



Hartford
OPPORTUNITY YOUTH
Collaborative

**TOOL-KIT: YOUTH OUTREACH
DEFINITION AND STRATEGIES
FOR PRACTICE**

Created by the Hartford Opportunity Youth
Collaborative

Abstract

This tool-kit presents the Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative's suggested strategies for engaging and sustaining opportunity youth in education and training programs. The tool-kit was developed by two HOYC sub-committees- the Education and Training Committee and the Career Pathways Committee. The definition and strategies were agreed upon as best practices by the entirety of the group.

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Youth Outreach and Engagement Strategies

➤ **Youth Outreach Definition:**

Youth outreach is successfully achieved by building trusting relationships with youth, particularly reaching out to those who are not receiving services and are disconnected from education and employment. The purpose of youth outreach is to introduce youth to resources and services that can lead to positive life outcomes such as education enrollment, increased work experience, permanent employment, and credential attainment. Youth outreach strategies should include the following:

- Relentless and persistent contact with youth.
- Elevating youth voice at multiple tables, and opening positions for them to take on outreach roles.
- A mutual understanding that we will be working together toward positive life outcomes for the youth.
- In a timely manner assessing their interests, needs, aspirations, and levels of work readiness.
- Realizing that one organization may not be able to provide all that the youth needs and therefore, warmly transitioning a youth from one provider to the next.

As a result of these youth outreach strategies, we can both build on existing relationships and also enhance the longevity and quality of current relationships.

➤ **Strategies to Achieve the Definition:**

- Social Media Outreach
- Youth-Peer to Peer Education/Relationship Building
- Increasing Interactive Opportunities Between Youth Serving Agencies (i.e. Events)
- Building Quality Relationships (Opportunities for Communication and Understanding of Youth Interests, Culture/Traditions and Community)
- Youth Ambassadors/Peer Mentors
- Develop a Framework of Youth Centered Coaching
- Opportunities for Youth Voice to Be Included at All Tables of Youth Outreach Activities
- Real-Time Partnership Agency to Agency Communication (i.e. Updated Inventory of Real Time Youth Programming)
- Fully Support Consistent Youth Participation

Descriptions of the Strategies:

1. Social Media Outreach

- a. Use different social media platforms to stay in contact with youth. Use access to social media platforms to assure youth contact information is collected and therefore agencies can connect with youth outside of the social media platform.
 - Examples: Community Youth Facebook Page for Opportunity Youth or utilizing platforms such as Instagram/TikTok/Discord/Snapchat/Twitter to cast a wide net which will engage more youth. Utilizing the power of texting to continue connecting with youth (in both automated and manual formats).

2. Youth-Peer to Peer Education/Relationship Building

- a. Create more opportunities to hear collective youth voices in a variety of places and times within the community.
- b. Agencies should be present at community events in order for youth to continue to build trust with agency staff.

3. Increasing Interactive Opportunities Between Youth Serving Agencies (i.e. Events)

- a. Presence at community events in order to coordinate information sharing and recruitment between youth serving agencies.
- b. Utilize the *Employment and Training and Career Pathways Committee Programs and Services Chart* (Inventory of HOYC Programs) to identify programs and services to help young adults reach their goals.
 - i. For example, utilize the chart to build relationships and collaborative working opportunities with colleagues by referring youth to partner agency programs where appropriate.

4. Building Quality Relationships (Opportunities for Communication and Understanding of Youth Interests, Traditions/Culture and Trauma)

- a. Developing a series of questions before, during, and after working with a youth, to ensure that specific communication points are addressed with them throughout the engagement process.
 - i. For example, preparing questions such as the following:
 1. Before Meeting with the Youth: What is the unique purpose of involving young people in this engagement process?
 2. While Working with the Youth: Is team building among young people and adults being emphasized to address boundaries and hierarchies?
 3. After Working with the Youth: What are the process plans for conducting a reflection activity with the youth?

- b. In order to build quality relationships, it is important for staff to understand the young adults, their culture, how trauma impacts their daily lives, and how to respond to it.

5. Youth Ambassadors/Peer Mentors

- a. Provide compensation for time and professional development opportunities for youth ambassadors. A Youth Ambassador is a young leader who provides support for multiple activities critical to positive youth development and outreach.
 - i. For example, incorporate a stipend structure to compensate youth ambassadors for participating in meetings, taking active roles in recruitment, outreach, colleague support and assistance, event planning, agenda development, and other member focus related activities.
- b. Ensure that youth ambassadors are on a quality career pathway and have access to employment opportunities.
- c. Include youth ambassadors on the agenda and in any group HOYC planning.
- d. A system of coordination should be established to ensure that Youth Ambassadors are working together.
 - i. Peer Mentors:
 1. Organizations should ensure a structured plan for the peer mentor to follow with their mentees including best practices that will lead to engagement and participation.
 2. Organizations should ensure peer mentors receive opportunities for professional development, leadership, and have clear expectations for their role in the program.
 3. At the end of the program, mentors should leave their mentorship with an updated resume and at least 3 completed job applications.
 4. A system of coordination should be established to ensure peer mentors are meeting regularly to discuss best practices as well as meeting with their supervisor regularly to ensure they are on target with their goals and expectations.

6. Develop a Framework of Youth Centered Coaching

- a. Identify the strengths that a youth possesses and allow them to speak to the concepts they are passionate about. Be sure to “dig deeper” into their interests and relate them to opportunities available in HOYC programs.
- b. Provide multiple chances for youth to engage and reengage. In order for an OY to succeed, there must be opportunities available for them to keep trying when a program does not work the first, second, or even the third time.

7. Opportunities for Youth Voice to Be Included at All Tables

- a. Organizations will follow up on youth intake forms to ensure they are targeting what the youth interests are.
- b. Organizations will provide opportunities for youth to share their voice and opinions often.

8. Real-Time Partnership Agency to Agency Communication (i.e. Inventory)

- a. Review and update the *Employment and Training and Career Pathways Committee Programs and Services Chart* (Inventory of HOYC Programs) often so that members are aware of all OY programs that are currently available. This provides an opportunity for relationship building and collaborative opportunities among partner organizations through understanding how each organization serves the OY population in Hartford.
- b. Utilize HOYC Navigation Tool to effectively connect OY in Hartford with current program opportunities.

9. Fully Support Consistent Youth Participation

- a. Value youth representation, participation, and presence at community meetings/tables.
- b. Identify youth in each organization who can support the development and maintenance of multiple outreach venues (i.e. draft social media posts, etc.).

Context Setting for the Above Strategies:

The following statements were voted on as the top three priorities for the HOYC group to complete to decrease the OY population in Hartford:

1. Engaging and sustaining engagement of OY.
2. Connecting youth with needed support services, including substance abuse and mental health services.
3. Accessibility and availability of appropriate services; sequencing services.

Next Steps:

--The ET/CP Committees decided to focus on the first data priority for action as it complimented the work the group was currently working on with the construction and implementation of a youth outreach definition.

--The other two priorities will be worked on in the future.

About the Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative

The Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative (HOYC) is composed of a steering committee of more than 20 organizations signed Memorandums of Understanding to form our collaborative in Spring 2013 and another 20+ organizations have joined us since. Using collective impact, a broad cross-sector membership representing government, education, service providers, philanthropy, and others make up our steering committee who oversees our work and meets quarterly.

The Career Pathways Committee/The Education and Training Committee is charged with identifying and building systems capacity to scale up best and promising practices of our effective pathway programs, developing staff skills and capacity to better serve Opportunity Youth, and make recommendations to increase system and program penetration and participation of youth in key subpopulations of Opportunity Youth. The committee oversees the coordination of the Career Pathway System. The committee is open to any collaborative member.

If interested in learning more about HOYC please visit our [website](#).

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