

THE AMERICAN DREAM NEEDS A JUMP START.

HERE'S OUR PLAN TO DO IT.

Opportunity and social mobility have defined America. It is a core value of our nation that where you start in life should not determine how high you climb. But that ideal is at risk of disappearing. Young people in other highly industrialized countries now have a better chance of moving up the economic ladder than children in America.* **Today, the zip codes where people are born too often determine their destiny.**

In a free society, some inequality is unavoidable. Not everyone will rise to the same level; people simply differ in skills and ambition. **But inequality without the chance for mobility is economically inefficient — and unjust.** The circumstances of a person's birth should not condemn that person to an inescapable economic fate. When the American Dream is at risk for some, we all suffer.

250

ORGANIZATIONS



100

MILLION PEOPLE

OPPORTUNITY NATION is a national movement of 250 organizations reaching 100 million people united around a shared plan to rebuild the American Dream. Join us.

REPAIRING THE LADDER OF OPPORTUNITY.

Many rungs on the ladder of opportunity are in critical need of repair, and our first focus will be on strengthening career pathways for young adults and promoting postsecondary educational success. Why?

Young adults can boost our economy.

Many U.S. employers say that the inability to find qualified workers is their biggest obstacle to growth.* Despite the current unemployment crisis, there are millions of U.S. jobs available right now that employers need to fill, but applicants lack the required degree, certificate, and skills. Let's help employers grow and change the fact that, for the first time ever, young adults risk having lower educational attainment rates than their parents. It's never too late. Even students who've struggled throughout childhood and adolescence increase their chances of reaching the middle class by middle age by more than 50% if they earn a postsecondary degree.*

Young adults are the key to our global competitiveness.

By 2018, more than 60% of American jobs will require at least an associate's degree.* But we aren't training our rising generation to meet these workforce demands, especially compared to our international peers. In 2007 alone, only 48% of young adults in the U.S. found jobs within six months of graduating compared to 80% in Germany.* In order to stay competitive globally and meet the demands of the current and future American workforce, we must strengthen pathways to school and careers.

Young adults can create more opportunity in our communities.

The success or failure of young adults creates a ripple effect across every aspect of community life. For example, **Opportunity Index** research reveals the percentage of young adults engaged in school and work is one of the most important influences on a state's **Opportunity Score**. If more young adults are on career pathways, the overall community is more likely to achieve economic mobility and security.*

Young adults can keep us from paying steep financial and social costs.

Young adults who are not in school or working represent untapped potential for our nation. They cost taxpayers \$93 billion annually and \$1.6 trillion over their lifetimes in lost revenues and increased social services.* However, once students finish high school and complete some form of postsecondary education, they can be more successful and contribute more to our society. Students who obtain an associate's degree earn nearly one-third more over the course of their lifetimes than those with just a high school diploma – and students with a bachelor's degree earn three-quarters more.*

17.1%

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT
RATE IN 2012

63% BY 2018

PERCENTAGE OF AMERICAN JOBS THAT WILL REQUIRE
AT LEAST AN ASSOCIATE'S

6.7 MILLION

NUMBER OF YOUNG ADULTS IN AMERICA
NOT IN SCHOOL OR WORKING

Today's young adults are filled with dreams and promise, just like the generations who came before them. Let's give them the opportunity to reach their full potential. We'll all reap the benefit.

Our nation has renewed the American Dream many times throughout our history. We can do it again.



OUR SHARED PLAN.

What follows is the result of hundreds of meetings and listening sessions with Americans of all backgrounds, including our diverse coalition partners, grassroots leaders, and policy experts from across the ideological and political spectrum.

America's young adults can't be viewed through a single lens. They have unique histories and diverse talents, and some are facing significant challenges to reach their full potential despite their optimism and aspirations. They may be high school dropouts striving to get back on track, teen parents working to support their families, or current and former foster youth; others have had periods of homelessness or been involved with the juvenile justice system; and some are finding it difficult to access, afford, and complete a strong postsecondary education. Because of these differences, young adults must complete high school and have a variety of high-quality options – including one-, two-, and four-year degree programs – that fit their ambitions and talents and equip them with comprehensive workplace skills.

Our plan repairs the ladder of opportunity through a combination of community and employer action, local innovation, and bipartisan reform of federal policies.



View or download the shared plan and complementary reports, **Enterprising Pathways: Toward a National Plan of Action for Career and Technical Education and National Roadmap for Opportunity Youth**, at opportunitynation.org/thesharedplan



ENGAGE EMPLOYERS AS PART OF THE SOLUTION

Employers in all sectors are a critical part of the solution for connecting young adults to meaningful employment, mentoring, education, internships, and training opportunities. Employers should be encouraged to use the White House Council for Community Solutions' Employer Toolkit, which provides employers with a step-by-step guide on how to evaluate their capacity and then develop and implement programs to engage young adults.



BOOST MENTORING

Caring mentors have the power to help youth in a variety of ways, including improving academic achievement and emotional well-being and reducing risk behaviors.* But currently, 18 million children in the United States want and need a mentor, and only three million have one.* We support bold efforts to recruit millions of new volunteer mentors to transform the lives of youth in all of our communities.



INCENTIVIZE INNOVATION THROUGH AN ENTERPRISING PATHWAYS PROGRAM

Federal policymakers should create an Enterprising Pathways Innovation Program to fund career and technical education (CTE) programs. This competitive grant process should reward promising practices and provide seed funding to develop and launch scalable programs. To leverage private-sector support for such models, Congress should also give the Secretary of Education the authority to use this competitive program and other discretionary resources to pilot Pay for Success – a new program being piloted by federal agencies to leverage private-sector support of innovative social programs.



PAIR COLLEGE PLANNING SUPPORT FOR LOW-INCOME STUDENTS WITH ASSET DEVELOPMENT

Congress should support efforts to pave the path from high school to college, including improved college guidance in "high-need" school districts. Additionally, because students with a savings account dedicated to higher education are four times more likely to attend college than their peers without college savings,* Congress should create an online platform or account for low-income students to access college savings products, tools, and incentives so students can make investments in their educational future.



REAUTHORIZE AND REFORM FEDERAL POLICIES TO IMPROVE CTE

The next Congress will consider reauthorization of the Perkins Career and Technical Education Act and other education and workforce legislation. Congress should use these reauthorizations to reenvision and accelerate CTE by improving collaboration among secondary schools, postsecondary education, and industry and aligning programs with regional and state workforce needs.



INCREASE PATHWAYS TO SECONDARY AND POSTSECONDARY SUCCESS FOR ALL YOUTH

States and school districts should support multiple pathways to high school and postsecondary completion by increasing access to dropout recovery programs, accelerated learning, dual enrollment to earn college credit, and bridge programs; by encouraging flexible scheduling; and by recognizing competency-based learning.



DRIVE COMMUNITY COLLABORATION TO RECONNECT YOUTH

Building off the success of the Youth Opportunity grant program, Congress should renew program funding to help communities in urban, suburban, rural, and tribal areas build systematic cross-sector approaches to reengage high school dropouts and prepare them for success in postsecondary education and the labor market.



INVEST IN CURRENT PROGRAMS THAT WORK

There are current high-quality programs that reconnect young adults to education and employment opportunities, but these programs can reach only a small fraction of young people. Federal policymakers should significantly scale investments over the next five years to expand programs that have a consistent and proven track record.

HOW YOU CAN ACTIVATE THE SHARED PLAN.

By working together and engaging others in our shared plan, we'll take a giant step toward rebuilding the ladder of opportunity for young adults.

You can begin by reading the actions below. Then go online to learn more details about how you can engage.



Mentor youth

EVERYONE

Mentor a young adult.

Get involved in a young person's life and make a difference. There are many worthwhile mentoring programs available.



Learn your score

COMMUNITY OR NONPROFIT LEADER

Learn your Opportunity Index Score.

Visit OpportunityIndex.org to learn your score and work to improve it. See our partners with whom you can volunteer to make an impact. Then use our Local Action Toolkit to host a community conversation and create a plan to tackle local challenges.



Go online

Support the plan on Twitter and Facebook.

 @oppnation

 facebook.com/opportunitynation



Partner together

Create an ACTION Community.

Increase your Opportunity Score by establishing partnerships with local organizations and educational institutions to create an ACTION Community, an Area Committed To Increasing Opportunity Now.



Engage employers

EMPLOYEE

Talk to your human resources department.

Recommend the Employer Toolkit for Connecting Youth and Business. It explains workplace strategies to engage young adults, such as internships, apprenticeships, and job-shadowing days.



Empower young voices

Let young adults' voices be heard.

Put young adults in decision-making positions on your boards of directors, councils, and youth advisory boards.



Cultivate media

Cultivate local news coverage.

Ask your local newspaper to cover these issues, publish your own op-ed, or write a letter to the editor.



Vote Opportunity

CITIZEN AND VOTER

Support the Opportunity Nation Plan.

Be an "Opportunity Voter!" Learn how to ask candidates and elected officials to support the plan.



Work with your congregation

PERSON OF FAITH

Host a training with your house of worship.

Our partner Faith for Change has a Graduation Ministry Toolkit that can help make your congregation a "no dropout zone."



Set goals

YOUNG ADULT

Set personal educational goals.

Work with a counselor or mentor on a specific plan to reach your goals.



Mentor peers

Be a peer mentor.

Help another young adult plan a better future.



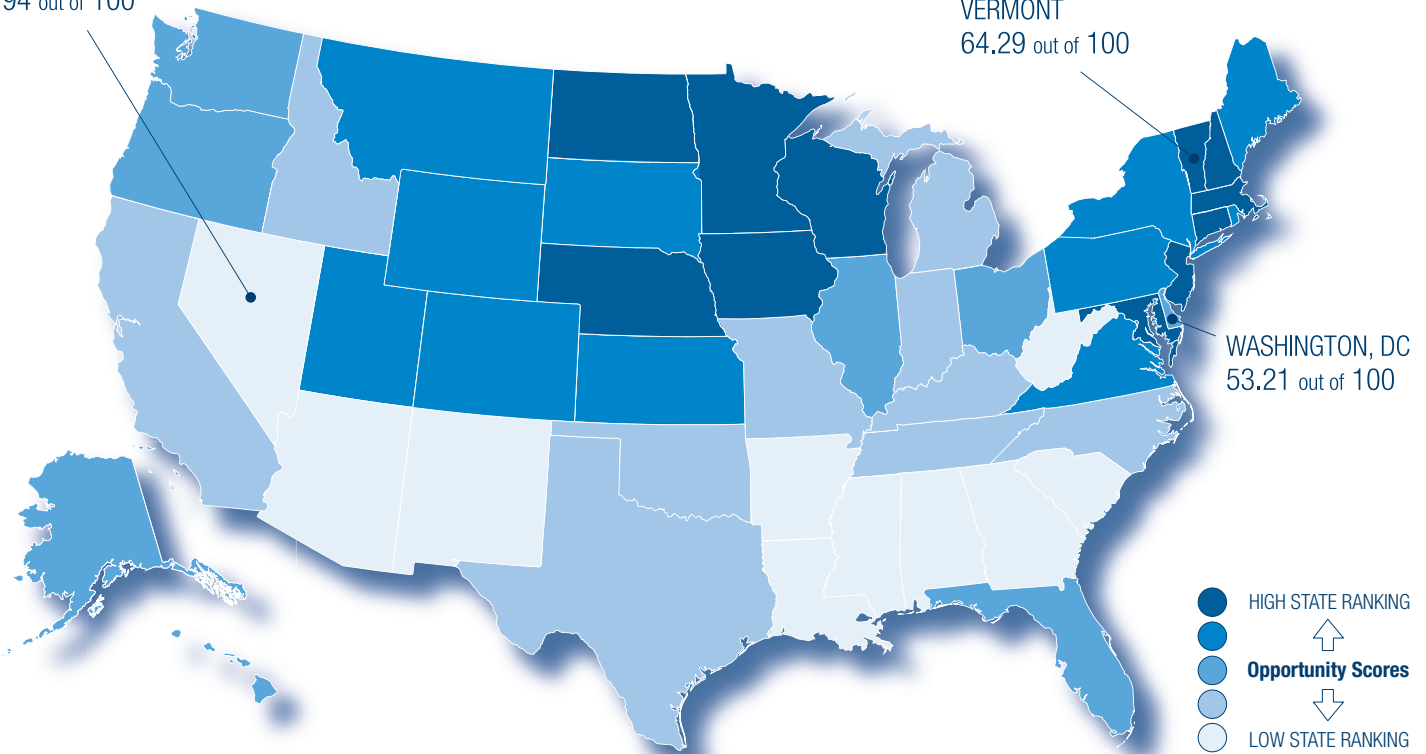
View or download the shared plan, instructional toolkits, and other information at opportunitynation.org/thesharedplan

THE OPPORTUNITY INDEX.

NEVADA
35.94 out of 100

VERMONT
64.29 out of 100

WASHINGTON, DC
53.21 out of 100



A GROUNDBREAKING NEW WAY TO MEASURE OPPORTUNITY

We measure opportunity with the **Opportunity Index**, a new tool that helps us assess local factors, such as jobs, education, and community, that impact a person's ability to achieve economic mobility and security. We use the index information to derive an **Opportunity Score**, a comprehensive snapshot of where a community stands today and how it can improve its future. When Opportunity Scores are rising in an area, we know conditions are in place for more citizens to access the American Dream.

Local citizens, businesses, and civic institutions in all 50 states, plus Washington, DC, and 2,900 counties across the country can now use their Opportunity Scores to create action plans to make their communities better places to live. The results can also help inform policy changes to create state and national impact.

The Opportunity Index was cocreated by Opportunity Nation and Measure of America.

OUR GOAL:

Our 10-year goal is to improve Opportunity Scores by at least 10 percent in all 50 states. When opportunity grows, we all benefit.

10 ★ 10 ★ 50
YEARS PERCENT STATES



See how your community scores
opportunityindex.org



Discuss the Index on Twitter
#oppindex

JOIN US.

Opportunity and economic mobility for all.

Opportunity Nation is a national, nonpartisan, cross-sector campaign focused on increasing opportunity for everyone. Opportunity Nation's shared plan strengthens the rungs on the ladder of opportunity for the rising generation of young adults so they can reach their educational and workforce potential. When they succeed, we all benefit.

Our country will be more competitive in a global economy.

Our economy will be stronger.

Communities will have more opportunity, and Opportunity Index Scores will increase.

The American Dream will be restored for millions in the rising generation.

Help jump-start the American Dream and renew an Opportunity Nation.

opportunitynation.org



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