

# Northeast Opportunity Youth Conference Best Practices Summary

Hartford  
**OPPORTUNITY YOUTH**  
Collaborative



Hundreds of youth, service providers and community members turned out for the Northeast Opportunity Youth conference in Hartford to share inspiration, resources, and stories and best practices in addressing the needs of Opportunity Youth — at-risk young people aged 18 to 24 not actively engaged in school or the workforce.

The programs, including the Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative, are united in partnership as the Y.E.S. Project, a national initiative of America's Promise.

Sponsored by State Rep. Toni Walker at the Legislative Office Building in Hartford, Connecticut, the November 2019 event highlighted work in Boston, Hartford, New York, Philadelphia and Portland, Maine. Below are highlights and resources.

## Common themes and program elements:

- Backbone organization spearheads work; provides funding, training, and support for providers and opportunities for them to meet.
- Career pathways for opportunity youth target occupations identified by employers:
  - Seek to identify and meet the “skills gap”
  - Identify and work on both individual and systems-level indicators
  - Measure outcomes in the short, medium and long term
  - Incorporate work-based or project-based learning
  - Provide opportunities for self-reflection
- Career pathway partners need structured and regular opportunities to share and discuss information and data.
- Securing stable funding for services remains a challenge for providers and partners. The ability of backbone organizations and coalitions to amplify the value of the work to funders and the philanthropic community is valuable and necessary.

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## Boston

The [Boston Launch Program](#) supports the young adults of Boston, helping them go back to school, find long-term work, and pursue fulfilling careers. Launch connects young people to educational services designed to get them back on the road to college, as well as individualized career coaching to identify where they can best use their skills and experience. The OY Conference presentation included an overview of the model, a specific focus on on-ramps, training and career track employment – including the supportive coaching model. [Click here for more information.](#)



*(Boston Continued)***Key points included:**

- United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack County is backbone organization
- Referrals from partnerships with local housing authorities, property management groups, and other parties invested in state-subsidized housing residents.
- Services begin with home visits, followed by “saturation” via community-based services, and a “warm handoff”-- a friendly introduction to their coach to begin building trusting relationship.
- Coaching then involves intake, goal setting, barrier removal and persistence.
- Team includes Project Oversight, Funding and Housing Partners, Outreach and Coaching Providers, and a Third-Party Evaluator
- Best Practices: On-Ramps, Training and Employment
- Client voices integrated by Self-Advocacy, Client Interviews, and Launch Ambassadors – Clients hired to work doing outreach and developing projects
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## New York City

[JobsFirstNYC](#) leverages all available community, corporate, human, organization, private and public resources to bring out-of-school and out-of-work young adults into the economic life of New York City. JobsFirstNYC presented on “**Transfer 2 Career Collaborative: A Pilot to Reimagine the School-to-Career Transition.**” [Click here for more information.](#)

**Key points included:**

- New York City's 50,000 over-age and under-credited students are most at risk of becoming out-of-school and out-of-work.
- JobsFirstNYC partnered with New Visions for Public Schools to create the Transfer 2 Career Collaborative (T2C) in ten transfer high school and two charter high schools. Transfer High Schools are small high schools designed to serve students who are over-age and under-credited with wraparound services and academic reengagement. Their number one goal is high school graduation, and they double the graduation rate for this population as compared to traditional high schools.
- T2C embeds workforce development organizations and community colleges in transfer schools in order to create postsecondary pathways for students and improve their access to long-term careers. T2C partners meet as School Design Teams and together with all 12 schools in a Learning Community to strategize and share effective practices. Students receive early, increased opportunities for career awareness and exploration, advanced career development, and bridges to sector training and employment.

(New York City Continued)

### Early Lessons:

- T2C school and partner staff are dedicated to the success and well-being of their students.
- Curriculum that is aligned to CDOS standards and results in both high school credit and industry-recognized certificates is highly valuable for students.
- College readiness and career readiness are not prioritized equally at all levels. We are potentially changing student, parent, and school staff beliefs about the importance of postsecondary readiness and work-based learning for all students.
- There is a need to create new models for school/workforce partnerships beyond traditional referral systems. We hope to form Borough Collaboratives to connect more students to various sectors beyond what is offered through their School Design Teams.
- Education and workforce development sectors are siloed at all levels, creating structural barriers to new approaches. This process involves partnership integration, partnership development, learning, and continuous improvement. Involving entire school communities and workforce organizations in this strategic pivot is critical. Establishing the conditions for sustainable and effective partnership (goal setting, transparency, project management) is foundational, challenging work that needs intensive support.
- Contact: Amanda Rosenblum, Director of Postsecondary Innovation, at [arosenblum@jobsfirstnyc.org](mailto:arosenblum@jobsfirstnyc.org).

## Philadelphia

The [Philadelphia Youth Network](#) works to create coordinated systems that promote the attainment of academic achievement, economic opportunity, and personal success. Maintaining an ecosystem of diverse options is critical to creating a coordinated career pathway system. For 20 years the Philadelphia Youth Network has collaborated with key stakeholders to develop and sustain multiple pathways for opportunity youth. The [PYN Career Development Framework](#) organizes many strategies into a comprehensive system of services that support the skill development of youth and young adults. The session explored strategies to develop, enhance and expand a coordinated youth workforce development system. Chekem J. Fulmore-Townsend, President & CEO was the lead presenter. [Click here for more information.](#)



### Key points:

- Serving youth aged 12-24 and addressing root causes of poverty
- Multiple funders and systems are coordinated under the Career Development Framework, incorporating Academic and technical skills development; 21st Century Skill Development; Character Development; and Reflective Practice
- All four topics begin with Awareness, followed by Exploration and Preparation, and the Training and Immersion, culminating with Career Entry
- Eight pilots launched and one completed and scaled
- Contact: [info@pyninc.org](mailto:info@pyninc.org), 267.502.3800

## Hartford

The [Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative](#), [Our Piece of the Pie](#), [Blue Hills Civic Association](#) and [Opportunities Industrialization Center of New Britain](#) presented on several Opportunity Youth successful strategies. One of the topics for discussion was related to the successes of the Opportunity Works Program in Hartford. Presenters included: Jinelle Hooker, Our Piece of the Pie; Vicki Gallon-Clark, Blue Hills Civic Association; Paulette Fox, OIC-New Britain. [Click here for more information](#) and [click here for more information](#).



### Key points:

- Urban Institute study of Hartford and other Opportunity Works sites shows increase college enrollment and other labor marker and educational outcomes.
- Key tenets: Youth are Ready, Connected, and Supported
- Core elements are youth engagement and empowerment; connection to career pathways, as identified and defined with employers; and use of data to inform programming and policy work
- Hartford Data Collaborative offers chance to collect, share and discuss data on services and outcomes, to make needed changed and show results
- Partners secure and integrate other needed services such as mental health to address trauma
- Consistent support addressing all life factors for youth
- Outstanding staff and tenacious support, and providing services when needed
- CWP, as Backbone Organization, spearheads work and assembles local partners
- Contact: Chandra Robinson, Director of Workforce Initiatives, OPP, [Chanda.robinson@opp.org](mailto:Chanda.robinson@opp.org)

## Portland

In Portland Maine, The Youth and Community Engagement Team (YCE) at the [Cutler Institute for Health and Social Policy](#), University of Southern Maine, has been working with individuals and community partners to create responsive policies and practices in Maine since the 1990s. YCE works to support Opportunity Youth in leveraging their leadership, connecting them to resources and build their skills as they transition into adulthood and independence. YCE staff Cheri Crossman



*(Portland Continued)*

and young leaders presented on the initiatives that enhance and expand Opportunity Youth's engagement and attainment of post-secondary, career credentialing and meaningful work experiences. Youth spoke from their perspective and experience of key elements of leadership development and participating in state and national opportunities. Cheri shared strategies and an overview of each initiative as well as information about Maine's adaptation and implementation of the Back on Track Model (JFF) as part of Maine's Learn and Earn to Achieve Potential (LEAP) initiative. [Click here for more information](#).

**Key points:**

- The Gateway to Opportunity model is based on Work-based learning; National best practices; and a Dual-Customer approach, serving both young people and employers
- Youth-adult partnerships create transformational relationships that are at the heart of this approach.
- Learning rich, relationship driven, collaborative approach: Youth learn and practice skills such as teamwork, problem solving, and communication, provide critical feedback that impacts the project's outcomes. Youth have time to reflect on their experiences (in writing and discussion) and apply their learnings from their project to all aspects of their life from school to career goals.
- Collaboration includes layering of services, providing opportunity for youth to open bank accounts, network with professionals, participate in financial management training, earn expanded learning credit from their high school, and develop a resume.
- Host sites provide the backbone of ensuring there are a range of employment opportunities for youth to experience over the summer.
- School and business partnerships are also critical to design.
- Programming is youth driven, as youth guide and implement a project while learning from their experience along the way. Youth take part in peer working groups, and get "near-peer support," in which a college intern, or Team Leader, supervises and supports each team.
- Contact: Cheri Grossman, [cheri.crossman@maine.edu](mailto:cheri.crossman@maine.edu)



# Jobs For The Future

Jobs for the Future also shared its Back on Track Framework

## BACK ON TRACK: CareerNext

### PHASE ONE: On-Ramps

**PURPOSE:** To provide the skills and knowledge required for occupational training.

### PHASE TWO: Employer-Driven Training

**PURPOSE:** To ensure student success in attaining the training and credentials required for entry into career-track employment with adequate starting salaries.

### PHASE THREE:

Career-Track Employment in In-Demand Occupations (Post-Placement Support)

**PURPOSE:** To ensure success of youth in first employment and reduce turn-over.



## PHASE ONE: ON-RAMPS

**Purpose:** To provide the skills and knowledge required for occupational training

- ❖ Preparation for Technical Training
- ❖ Personalized Guidance and Supports
- ❖ Support in Selection of Training Program
- ❖ Preparation for the Future of Work



## PHASE TWO: EMPLOYER-DRIVEN TRAINING

**Purpose:** To ensure young adults succeed in attaining the training and credentials required for entry into career-track employment with adequate starting salary

- ❖ Attachment to Training Program
- ❖ Demand-Driven Training Program
- ❖ Support to Complete Training Program



## PHASE THREE: CAREER-TRACK EMPLOYMENT IN IN-DEMAND OCCUPATIONS

**Purpose:** To ensure success of youth in first post-training employment and reduce turnover

- ❖ Assistance with Attachment to Employment
- ❖ Support for Advancement

