</p> <p>5-10 years 31%</p> <p>Less than 5 years 46%</p> </div>

<sup>18</sup> 11% (4 collaboratives) noted an "other" category.



# FINDINGS

## OYF Theory of Change: Data Snapshots and Trends

### YOUTH OUTCOMES

#### Youth Outcomes in OYF Communities, 2017-2022

The goal of the Opportunity Youth Forum is to connect or re-connect young people to education or work opportunities, thereby reducing youth disconnection. The OYF theory of change posits that improving systems – education, workforce, human services, justice, and others – will result in fewer opportunity youth by removing barriers and improving access and success on educational and career pathways.

The Common Measures are intended to track and illuminate trends in youth disconnection over time and provide OYF communities with valuable community-level data to better understand opportunity youth in their communities. In 2022 (the most recent year of available ACS data), the youth disconnection rate in the network was 11.4 percent, representing **over 920,000 opportunity youth in OYF communities**. In other words, in all OYF communities put together, over 11 percent of young people (16-24 years old) were not connected to school or work. Rates varied widely across communities; for example, only 5.2 percent of young people were disconnected in Denver, CO in 2022 compared to 23 percent in Greenville, MS.

Across the OYF network, the youth disconnection rate was 11.9 percent in 2017 and 11.1 percent in 2019; jumped to 13.1 percent in 2021 (due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic), and then dropped to 11.4 percent in 2022. **The disconnection rate has nearly returned to pre-pandemic levels, falling almost two percentage points between 2021 and 2022 in OYF communities.** (Figure 5).<sup>19 20</sup>

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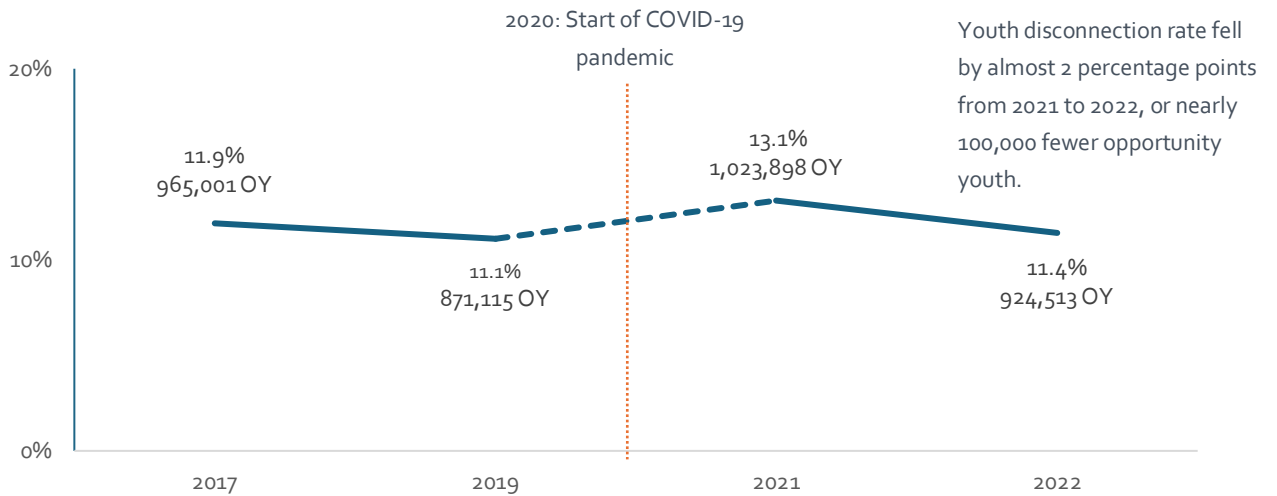
<sup>19</sup> This pattern is similar to national trends. Measure of America reported that after reaching a historic low in 2019 (10.7%), the national youth disconnection rate spiked in 2020 and remained high in 2021 at 12.1%, returning to 10.9% in 2022. Measure of America, Broad Recovery, Persistent Inequity: Youth Disconnection in America, <https://src-static.s3.amazonaws.com/moa/BroadRecoveryPersistentInequity.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> See additional data in the Common Measures infographic: Youth Connection Across the Opportunity Youth Forum in 2022, <https://www.aspencommunitysolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/2022-Common-Measures-Summary-July2024.pdf>





**FIGURE 5. YOUTH DISCONNECTION IN OYF COMMUNITIES ROSE DURING PANDEMIC BUT HAS RESUMED A DOWNWARD TRAJECTORY**



Source: American Community Survey Data<sup>21</sup>

## Analysis of Systems Change and Youth Outcomes

Based on the theory of change, we would expect OYF communities with *greater* success in changing systems to have *lower* youth disconnection rates over the long term, since the population-level impacts of changing systems may take time to appear. We conducted exploratory analyses using data collected over five years to assess the relationship between systems change scores (as measured on the self-assessment from 2019 to 2023) and community disconnection rates (using ACS data in 2017, 2019, 2021, and 2022). We conducted correlational analyses between systems change scores at one point in time and disconnection rates at a later point in time, as well as changes in systems change scores and changes in disconnection rates over time.

There are limitations to keep in mind regarding this correlational analysis. An association between systems change and youth disconnection does not mean the relationship is *causal*. We know there are many factors that can affect youth disconnection rates in a community including the local labor market and job opportunities, accessibility of training and education, poverty, structural racism, geography, and other factors. While widespread changes to multiple local systems to better serve young people are likely to reduce youth disconnection, positive changes could be counteracted by other changes and forces in the community.

Rural and tribal communities were excluded from our exploratory analyses because the geographic areas in the ACS do not align well with the geographic areas where the collaboratives are operating. The smallest rural and tribal geographic areas and populations sampled in the ACS are often much larger than the geographic areas where collaboratives operate and the populations they serve. This is a challenge with using large national data sets to understand smaller and more rural areas and one FCS works to mitigate through data collection by local communities.

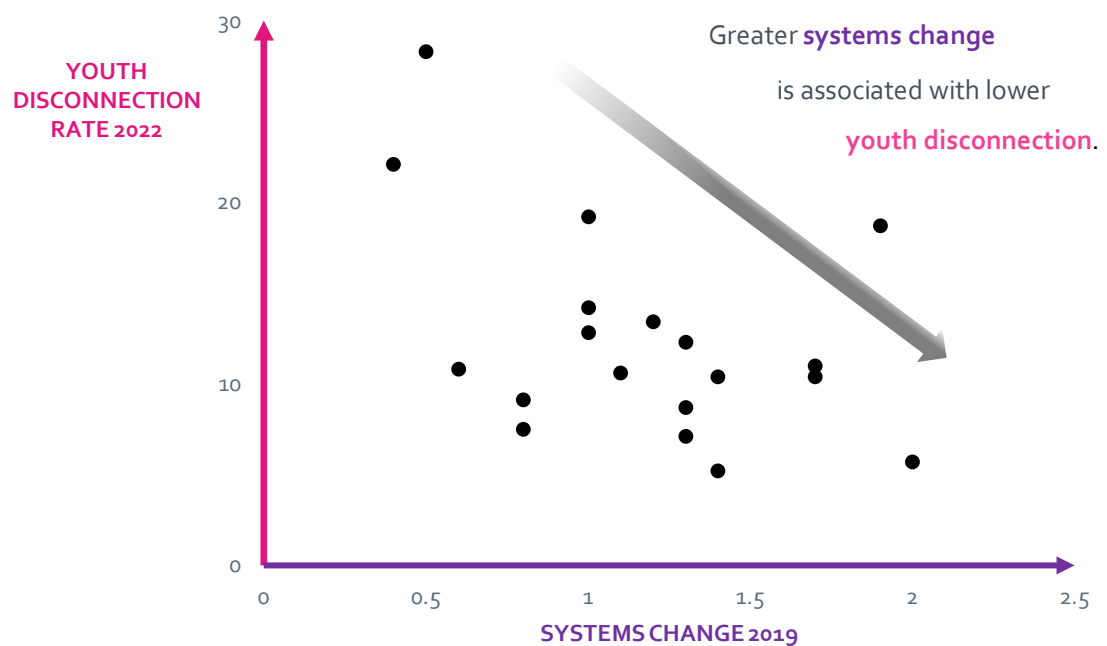
<sup>21</sup> Disconnection rates are based on the same set of 44 collaboratives in each year so that comparisons can be made over time. The Common Measures were not calculated in 2020 due to poor data quality of the ACS.



## Preliminary Findings: The Relationship Between Systems Change and Youth Outcomes

Overall, correlations or associations between systems change scores and community youth disconnection rates were weak. One promising finding, however, was a moderate correlation between 2019 systems change scores (the earliest year we have) and 2022 youth disconnection rates (the latest year we have): **collaboratives with higher systems change scores in 2019 tended to have lower youth disconnection rates in 2022** (Figure 6). In addition, most of the other correlations we tested between systems change in one year and youth disconnection in another year, while not large, were in the expected direction (i.e., *higher* systems change was associated with *lower* youth disconnection).

**FIGURE 6.** COLLABORATIVES WITH HIGHER SYSTEMS CHANGE SCORES IN 2019 TENDED TO HAVE LOWER YOUTH DISCONNECTION RATES IN 2022



Note: Each dot (n=19) represents a collaborative. The systems change score (x-axis) is the mean score in 2019; the disconnection rate is the percent of youth 16-24 not in school and not working in the OYF community in 2022. Correlation:  $r=-0.45$ ,  $p<.001$ .

**These findings should be considered preliminary.** We know changing systems to better serve young people can take a long time (at least a decade<sup>22</sup>); systems have often been operating in a particular way for decades and changing the status quo is a slow and sometimes piecemeal process. As we will see in the assessment data (see next section), systems change scores are inconsistent from year to year. If changing systems takes time, then it will also take time to see the impact of those changes, especially at a community or population level. Therefore, we likely need a greater length of time between changing systems and observing community impacts in the data. Even with a longer time between systems change and community impact, we need to account for other factors in the community that could also be affecting youth disconnection.

<sup>22</sup> "The reality is that systems change is a multi-decade effort." The Bridgespan Group, March 2023, Field Catalyst Origin Stories: Lessons for Systems-Change Leaders, <https://www.bridgespan.org/insights/field-catalyst-lessons-for-systems-change-leaders>



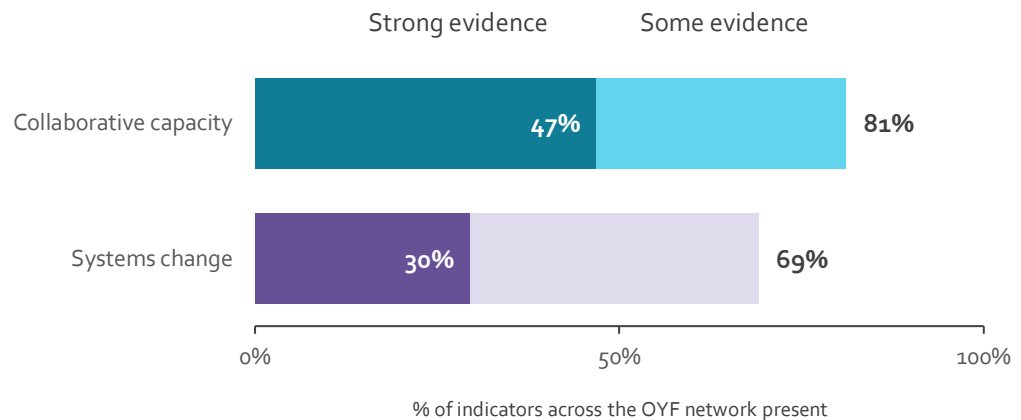
Community-level change in youth disconnection is the goal and OYF aims to achieve that goal through **high-capacity community collaboratives** that work across multiple sectors and with community leaders and residents to bring about **changes in local systems** that impact opportunity youth. The state of capacity and systems change in OYF communities in 2023, and over the past five years, is described in the next section.

## COLLABORATIVE CAPACITY

### 2023 Snapshot: Collaborative Capacity Across the OYF Network

Overall, collaboratives rated almost half (47%) of the capacity indicators<sup>23</sup> (which includes *leadership, planning, and convening power; data and learning; raising awareness and strategic communications; and resources for the collaborative*) as strongly evident in 2023, with 81 percent of capacity indicators at least somewhat evident in their collaboratives (Figure 7).<sup>24</sup> Capacity was stronger for collaboratives and backbones with more years of experience doing OY work, compared to collaboratives and backbones with fewer years of experience.<sup>25</sup> Experience working collaboratively on OY issues is helpful in building cross-sector relationships, leveraging connections, and building support for OY work in the community.

**FIGURE 7.** 2023 SNAPSHOT: CAPACITY AND SYSTEMS CHANGE IN THE OYF NETWORK



*Leadership, planning, and convening power* and *data and learning* were the two strongest capacities in 2023 with about half of the indicators strongly evident in collaboratives (55% and 48%, respectively, see Figure 8). The pattern among the four types of capacities has been consistent over the last five years, indicating collaborative structures and processes and data capacities, especially a learning and improvement orientation, may be easier for collaboratives to build than external communication strategies and partner resources for the collaborative and backbone.

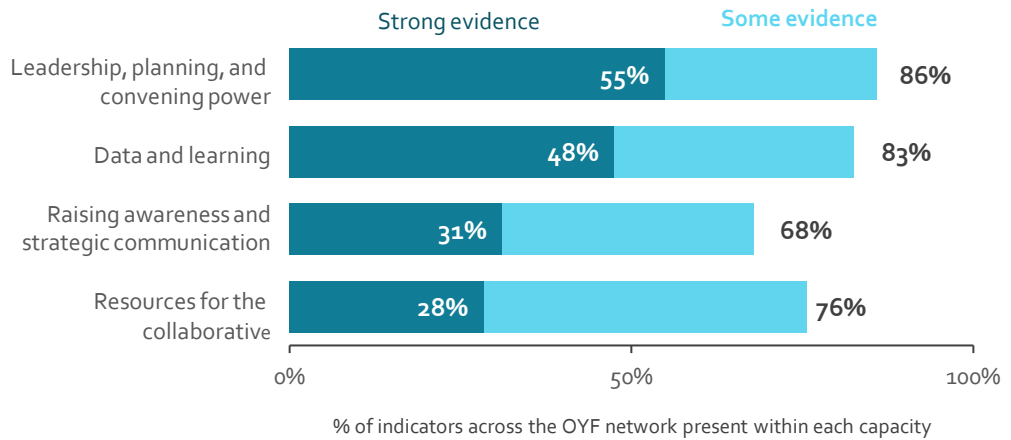
<sup>23</sup> The 2023 self-assessment includes 55 items or indicators of collaborative capacity across four areas.

<sup>24</sup> See Appendix for more details on methodology and calculations of percentage of indicators meeting a threshold (strong or some level).

<sup>25</sup> ANOVA  $p < .01$



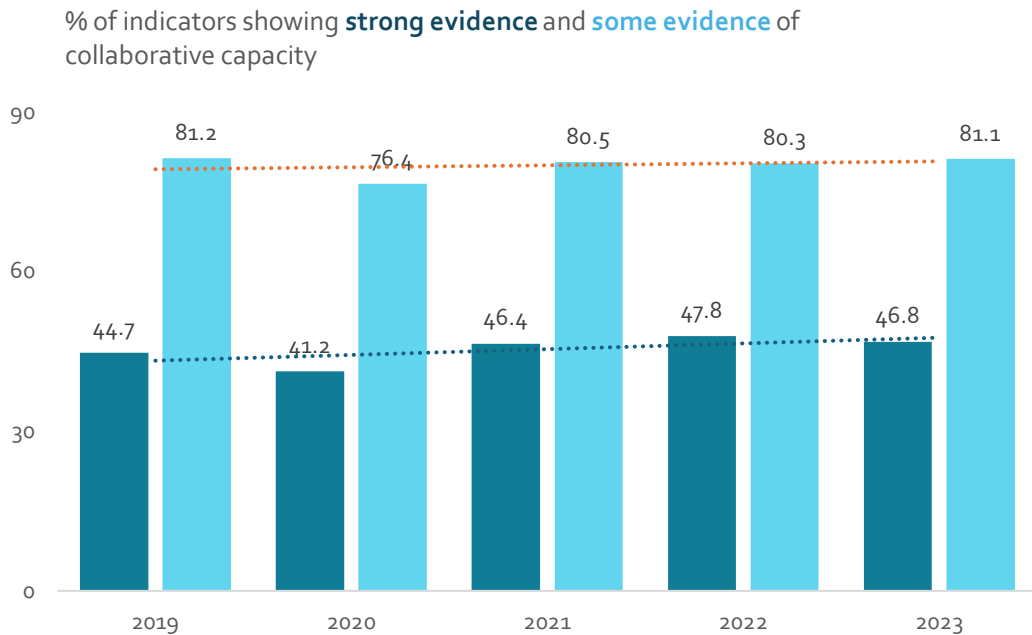
**FIGURE 8. 2023 SNAPSHOT: COLLABORATIVE CAPACITIES IN THE OYF NETWORK**



## OYF Network Trends Over Time, 2019-2023

Because the same assessment has been implemented over the last five years (2019-2023), we can look at changes across the network and in individual collaboratives to see if collaborative capacity is improving and which types of capacities are improving. A lack of improvement in certain areas may indicate a need for technical assistance or further support to build up that capacity.

**FIGURE 9. NETWORK CAPACITY SCORES BY YEAR, 2019-2023**



Note: *Some evidence* responses include describes us "somewhat, well, or very well"; *strong evidence* responses include describes us "well or very well."



Across the OYF network the following changes were found:

- Overall, **network capacity scores were steady over the last five years** at the *some* and *strong* evidence levels (Figure 9). After a drop in 2020, the network rebounded in 2021 and 2022 and remained steady in 2023. Mean capacity scores also show little change over time; mean scores were the same in every year except for a slight drop in 2020.<sup>26</sup>
- Among the four types of capacities, there were many ups and downs over the past five years in the network (Figures 10 & 11). Some positive signs include<sup>27</sup>:
  - **Leadership, planning, and convening power is at its highest level in five years.** Most indicators, 55 percent, were strongly in place across the network. This capacity improved slightly over the last year (2022 to 2023); it grew each year from 2020 to 2023. Based on these data, a **network strength is collaborative participation, structures, and processes** – the foundation of high-functioning collaboratives (see sidebar).
  - While it was the least present capacity, **resources for the collaborative** grew each year from 2019 to 2022 (10 percentage points higher in 2022 compared to 2019).<sup>28</sup> It remained higher in 2023 compared to 2019. The positive trend indicates greater financial and in-kind support from partners for backbones and collaboratives, perhaps indicating growing community partner buy-in to collaborative approaches for reconnecting youth.
  - **Data and learning capacity** is higher in 2023 compared to 2019. Eighty-three percent of data indicators are at least *somewhat* in place in 2023; the highest level in five years. This indicates many of the indicators of data capacity and learning processes, such as *consistent measures, staff, and using data for a variety of purposes*, are at least somewhat in place.
- Capacity challenges or where there might be a need for support include:
  - Three of the four capacities decreased from 2022 to 2023 in the network (all except *leadership, planning, and convening power*).<sup>29</sup> *Raising awareness and strategic communications* dropped the most – by five percentage points.
  - *Data and learning* peaked in 2021 and declined over the last two years (at the *strong* evidence level).

**Strongest leadership, planning, and convening items in 2023**

*Percent of collaboratives responding that this describes them well or very well:*

83% —The collaborative included representatives from the sectors and systems necessary to achieve its goals.

78%— Collaborative members reflected the demographic diversity of the community.

78%— Members from a variety of organizational levels were actively involved in the work of the collaborative.

78% — Collaborative planning included explicit acknowledgement of racial equity and/or community-specific disparities.

<sup>26</sup> In addition to calculating the percent of indicators meeting a threshold (see Appendix for more details on these calculations), we calculated mean scores on scaled items (responses: 0-3).

<sup>27</sup> The discussion of trends in capacities primarily focuses on data at the “strong evidence” level (describes us well or very well). We note interesting findings at the “some evidence” level where appropriate (describes us somewhat, well or very well). See Appendix for more details on methodology.

<sup>28</sup> Note there are only four items for *resources for the collaborative*; therefore, changes in one or more items will produce relatively larger changes in this capacity compared to other capacities that have more items.

<sup>29</sup> At the *some* evidence level, two capacities declined (*communications* and *resources*) from 2022 to 2023 and two increased (*leadership* and *data*).



FIGURE 10. CAPACITIES BY YEAR (**SOME EVIDENCE**), 2019-2023

% of indicators across the OYF Network showing **some evidence**

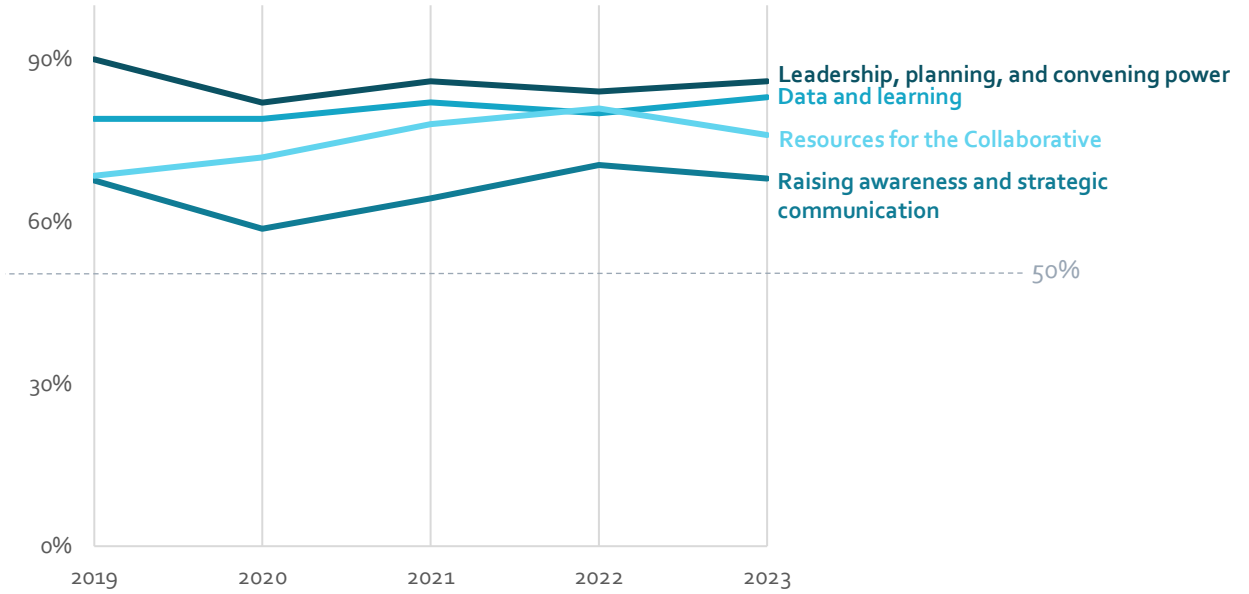
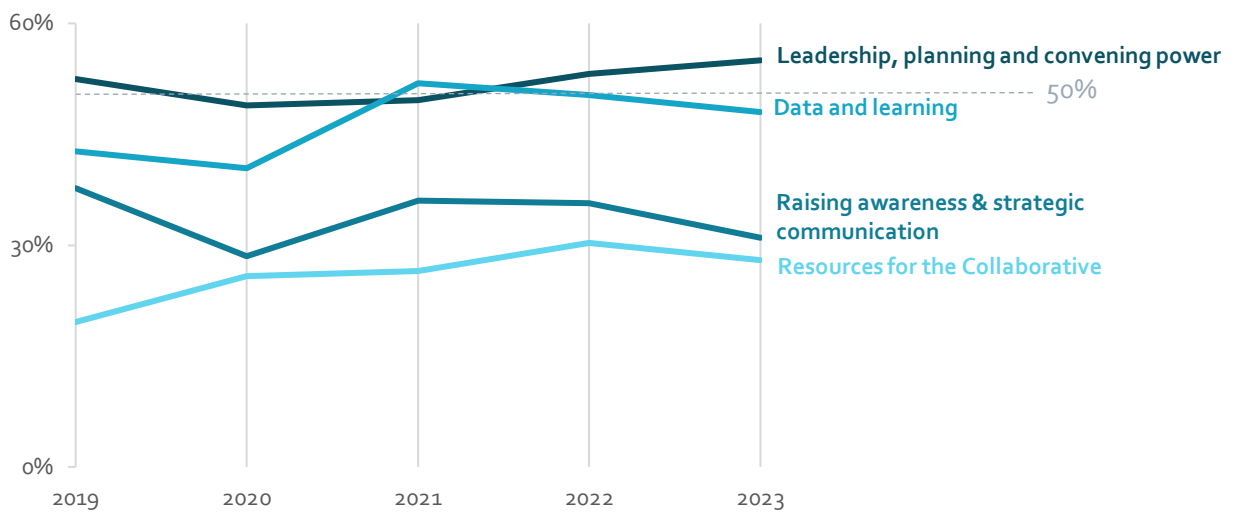


FIGURE 11. CAPACITIES BY YEAR (**STRONG EVIDENCE**), 2019-2023

% of indicators across the OYF Network showing **strong evidence**





## OYF Collaboratives Trends Over Time, 2019-2023

Looking at trends in the network is complicated by its changing composition – new collaboratives join and others leave the network each year or undergo significant changes and thus do not participate in the annual assessment. Comparing network findings year to year is not an “apples to apples” comparison.<sup>39</sup>

Another way to look at changes in capacity and avoid the problems of looking at the network as a whole, is to look at how individual collaboratives have changed over time.

Over the last year (2022 to 2023):

- **Two-thirds of collaboratives (68% or 23 of 34 collaboratives) improved their collaborative capacity from 2022 to 2023.** Looking at the four types of capacities, these improvements were driven by increases in *data and learning* capacity – 85 percent of collaboratives improved in this capacity from 2022 to 2023. Fifty-nine percent increased their *leadership* capacity from 2022 to 2023.
- Only 15 percent of collaboratives (five of 34) improved in *raising awareness and strategic communications* from 2022 to 2023.

Over the last five years (2019 to 2023):

- **Over half of collaboratives** (with five years of assessment data) **improved their collaborative capacity** from 2019 to 2023 (56% or nine out of 16 collaboratives).

## Summary of Collaborative Capacity Findings

Most collaboratives are building and improving their capacities over time. *Leadership, planning, and convening power* remained the strongest capacity in the network – collaboratives have structures and processes in place to work with cross-sector and systems partners to implement their opportunity youth agendas. *Data* capacity continues to grow as improving data capacity and use has been a focus of technical assistance in the network over the past several years. *Communications* capacity is the only capacity that was lower across the network in 2023 compared to 2019, and only five collaboratives reported improvements from 2022 to 2023. External communications such as sharing goals and progress with the public and key decision-makers is important for movement building as well as for systems changes such as mindset and narrative change, and garnering support for policy and funding changes for opportunity youth.

Collaborative capacity in individual collaboratives may go up and down year to year due to several factors such as changes in collaborative or cross-sector partner leadership, other staff changes, and fluctuations in funding. These changes can affect building and maintaining cross-partner relationships, momentum on key initiatives or projects, and the ability to invest in capacities such as data infrastructure.

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<sup>39</sup> However, from 2022 to 2023 the network remained mostly the same, consisting of largely the same collaboratives in both years (36 collaboratives completed the assessment in both years; four only completed the 2022 assessment).



# SYSTEMS CHANGE

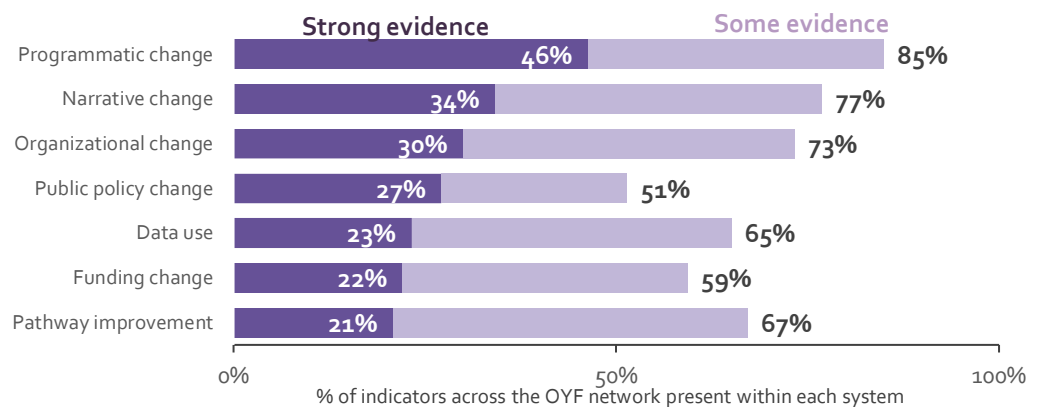
## 2023 Snapshot: Systems Change Across the OYF Network

Overall, collaboratives rated almost a third (30%) of the systems change indicators<sup>31</sup> as strongly present in their collaboratives and communities in 2023, with over two-thirds (69%) of the systems changes at least somewhat evident (Figure 7). Systems change was more evident in better resourced and experienced collaboratives – those with larger backbone OY budgets, more staff dedicated to OY work, and more years of experience on OY efforts (compared to backbones with smaller budgets, fewer staff, and fewer years of experience).<sup>32</sup>

In addition, collaboratives had **higher systems change scores in areas where they reported a greater focus of their work**. For example, collaboratives that reported *public policy change* was a *major* focus of their work in 2023 had 83 percent of *policy* indicators strongly present in their communities versus 29 percent when *policy* was a *moderate* focus and six to eight percent when it was *minor or not a focus* at all.<sup>33</sup> Prioritizing certain types of systems change may result in, as one would hope, more change in that area. As in prior years, collaboratives with higher collaborative capacity (across four capacities, as measured in the self-assessment) reported greater evidence of system change (see Figure 17). Resources, experience, and capacity allow collaboratives to work more broadly and deeply on multiple aspects of systems change (multiple sectors, multiple projects, etc.).

*Programmatic change*, such as new programs, improved design, and communication across programs to meet the needs of opportunity youth, was the *most evident* systems change in local communities in 2023 (46% of indicators strongly present), followed by *narrative change* and *organizational change* (34% and 30%, respectively) (Figure 12). *Pathway improvements, funding change, and data use across systems* were the most challenging to influence, with less than a quarter of the indicators strongly evident in OYF communities in 2023. The order of evidence of systems change across the network has been consistent over time with most changes occurring in programs, narratives, and organizations. *Public policy change* and *funding change* are typically the most challenging, although in 2023, policy change became more evident across the network.

**FIGURE 12.** 2023 SNAPSHOT: SYSTEMS CHANGE IN THE OYF NETWORK



<sup>31</sup> The 2023 self-assessment includes 78 items or indicators of systems change across seven areas.

<sup>32</sup> T-test,  $p < .10$  (OY budget) and  $p < .05$  (FTEs); ANOVA  $p < .001$  (backbone years of experience)

<sup>33</sup> ANOVA,  $p < .001$

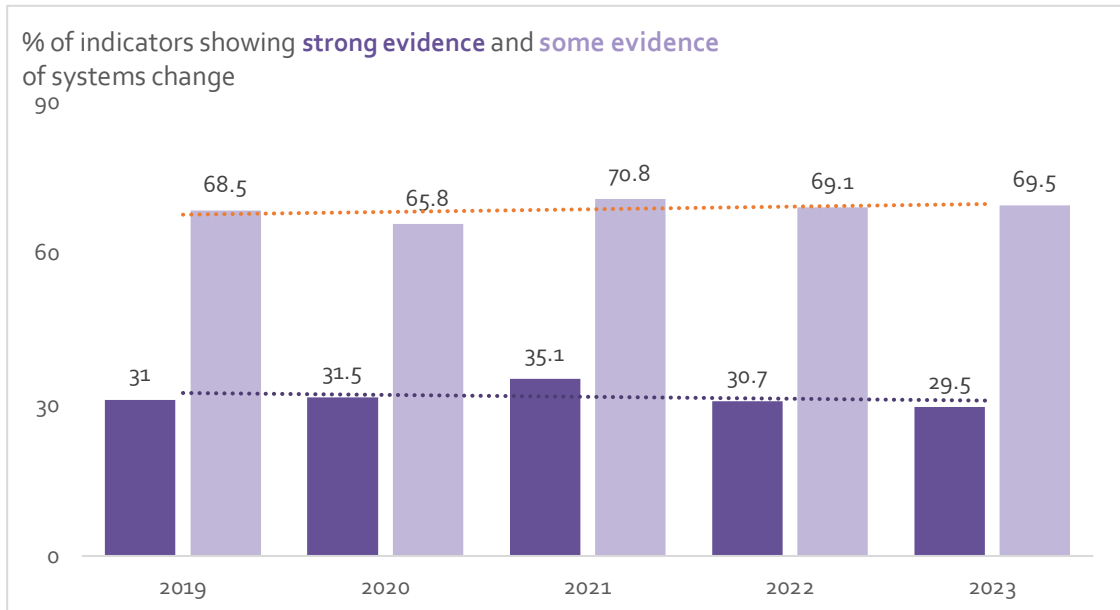




## OYF Network Trends Over Time, 2019-2023

As with capacity, because the same assessment has been implemented over the last five years (2019-2023), we can look at changes in the network and in individual collaboratives to see if systems are improving in local communities, and which types of systems change are most evident.

**FIGURE 13.** SYSTEMS CHANGE SCORES BY YEAR, 2019-2023



Note: Some evidence responses include *describes us somewhat, well, or very well*; strong evidence responses include *describes us well or very well*.

Across the OYF network the following systems changes were reported:

- Overall, **network systems change scores were steady over the last five years** at the *some* and *strong* evidence level (Figure 13). Systems change peaked in 2021 and has declined over the last couple of years. Mean systems change scores have been the same each year.
- Among the seven types of systems changes, there were many ups and downs in the network over the past five years (Figures 14 & 15). Some positive signs include<sup>34</sup>:
  - **Public policy change is at its highest level in five years:** 27 percent of policy indicators are *strongly present* in local communities and 51 percent of policy indicators are at least *somewhat present*. Policy scores in 2023 increased significantly from 2022 – from 19 percent to 27 percent, an eight-percentage point increase (see “OYF Collaborative State and Local Policy Wins” on p.27).
  - *Funding changes* and *data use across systems* are higher in 2023 compared to 2019.

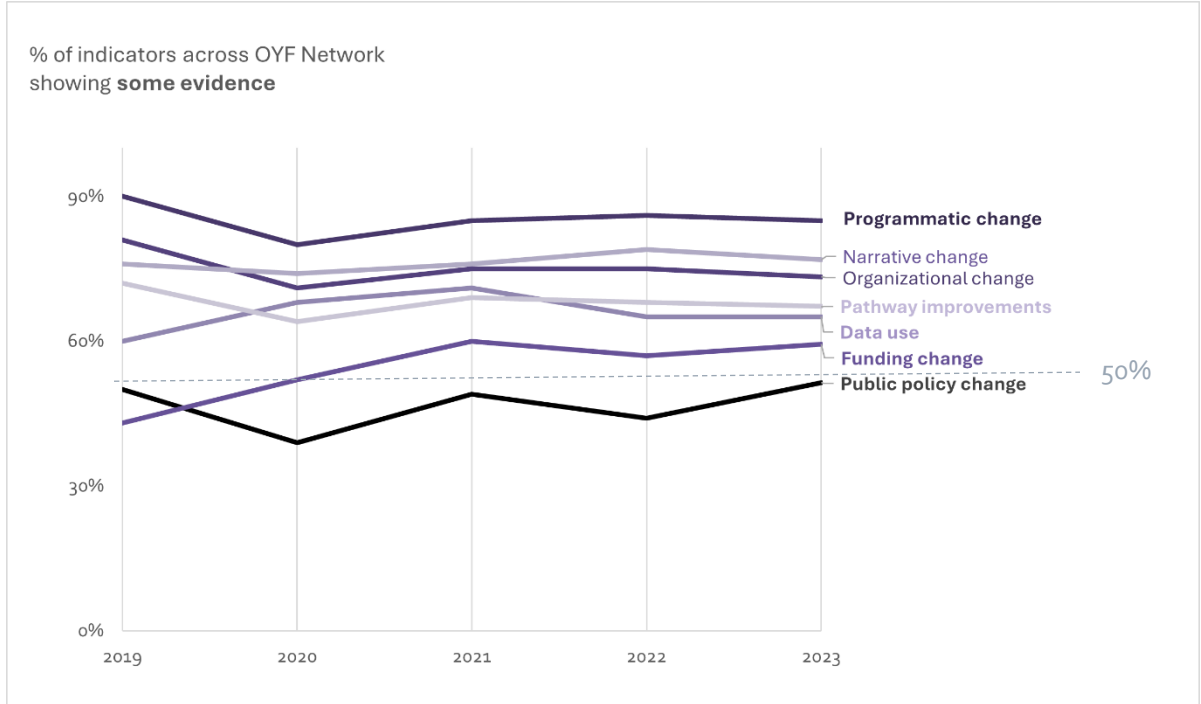
<sup>34</sup> The discussion of trends in the types of systems changes primarily focuses on data at the “strong evidence” level (describes us well or very well). We note interesting findings at the “some evidence” level where appropriate (describes us somewhat, well or very well). See Appendix for more details on methodology.



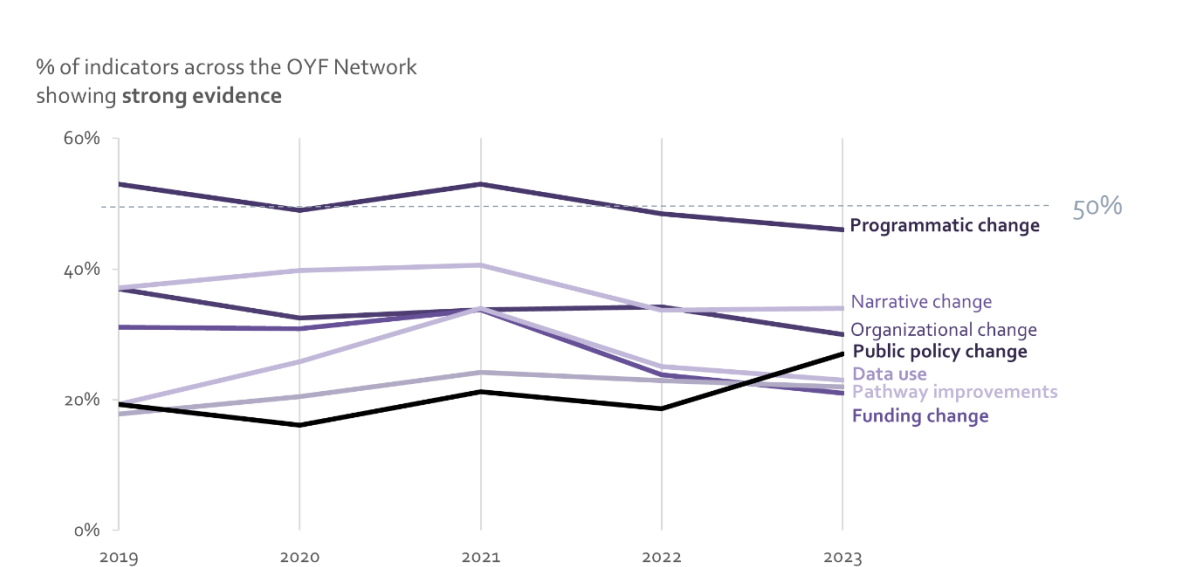
➤ Challenges in changing systems include:

- Five of the seven types of systems change (all except *policy* and *narrative change*) decreased from 2022 to 2023.<sup>35</sup>
- *Programmatic change, funding change, data use, and pathway improvements* were most evident in 2021 and have declined year to year since then. *Pathway improvements* have declined by 13 percentage points from 2021 to 2023.

**FIGURE 14. SYSTEMS CHANGES BY YEAR (SOME EVIDENCE), 2019-2023**



**FIGURE 15. SYSTEMS CHANGES BY YEAR (STRONG EVIDENCE), 2019-2023**



<sup>35</sup> At the *some evidence* level, four of the seven systems changes decreased from 2022 to 2023; policy, funding, and data increased.



## OYF Collaborative State and Local Policy Wins

**Maine** provides free community college for all high school graduates. Mass Reconnect does the same for young adults 25+ in Massachusetts; the city of **Boston** has increased funding for a city program to provide free community college.

**Jasper, Texas** provides free dual credit classes to students who qualify for free and reduced priced lunch.

**Houston, Texas** has a Youth Incentive Policy for local workforce boards. **California Opportunity Youth Network (COYN)** is continuing to engage with workforce development boards in **California** to opt into a federal Out of School youth waiver.

**New Jersey** passed a statewide Disconnection Prevention Task Force and state appropriations for NJ YouthBuild Act.

## OYF Collaboratives Trends Over Time, 2019-2023

Because the network composition changes year to year, it is important to assess change by looking at individual collaboratives. In last year's report, we found that the year-to-year systems change journeys were varied, with most communities experiencing some variation of "ups and downs" (growth and declines in systems change scores) over time. We continue to see these trends when we add an additional year of data (Figure 16).

**FIGURE 16.** OYF COLLABORATIVES SYSTEMS CHANGE JOURNEYS, 2019-2023<sup>36</sup>



**Zigzag.** Over half (53%, nine collaboratives) of collaboratives showed growth and decline over the time period (2019-2023). For some, this looked like a zigzag pattern with yearly alternating growth and declines; for others, it was ups and downs followed by two years of growth or decline (or vice versa).



**U-shape.** About a quarter of collaboratives (24%, four collaboratives) followed a "u-shape" pattern of declines followed by rebounds or periods of growth.



**Growth, then decline in 2023.** About a quarter of collaboratives (24%, four collaboratives) showed growth over four years and then a decline in 2023. At two collaboratives, this decline was significant.

<sup>36</sup> Among collaboratives with 4-5 years of assessment data.



In addition, over the past year (2022 to 2023):

- Forty-three percent of collaboratives (12 of 28) increased systems change scores from 2022 to 2023.

Over the last five years (2019 to 2023):

- Less than half of collaboratives (with four to five years of assessment data) reported improved systems change in their communities from 2019 to 2023 at the *strong* evidence level (six of 16 collaboratives, or 38%). However, **the majority (63%) of collaboratives reported evidence of some changes in local systems from 2019 to 2023.**
- The only area of systems change where the majority of collaboratives improved from 2019 to 2023 was in **data use across systems** (11 of 16 collaboratives or 69% improved). Similarly, *data use across systems* was the only area that most collaboratives (54%) improved over the last year (see data systems wins in sidebar). This coincides with an intentional multi-year effort by FCS to grow data capacity and use by OYF collaboratives.

### Wins in Data Use Across Systems

**Buffalo, New York** focused on data policies and practices to create a shared dashboard.

Data presentations in **Houston, Texas** previewing the 13-county Measure of America report findings have built interest in the collective impact approach.

**New Orleans, Louisiana** invested in data infrastructure to create the Youth Data Hub, providing improved data on opportunity youth.

**San Augustine, Texas** continues to partner with the local school district to track potential opportunity youth and connect them to services.

## Summary of Systems Change Findings

The trend data continue to show the ups and downs of systems changes in local communities with sometimes dramatic year-to-year changes. As we shared in last year's evaluation report,<sup>37</sup> challenges to systems change work include: COVID and local natural disasters' impacts and recovery; leadership, staffing, and backbone transitions; unstable funding and resources; and the political context and climate. These factors can cause disruptions, the need to pause the work, the loss of momentum, and the need to re-set priorities and strategies which can slow or reverse the progress of changing local systems. As we've noted before, progress, especially in changing organizations, institutions, and policies, is not straightforward and linear, but a journey with many ups and downs.

*"Systems change work is fluid, often nonlinear, and long term. It is not always characterized by forward progress – sometimes ground will simply be held, or even lost. Since this work involves a dynamic system, it is hard to model what might happen in six months, let alone six years."*

The Bridgespan Group, 2024, How Nonprofits and NGOs Can Measure progress Toward Systems Change, <https://www.bridgespan.org/insights/how-nonprofits-and-ngos-can-measure-progress-toward-systems-change>

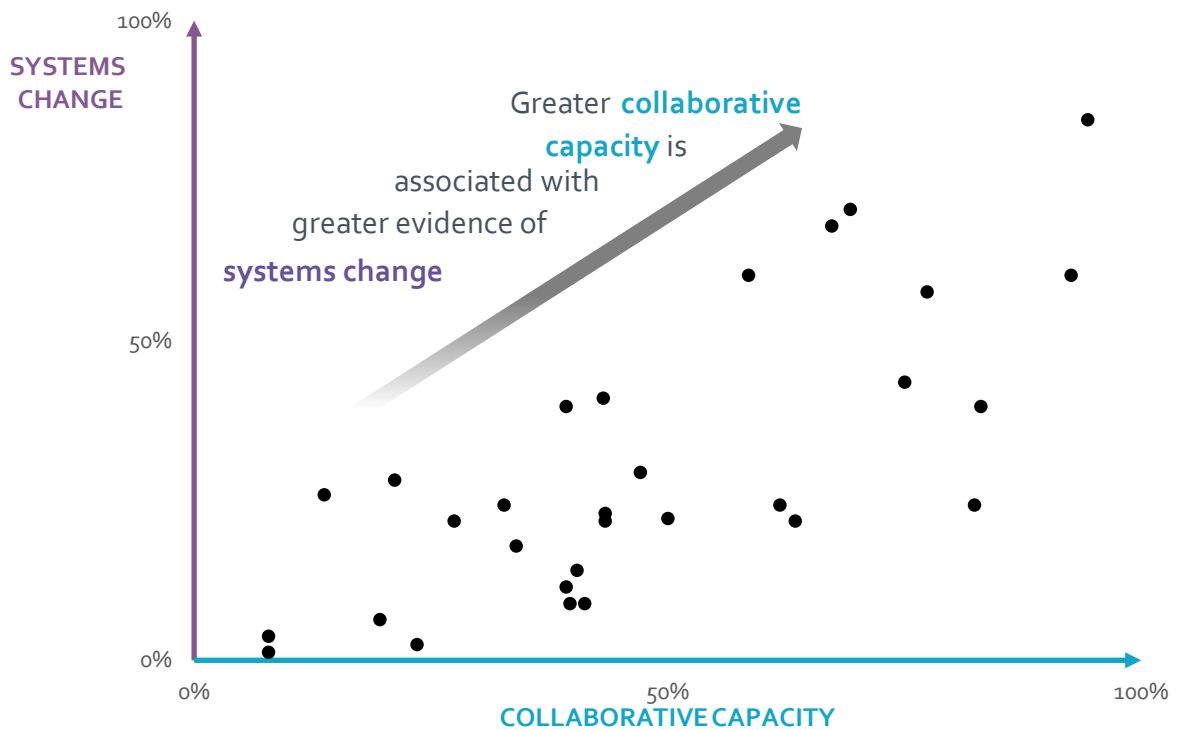
<sup>37</sup> Equal Measure, Many Paths Forward: The Systems Change Journeys of OYF Collaboratives, <https://www.aspencommunitysolutions.org/report/many-paths-forward-the-systems-change-journeys-of-oyf-collaboratives/>



## The Relationship Between Collaborative Capacity and Systems Change in 2023

The OYF theory of change posits that as collaboratives build their capacity to implement their opportunity youth agendas through strengthening collaborative *leadership, data, communications, and resources* that they will be better able to implement systems changes in their communities. In our analysis of the 2023 assessment data, we found that the relationship between collaborative capacity and systems change was consistent with prior years, where **collaboratives with greater capacity are statistically more likely to see greater evidence of systems changes necessary for opportunity youth to succeed**.<sup>38</sup> Figure 17 illustrates the relationship between each OYF community's collaborative capacity and evidence of systems change, as measured on the 2023 self-assessment. These findings reinforce the need to invest in and build the "collaborative muscle" necessary for creating systems that promote success for opportunity youth.

**FIGURE 17.** COLLABORATIVES WITH HIGHER CAPACITY SCORES HAD HIGHER SYSTEMS CHANGE SCORES (2023)



Note: Each dot represents a collaborative. The capacity and systems change scores indicate the percentage of indicators of capacity or systems change that are strongly evident in the collaborative or community in 2023 (see Appendix for more details).

<sup>38</sup> Correlation between capacity and systems change in 2023:  $r=0.74$ ,  $p<.001$ . Note that correlation does not imply causality. Greater capacity may lead to greater systems change; or there could be some other factor that leads to both higher capacity and systems change. The correlation indicates that there is a strong linear relationship between the two variables.



# CONCLUSION

In this report, we examined progress across the OYF network and trends in the key elements of the OYF theory of change: collaborative capacity, systems change, and youth outcomes, and the relationships between them. We continue to see a strong association between collaborative capacity, or the infrastructure and processes for cross-sector partners to work together to reconnect young people, and systems changes in local communities. While we cannot assume the relationship is causal, the correlation has been strong and consistent over the past five years, suggesting a relationship that supports the theory of change. There is *preliminary* evidence that greater systems changes are associated with improved youth outcomes, though more data and a longer timeframe are needed.

We continue to see change to the local systems supporting youth and young adults – in programs, organizations, narratives, data, policies, funding, and pathways – proceeds in fits and starts. Many factors can influence the systems change journeys in communities and working to make systems work better for opportunity youth is complex, nonlinear, and long-term. Some recent bright spots are improvements in state and local policies that impact opportunity youth and continued attention to using data across community ecosystems.



# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

### Common Measures

Equal Measure developed the Common Measures in 2018-2019 in collaboration with Aspen FCS and six collaboratives as part of Equity Counts.<sup>39</sup> The goal for the Common Measures was to develop a standard method for understanding opportunity youth within and across OYF communities. The Common Measures use publicly available data, the American Community Survey,<sup>40</sup> to calculate disconnection rates in a standard way across the OYF collaboratives and over time. We also disaggregate the rates by race, ethnicity, gender, age and other factors to examine inequities.

The four disconnection rates, or OYF Common Measures are:

- **Community Disconnection Rate:** The rate of young people disconnected from work and school (i.e., opportunity youth).
- **High School Disconnection Rate:** The rate of young people without a high school diploma/GED and of working who are disconnected from high school.
- **Postsecondary Disconnection Rate:** The rate of young people with a high school diploma/GED, without a postsecondary credential who are disconnected from postsecondary education and not working.
- **Workforce Disconnection Rate:** The rate of young people with a postsecondary credential, who are not enrolled in postsecondary and are disconnected from the workforce.

These rates, as well as additional data on high school and postsecondary attainment, have been provided to all OYF communities in 2017, 2019, 2021, and 2022. Rates are calculated for the geographic areas where OYF collaboratives are working, using the smallest unit of geographic analysis available in the ACS data: Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs). Each OYF collaborative identified the PUMA or PUMAs where they are working, and those areas are used in the analyses. For rural and tribal areas, the PUMA is often much larger than the footprint of their OYF work, and thus the Common Measures are less accurate and useful for these communities.

For more detailed information on the Common Measures, see the technical guide:

<https://www.aspencommunitysolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/EC-Measures-Technical-Document-Final-20Sept2019.pdf>

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.aspencommunitysolutions.org/using-data-to-advance-equity/>

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/>,



## Annual Self-Assessment

We drew on findings in this report from the 2023 OYF self-assessment. The self-assessment focused on five areas: 1) Community and Opportunity Youth Collaborative Characteristics; 2) Collaborative Capacity; 3) Changes in Programs, Organizations, and Systems (i.e., Systems Change); 4) Belonging, Meaning, Wellbeing, and Purpose; and 5) Youth Outputs and Outcomes. Starting in 2022, collaboratives were asked to identify their efforts as comprehensive change, sectoral change, or joint program. Those that identified as “joint program” did not complete the systems change questions in the self-assessment, as that is not a goal of their collaborative.<sup>41</sup>

We followed the same methodology as the 2019-2022 OYF reports. In the assessment of collaborative capacity and systems change, we asked collaboratives to rate the presence of indicators on a scale from 0 to 3 (0=does not describe us, 1=somewhat describes us, 2=describes us well, 3=describes us very well). Using the four-point scale in the assessment allows us to examine indicators with more nuance and detail, as well as set a “quality standard” for capacity and systems change.

In analyzing the data, we looked at: 1) strong evidence of an indicator, meaning the indicator was rated a 2 or 3 (“well” or “very well”); and 2) some evidence of an indicator, where the indicator was rated at least a 1 (“somewhat”).

Most percentages reported throughout this report refer to the percentage of collaboratives or indicators that met the highest threshold – at the “strong evidence” level. We use this threshold to establish a standard for determining the extent that a capacity or systems change is fully in place. Occasionally, we provide data on the percentage of communities or indicators that had “some” evidence for additional context or to acknowledge where collaboratives or communities are beginning to make changes.

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<sup>41</sup> *Comprehensive change* is defined as: aiming to improve all outcomes for all opportunity youth in an area. Example: an OY collaborative works with institutions in K-12, colleges, and workforce, and supporting services agencies to comprehensively support opportunity youth success across an entire city. *Sectoral change*: aiming to improve a specific outcome for all opportunity youth who have not attained that outcome, within a specific sector (or for a specific outcome across sectors) in an area. Example: an OY collaborative works with many postsecondary institutions and CBOs focused on postsecondary to attain college success for all opportunity youth across an entire city. *Joint program*: aiming to improve outcomes only for opportunity youth who are part of a specific project or program. Example: a single college and some CBOs join together to run an OY-focused collaborative program at that single college.





# APPENDIX B: CORE VALUES

FIGURE 1. CORE VALUES SCORES IN 2023

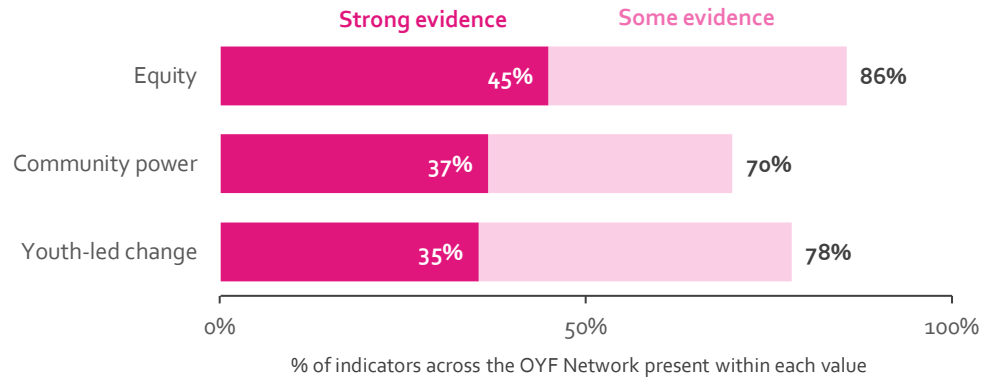
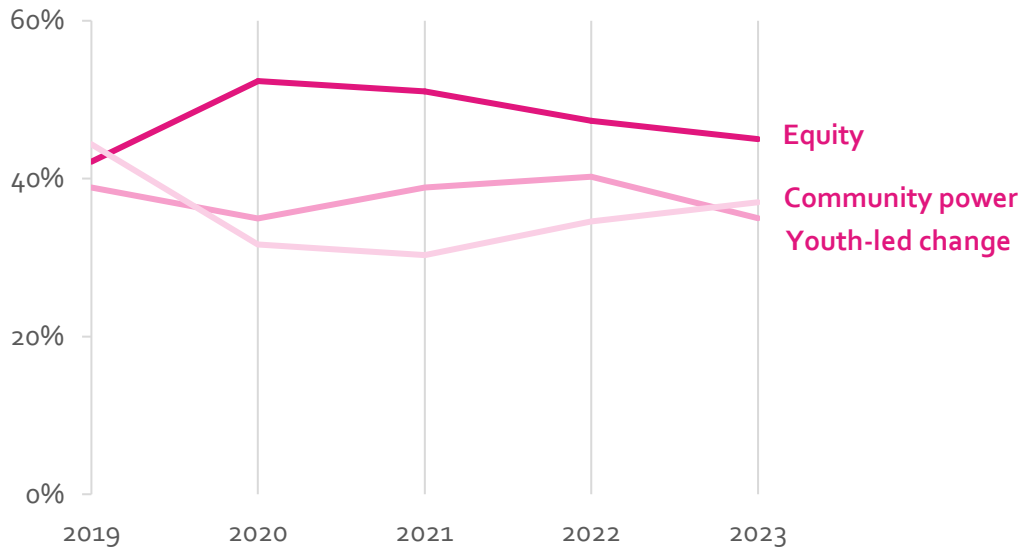


FIGURE 2. CHANGES IN CORE VALUES SCORES OVER TIME, 2019-2023

% of indicators across the OYF Network showing **strong** evidence





# APPENDIX C: BACKGROUND

TABLE 1. COMMUNITIES IN THE OYF NETWORK IN 2023

Atlanta, GA	Hartford, CT	Pueblo of Laguna, NM
Austin, TX*	Hawai'i	Pueblo of Taos, NM
Baltimore, MD*	Hopi Tribe, AZ*	Roaring Fork Valley, CO**
Boston, MA	Houston, TX	San Antonio, TX
Bozeman, MT	Jasper, TX	San Augustine, TX
Buffalo, NY	Los Angeles, CA	San Diego, CA
Cheyenne River Sioux	Missoula, MT	San Francisco, CA
Reservation, SD	Maine (southern, rural)	San Jose/Santa Clara County,
Chicago, IL*	New York, NY (4 collaboratives)	CA**
Del Norte County and Tribal	Newark, NJ	Seattle/South King County, WA
Lands, CA	New Orleans, LA	Tucson, AZ
Denver, CO	Northern New Mexico	Twin Cities, MN
Detroit, MI	Oakland, CA	
El Paso, TX	Philadelphia, PA	
Flint, MI**	Phoenix, AZ	
Greenville, MS	Pueblo of Jemez, NM	

\* Did not participate in 2023 assessment

\*\* Participated in 2023 assessment, but were excluded from capacity and system change sections due to developing/transiting status

See also: <https://www.aspencommunitysolutions.org/oymunities/>

FIGURE 3. NUMBER OF YEARS OYF BACKBONE ORGANIZATIONS AND COLLABORATIVES HAVE FOCUSED ON OPPORTUNITY YOUTH, N=39

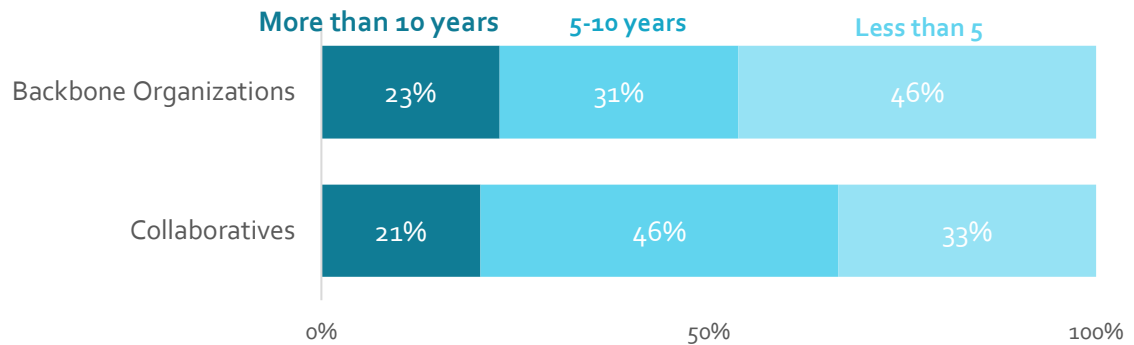




TABLE 2. COLLABORATIVE PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS IN 2023, N=37

Collaborative partner organizations by sector	Number of sites reporting at least one partner from this sector	Median number of partners	Range of reported partners
Community based organizations	35	8	2-74
Public or private higher education institutions	35	2	1-26
K-12 public or charter education institutions	33	3	1-16
Government institutions (not education institutions)	32	2.5	0-122
Other partners	30	3	0-154
<b>Total partners across all sectors</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>5-129</b>

FIGURE 4. PERCENT OF COLLABORATIVES THAT REPORTED PRIORITIZING CERTAIN GROUPS OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN 2023, N=39

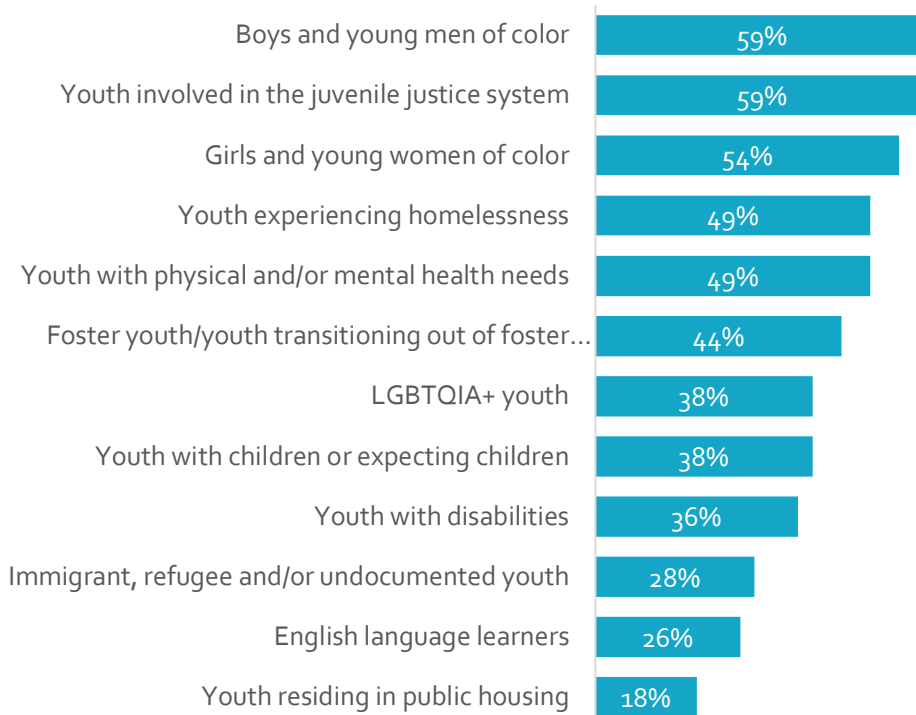




FIGURE 5. PERCENT OF COLLABORATIVES WHOSE WORK ADDRESSED SEGMENTS OF THE EDUCATION-TO-CAREER CONTINUUM, N=39

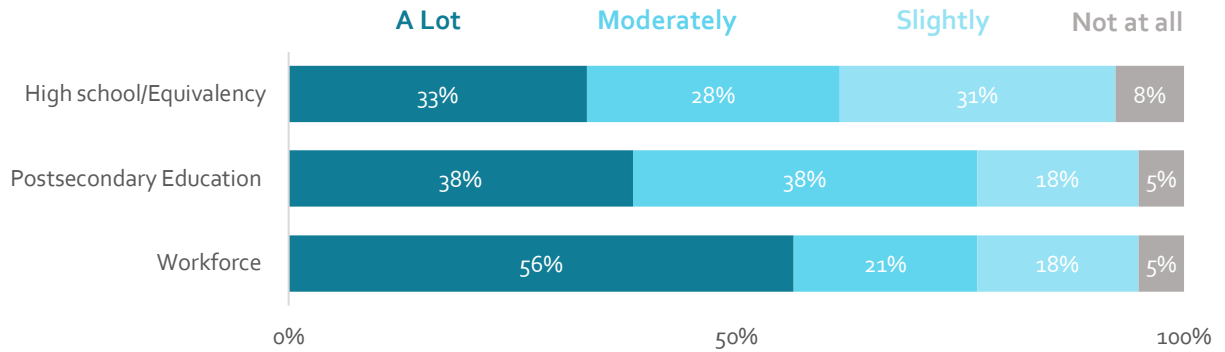
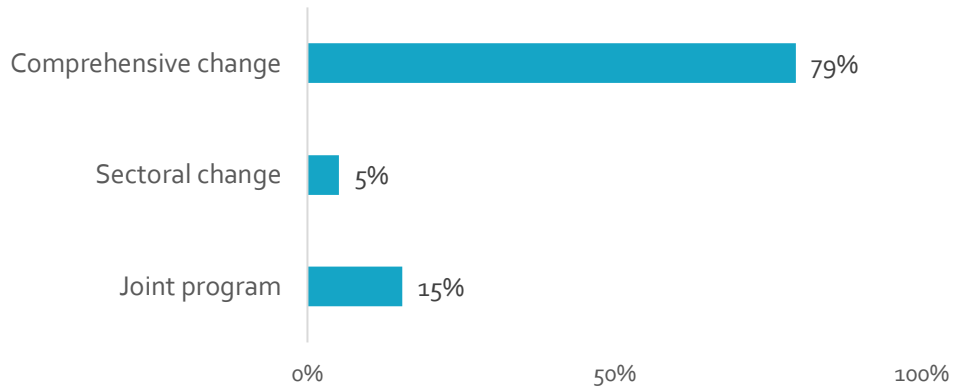
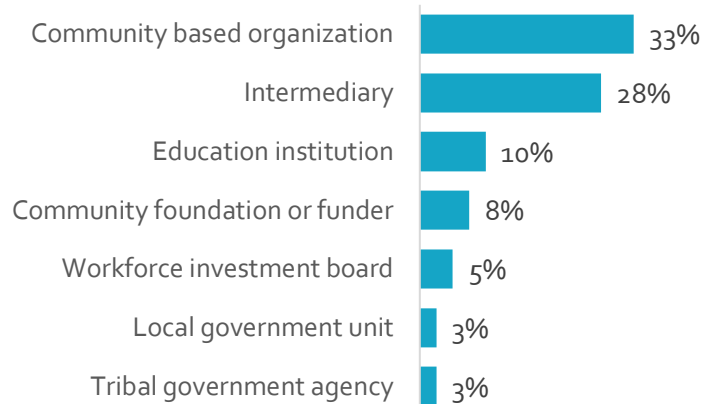


FIGURE 6. PERCENT OF COLLABORATIVES REPORTED FOCUS OF OY WORK IN 2023, N=39



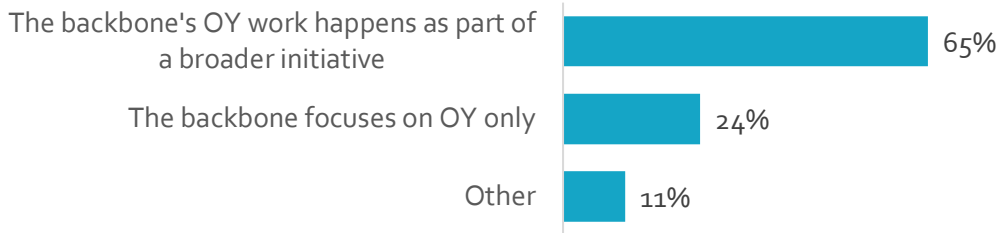
Note: Comprehensive change is aiming to improve all outcomes for all opportunity youth in an area. Sectoral change is aiming to improve a specific outcome for all opportunity youth who have not attained that outcome, within a specific sector (or for a specific outcome across sectors). Joint programs aim to improve outcomes only for opportunity youth who are part of a specific project or program.

FIGURE 7. PERCENT OF COLLABORATIVES BY BACKBONE ORGANIZATION TYPE, N=39





**FIGURE 8. PERCENT OF COLLABORATIVES REPORTED BACKBONE FOCUS AREA, N=37**



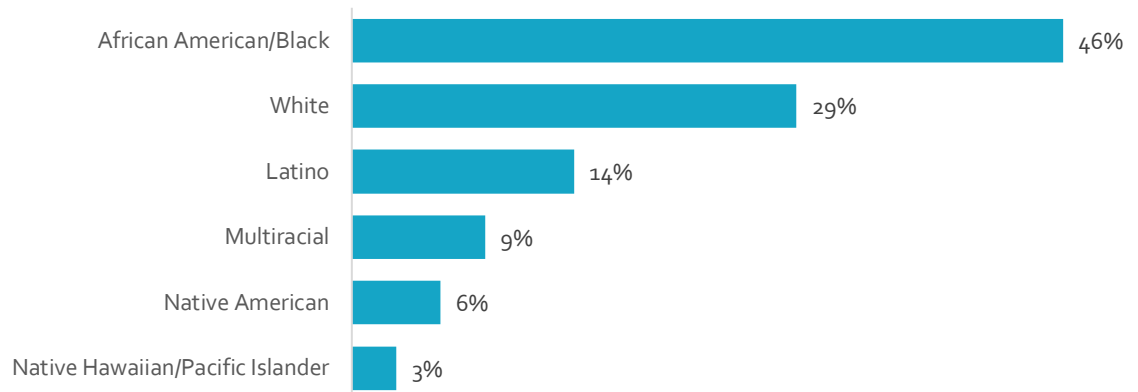
**TABLE 3. BACKBONE FULL-TIME STAFFING IN 2023**

Staffing	Median	Range	Number of sites who responded (N)
Total staff	11	0 to 220	36
Dedicated staff for OY	3	0 to 25	39

**TABLE 4. BACKBONE FULL-TIME OY STAFFING BY ROLE IN 2023**

Roles	Median	Range	Number of sites who responded (N)
Programmatic work/Pathways	2	0 to 18	33
Collaborative facilitation/Leadership	1	0 to 5	35
Data	0.5	0 to 6	28
Communications	0.5	0 to 4	27
Policy and advocacy	0.5	0 to 3	25
Fundraising	0.5	0 to 4	24

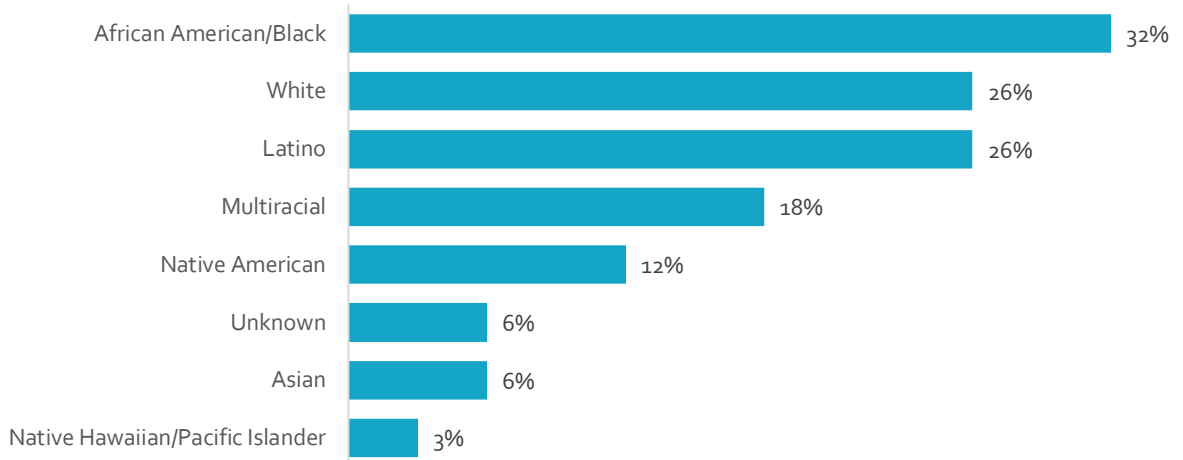
**FIGURE 9. BACKBONE ORGANIZATION EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BY RACE/ETHNICITY, N=35**



Note: The percentages do not sum to 100% because some collaboratives reported multiple identities for Executive Directors.

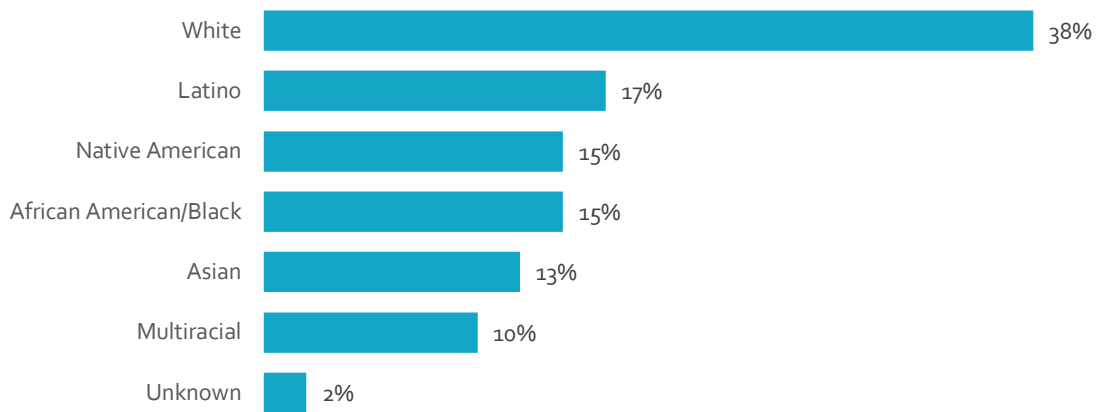


FIGURE 10. COLLABORATIVE OY LEADER/FACILITATOR BY RACE/ETHNICITY, N=34



Note: The percentages do not sum to 100% because some collaboratives reported multiple identities for OY leaders/facilitators.

FIGURE 11. COLLABORATIVE DATA/TECH STAFF BY RACE/ETHNICITY, N=48\*

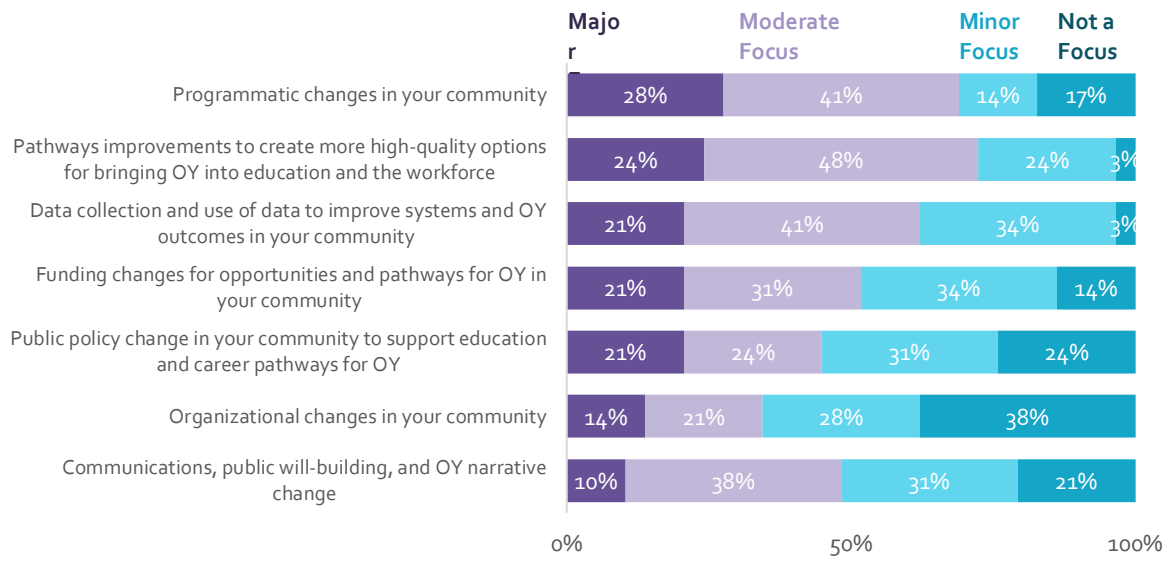


\* The assessment asked for the race/ethnicity of up to two data or technology staff. In total, collaboratives reported on 48 data staff.

Note: The percentages do not sum to 100% because some collaboratives reported multiple identities for data/tech staff.



FIGURE 12. PRIORITIES OF COLLABORATIVES IN 2023, N=29





# APPENDIX D: FUNDING

TABLE 5. MEDIAN BACKBONE ORGANIZATION BUDGETS IN 2023, N=32

Budget	Median	Range
Total budget	\$3,662,948	\$130,200-\$125,000,000
Budget dedicated to OY	\$661,090	\$30,000-\$24,140,449

TABLE 6. MEDIAN AMOUNTS BACKBONE ORGANIZATIONS RECEIVED IN 2023 FOR OY WORK, BY FUNDING SOURCE

Funding Source	Median	Range	Number of sites that responded (N)
Public funding	\$400,000	\$15,000-\$20,283,759	21
Private funding	\$200,000	\$15,000-\$3,856,690	29

FIGURE 13. PERCENTAGE OF COLLABORATIVES THAT REPORTED OY FUNDERS IN THEIR COMMUNITIES, BY TYPE, N=38



TABLE 7. MEDIAN AMOUNTS SUPPORTING OY WORK IN COMMUNITY IN 2023, BY FUNDING SOURCE

Funding Source	Median	Range	Number of sites that responded (N)
Public funding	\$675,000	0-\$94,000,000	18
Private funding	\$187,500	0-\$35,000,000	19

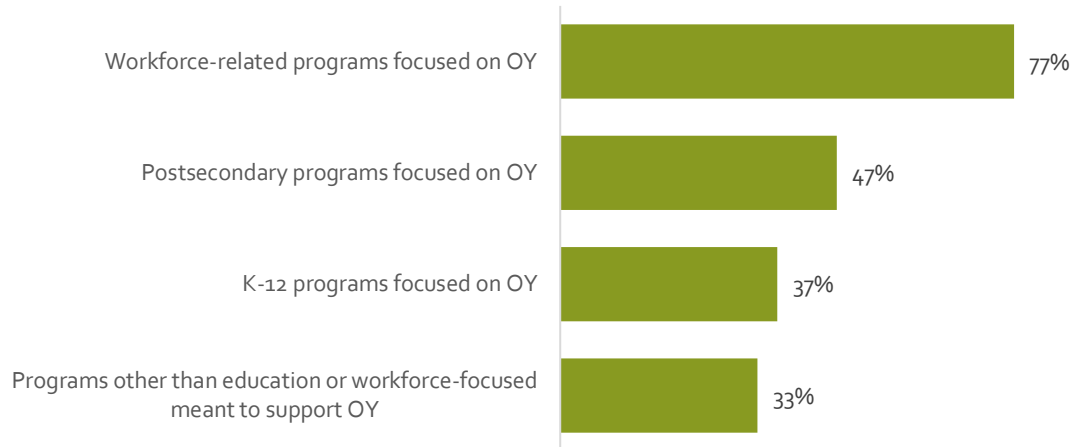




TABLE 8. MEDIAN AMOUNTS SUPPORTING COLLABORATIVE'S DATA CAPACITY AND/OR DATA-DRIVEN PRACTICES IN 2023, BY FUNDING SOURCE

Funding Source	Median	Range	Number of sites that responded (N)
Public funding	\$0	0-\$1,200,000	17
Private funding	\$25,000	0-\$3,400,000	21

FIGURE 14. PERCENT OF COLLABORATIVES THAT HAVE INFLUENCED PUBLIC FUNDING STREAMS, IN 2023, BY AREA, N=30





# APPENDIX E: BELONGING, MEANING, WELLBEING, AND PURPOSE

FIGURE 15. PERCENT OF COLLABORATIVES THAT REPORTED THEIR PARTNERS UNDERSTAND AND INTERGRATE BMWP ELEMENTS, N=39

Collaborative partners who...

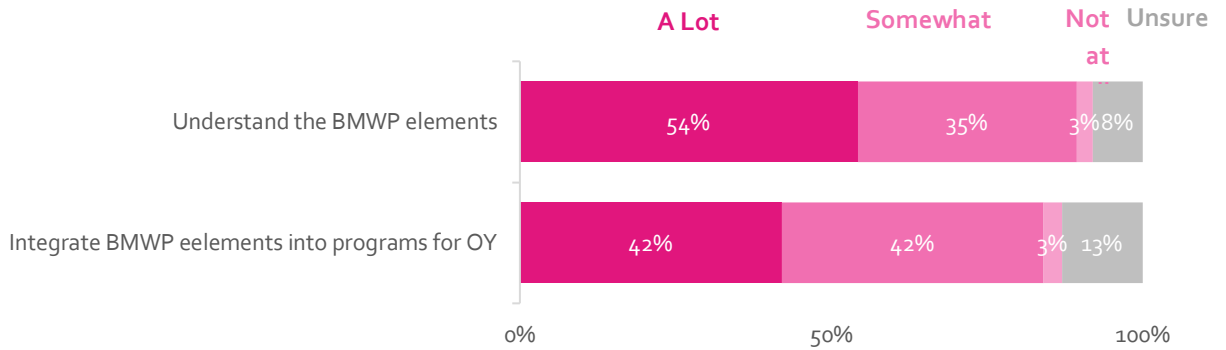


TABLE 9: STRATEGIES COLLABORATIVES USED IN 2023 TO FACILITATE BMWP PRACTICES AMONG PARTNERS, N=39

BMWP Strategies	Percent of sites
Supported programmatic improvements or adjustments to center BMWP	62
Explained BMWP concepts to OY collaborative members.	56
Shared research and resources around BMWP with collaborative partners	49
Discussed BMWP implementation or strategies with young people	46
Explained BMWP concepts to people outside of the OY collaborative	31
Planned BMWP implementation in collaborative meetings	21
Drafted goals related to BMWP for the collaborative	21
Collected data or feedback on BMWP implementation from partners	18
Shared research and resources around BMWP with partners outside the OY collaborative	10
Other*	13

\* Other responses written in included:

- Backbone staff model BMWP implementation in shared spaces.
- BMWP is similar to how we structure our meetings and gatherings. We use community core values to lead us when gathering people.
- We are still learning about this as leaders in the field.



## Supports that would help collaboratives and their partners better integrate BMWP into their work (open-ended; n=30)

The supports collaboratives requested included:

- Written materials, tools, guides, playbooks, and/or other resources that include tangible examples and recommendations of how to apply the BMWP framework to programs and initiatives.
- Training, technical assistance, professional development, and/or individualized coaching with collaborative members with an emphasis on translation and implementation of BMWP.
- Peer learning to hear about how other collaboratives are operationalizing BMWP, effective practices, and how they are doing so in partnership with young people.
- Concise materials (i.e., one-pagers) to share more broadly; messaging guidelines.
- Goals and metrics to measure progress

FIGURE 16. PERCENT OF COLLABORATIVES BY ROLE OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN SETTING COLLABORATIVE AGENDA/PRIORITIES, N=34



FIGURE 17. EXTENT COLLABORATIVES ACKNOWLEDGE TRAUMA IN WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE, N=35

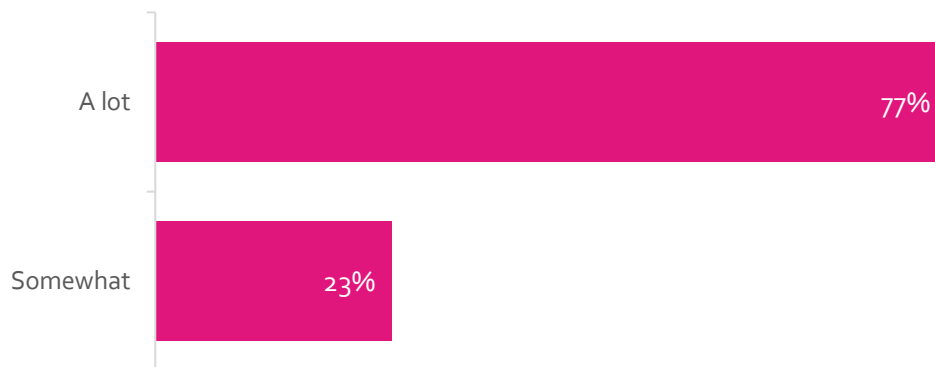




TABLE 10. STRATEGIES COLLABORATIVES USED IN 2022 TO ACKNOWLEDGE AND SUPPORT HEALING AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE, N=39

Healing Strategies	Percent of sites
Creating meaningful organizational leadership roles for young people (e.g., hiring as staff, serving on the board, having young people drive decision making about the organizational agenda)	64
Regularly incorporating celebration and positive acknowledgement	56
Creating community-building spaces to share stories	54
Facilitating peer-to-peer approaches to build leadership and promote mentorship	46
Training and skill development in youth organizing, advocacy, social justice and/or critical awareness	44
Using gender neutral language to affirm and be inclusive of all gender identities	44
Reflecting to process conditions, experiences, and emotions, through writing or discussions	44
Creating separate spaces for youth and adults, and intentional spaces that bring both groups together	39
Individual therapy for young people	36
Building relationships between young people and elders	36
Facilitating healing circles or ways to create and establish peer support	31
Incorporating culturally relevant healing practices (e.g., ceremonies, body work, mindfulness, yoga)	28
Attending and jointly reflecting on advocacy efforts in action (e.g., demonstrations, protests)	26
Incorporating restorative justice and conflict resolution practices	23
Trainings for adults to address adultism practices in youth programming	21
Other*	10

\* Other responses written in included:

- Creating a student study and social lounge (young adults need a space of their own).
- Utilized social media to create youth specific content and encouragement.
- Digital storytelling project where youth created their own story to share in community