

WE GOT THIS

A CALL TO ACTION
FOR YOUTH EMPLOYMENT



**OPPORTUNITY
NATION** 
THE SHARED PLAN TO RESTORE OPPORTUNITY

Starting today, every one of us can work together and take concrete steps to ensure young Americans are thriving in their jobs, schools and communities. Generated by the priorities of our diverse, cross-sector coalition and an extensive listening tour with key partners, Opportunity Nation is releasing our plan to tackle the U.S. youth employment crisis: **WE GOT THIS.**

Connecting young Americans to meaningful, seamless education and career pathways benefits our communities, our companies and our country. Helping our youth get ahead is not simply altruistic — it improves our economy, our society and our global competitiveness. When our youth do well, we all do well. Young people bring energy, creativity, loyalty, comfort with technology and other strengths in abundance. They just need an opportunity. And we need all our talent on the field.

With double-digit youth unemployment, millions of American youth currently disconnected from school and work, and employers desperate for skilled workers, now is the time to come together across public, private and nonprofit sectors and help young Americans gain the skills they need for today's competitive job market and get on the road to economic security and stability.

Each of us — including employers, educational institutions, nonprofits and philanthropies, policymakers and young Americans — can help realize this goal. We can mentor or hire youth, bring potential partners together to train and prepare youth for careers, and advocate local, state and federal policy change. Guided by solutions that work across the country — from cities and suburbs to rural settings and tribal lands — this is how we become a true opportunity nation for the rising generation.



TRAIN

Train young adults through work-based learning experiences.

YOUTH AND COMMUNITY LEADERS

- Support bipartisan policy initiatives that would expand and update hands-on, modernized career and technical education for all students.
- Participate in or promote work-based learning experiences, which help build a strong business case to employers about the benefits of offering internships and other training opportunities to youth.

EMPLOYERS

Expand access to work-based learning such as internships and modern-day apprenticeships among industries, small business owners and third-party providers; increase awareness of these opportunities and their benefits.

NONPROFITS & PHILANTHROPY/EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Spur partnerships with employers, school districts, colleges and post-secondary technical schools for integrated, work-based learning experiences and certification opportunities for youth.

POLICYMAKERS

- Support bipartisan policy initiatives that would expand and update hands-on, modernized career and technical education for all students.
- Incentivize employers to hire and train youth and encourage them to work with and buy services and products from organizations that employ “opportunity youth”— 16 to 24-year-olds who are neither in school nor working.
- Collaborate with employers and local workforce investment boards to ensure that all young Americans who need job training and supports are being referred to effective, evidence-based programs that prepare them for careers in their region.



HIRE

Hire youth and increase employer demand for wider pipelines of young talent.

YOUTH & COMMUNITY LEADERS/NONPROFITS & PHILANTHROPY

- Help large, medium and small businesses become champions for hiring youth; share tools to support on-boarding of new employees; and ramp up job-training programs, internships and modern-day apprenticeships.
- Involve entrepreneurs as an effective way to identify solutions that expand opportunity; emphasize entrepreneurship as a way to give young adults a pathway to success and skills that employers covet.
- Make a powerful business case to employers for hiring youth, especially those from non-traditional backgrounds, given the significant return on investment through greater employee loyalty, talent and energy.
- Build initiatives with cross-sector input from the start, collectively engaging employers in order to hear their needs and then prepare young adults to meet them.

EMPLOYERS

- Increase hiring and/or providing of meaningful, hands-on opportunities for young people that benefit both youth and employers. Businesses with supply chains and vendors should also ask this commitment from their partner companies.
- Identify internal barriers to accessing wider talent pipelines — such as degree requirements for every job, even when the necessary skillsets do not require one — and explore the value of human resources solutions in modifying or removing these requirements.
- Approach the hiring of youth not as a discrete program, but rather as a mechanism to shift systems, mindset and orientation that drive scale.

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

- Connect students to employers for some form of work experience; promote a powerful business case to employers for hiring youth.
- Provide information and collaborate with employers, local workforce boards and nonprofits focused on youth employment in an effort to match student training with specific employer needs.

POLICYMAKERS

- Set goals for increases in and improvements to apprenticeships, internships, job shadowing and other forms of work experience in all states.
- Regularly report youth employment numbers to local, regional and statewide groups and elected officials.



MENTOR

Mentor youth through work-based, service learning or civic engagement experiences that impart transferrable skills, leadership and social capital.

YOUTH & COMMUNITY

Support and participate in peer-to-peer and youth-to-adult mentoring models, particularly through youth-led organizations that promote leadership, skill-attainment and community service, as a powerful way to engage young Americans and demonstrate their contributions and talents to employers and society.

EMPLOYERS

- Create job shadowing and externship opportunities for young adults to give them valuable exposure to work options and professional networks as they map their career pathways.
- Leverage support from nonprofits, schools and colleges to launch or expand youth-focused programs, understanding that mentoring is also good for business as it helps to develop talent, fosters employee loyalty and creates career pathways.

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS/NONPROFITS & PHILANTHROPY/POLICYMAKERS

- Recruit employers to launch or expand youth-focused programs and coalitions led by mentors through sharing evidence that mentoring makes smart business sense, as it develops talent and creates career pathways.
- Help all students understand their education and career options, including: career and technical education; internships and apprenticeships; alternative programs; and information about the fastest-growing job sectors in their region.
- Partner in building wraparound services into educational and career programs, particularly as many “opportunity youth” face significant obstacles to upward mobility. Such groups include homeless youth; youth transitioning from foster care; youth with disabilities; pregnant and parenting youth; post-adjudicated youth; and youth with transportation challenges.
- Expand volunteer programs, community projects and service learning for young adults, as research shows civic engagement can decrease youth disconnection and increase professional and technical skills and social capital.



GRADUATE

Graduate youth by dramatically increasing the number of young people who receive a post-secondary degree or credential while continuing to boost high school graduation rates and student skill levels.

YOUTH & COMMUNITY LEADERS

Engage in hands-on, empowering leadership experiences that teach the tools for self-sufficiency and help young Americans complete high school and post-secondary education.

EMPLOYERS / NONPROFITS & PHILANTHROPY / EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

- Build smoother transitions from school to work through closer collaboration among schools, community colleges, universities, nonprofits and employers so young adults can gain valuable, transferrable skills while becoming ready for college and careers.
- Promote and help build direct partnerships between employers and higher education institutions to ensure clear links between post-secondary credentials and career pathway job experiences.
- Identify high-quality, industry-validated credentials that are used for hiring.
- Encourage opportunities for every student to be connected with at least one employer and have some form of work experience with that employer.
- Revamp developmental education through strategies such as integrating basic skills with occupational skills and summer immersion courses, so that remedial education is no longer a barrier to completing a post-secondary degree.
- Make college registration systems more flexible and student-centric; increase advising to improve higher education decision-making; and make it easier to transfer credits from community colleges to four-year colleges and universities.
- To reach the goal of national 90% high school graduation rate by 2020, focus on dropout prevention and the re-engagement of recent dropouts and over-age and under-credit students.
- Create an alternative accountability system for non-traditional high school students and programs, and improve and expand credit recovery programs. Examples include: early warning systems; flexible schedules; a reduction in seat time barriers through adaptive models; increased worked-based learning time and competency/mastery based credit award; night and weekend programs for young adults; and tracking graduation of re-engaged youth and credit accumulation.
- Expand dual enrollment programs that allow high school students and those who recently dropped out to earn college credit while working toward their diploma.
- Identify students who have recently left higher education (within the past two years) and help them re-enroll and get on track to complete a certificate, industry-recognized credential, associate or bachelor degree.

POLICYMAKERS

- Improve affordability and financial aid access.
- Support college savings plans for low-income children.



REVIVE

Revive opportunity by capitalizing on bipartisan support for criminal justice reform. Support programs and policy designed to help young, nonviolent offenders get on paths to careers and stable, productive lives.

YOUTH & COMMUNITY LEADERS / POLICYMAKERS

Support bipartisan policy initiatives that seek to give Americans convicted of nonviolent crimes a second chance at the American Dream by preventing mistakes made while young from turning into future criminal behavior and by helping young adults who commit nonviolent crimes become more self-reliant and less likely to commit future crimes.

EMPLOYERS

Lead by hiring and/or training post-adjudicated youth and young adults who are on probation for nonviolent crimes.

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS / NONPROFITS & PHILANTHROPY

Develop and support programs that help youth both within and released from the juvenile justice system to complete high school or a GED program and receive a post-secondary credential.

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Opportunity Nation is a bipartisan, national campaign comprised of more than 300 businesses, educational, institutions, nonprofits and civic organizations working together to expand economic mobility and close the opportunity gap in America.