Youth have diverse and sometimes pressing needs as they navigate the path to adulthood. As anyone who works to deliver social services to youth knows, meeting these needs can be a difficult and complex challenge. Because of this, many communities throughout the country have created multi-agency alliances to improve the effectiveness of their public service systems for youth and young adults. Recognizing that “it takes a network,” these cross-system collaboratives do together what they could not accomplish alone. They typically involve workforce development agencies, educational institutions, social service providers, juvenile justice agencies, and community-based organizations working together to coordinate programs and systems that support youth in making seamless transitions in school and into the workforce and independent adulthood.

In recent years, the practice of multi-agency collaboration has become more commonplace. Many of the newly created cross-system networks transcend geographic, sector-based, and political barriers, emphasizing the alignment of youth services and programs. Once they come together, the participating agencies and organizations work together to support the multifaceted needs of youth as they complete school, plan their careers, receive workforce training and develop positive peer relationships. While many networks strive to address the needs of all youth and young adults in their communities, others intentionally target the most vulnerable populations. With a unified voice, these collaboratives can shape state and local administrative policies to better meet the needs of young people and the organizations that serve them.

This issue brief reviews six core activities of seasoned cross-agency networks that successfully support youth and young adults in their transitions to adulthood. It also highlights some of the key structural and operational components of these networks.
Communities across the country have invested considerable time and resources in catalyzing and sustaining cross-system networks for youth and young adults. Because successful community network initiatives are locally defined and locally driven, the activities across sites look different from one another. However, our scan reveals six common areas where seasoned, successful cross-system networks for youth are focusing their attention.

1. **Collaborate across systems and coordinate youth services** by assessing gaps, embracing a shared vision and set of metrics, and catalyzing changes that will better meet the comprehensive needs of youth and young adults.

2. **Keep students “on-track” to high school graduation** by improving access to high quality schools and providing quality work-based learning experiences.

3. **Support youth transitioning to postsecondary training, college, and careers** by developing seamless pathways that include real-world training opportunities.

4. **Develop community-wide jobs and workforce development experiences for youth** by brokering relationships with employers committed to regional career development for youth.

5. **Support various populations of vulnerable youth** by developing systems that meet their unique needs.

6. **Infuse a youth development approach across programs and services** by involving youth as partners in reform efforts and ensuring that public agencies understand youth development.

**1. COLLABORATE ACROSS SYSTEMS AND COORDINATE YOUTH SERVICES**

Through collaboration across systems, successful youth networks address the comprehensive needs of youth and young adults. Together, the participating agencies and organizations assess the needs of youth in their community, identify gaps in services, and develop more efficient and effective systems to coordinate services across agencies.

Because government and foundation funding now often requires sophisticated coordination among several agencies, partnerships across systems are relatively common. However, many such partnerships dissolve once the funding—and the concomitant need for tight coordination—ends. Successful local community networks, in contrast, understand the many and varied benefits of long-term, committed, coordinated efforts. Members of these alliances often begin their partnerships based on the success of one initiative, layering and building upon their past experiences. They are seeing firsthand how their collaborative efforts help to sustain change efforts in the long term.

Successful youth networks employ several powerful coordination strategies:

- Invest an intermediary organization or network partner with responsibility for leading the coordination of network activities and community-wide initiatives.
- Engage and build linkages with organizations and agencies across youth and adult systems.
- Use a common metric or set of measurable indicators to provide coherence and shared accountability.
- Assess gaps in services by conducting community resource mapping.

**Strategies in Action**

**Local Youth Networks: Los Angeles, California**

The City of Los Angeles has actively supported cross-system collaboration among public and private agencies since at least 1994 with the implementation of the School-to-Work Act. At that time the city formed **UNITE-LA**, a non-profit intermediary organization that creates partner-
WHAT IT TAKES TO SUSTAIN A CROSS-SYSTEM YOUTH NETWORK

Local, regional, and state collaborative networks are finding ways to increase the efficiency, impact, and continuity of services by leveraging existing resources, as well as by jointly pursuing funding opportunities that individual organizations often cannot secure on their own. For example:

- The San Diego Workforce Partnership (SDWP) and the County of San Diego HHSA Child Welfare Services (CWS) collaboratively issued an RFP to provide transitioning foster youth with a continuum of seamless, individualized services. The two-tiered program design enables CWS and the SDWP to issue separate contracts for services that might otherwise have been substantially duplicative.

- The Los Angeles Compact recently received a highly competitive Innovation Fund (i3) Grant for $5 million from the US Department of Education to support and expand successful cross-system efforts to improve educational outcomes for youth.

- The Workplace Learning Connection (WLC) developed a fee-for-service structure that allows all schools in the region, whether urban or rural, to receive WLC’s services equitably. In addition, each participating local education agency and community college contributes a portion of its Perkins funding and each participating County Board of Supervisors provides economic development funding. WLC also receives WIA funding from WIA service providers for professional development and other technical assistance services.

- The Maine Governor’s Children’s Cabinet funds cross-system efforts by earmarking a small percentage of the administrative fees allowed within grants received by each of the state agencies that comprise the Cabinet. This collaboratively-funded pool supports coordinating staff at the state-level as well the costs of updating and maintaining the trend data on the Maine Marks website.

ships between the business and education communities and provides youth with school-to-career activities.

Catalyzed in part by a study that showed that one out of five youth in L.A. are out of work and out of school, city leaders and government officials representing 18 major institutions from both the public and private sectors signed the LA Compact in 2010. This collaborative agreement focuses on reforming high schools to boost graduation rates, better prepare students for college, and provide them with more opportunities and better access to jobs and careers.

Local Youth Networks: San Diego, California

The San Diego Workforce Partnership (SDWP) has drawn on the assets of an existing collaborative structure to support interagency work. The WIA-mandated Youth Council functions as a regional intermediary, facilitating the involvement of diverse partners from education, juvenile justice, child welfare, and local community-based organizations, as well as a large contingent of businesses and youth advisory committees. Initiatives include a county-wide youth resource mapping project, the development of workforce development strategies in alternative schools for those not succeeding in traditional environments, and the creation of career pathways for youth leading to allied health care and green jobs. San Diego Workforce Partnership’s WIA Youth division requires providers to contract or have MOUs with community partners to demonstrate leveraged support.

In 2009, all of the WIA youth providers contracted by the SDWP completed a self-assessment designed by the National Youth Employment Coalition’s (NYEC) Promising and Effective Practices Network (PEPnet) Quality Standards in Youth Programs. The SDWP is using the assessment results to direct professional development for youth service providers region-wide.

State Youth Network: Nevada

Nevada’s Ready for Life program grew out of a number of different initiatives, all sharing the common goals of connecting Nevada’s youth to education and productive employment and promoting the valuing of education. To these ends, Ready for Life (launched in 2005 and adopted statewide in 2009) seeks to create a strong, united voice for Nevada’s youth, as well as to facilitate communication across state and local levels in order to leverage resources, remove barriers, and progress toward measurable goals that help youth become “ready for life.” At the local level, Ready for Life partners include K–16 educational institutions, law enforcement agencies, businesses, juvenile justice systems, foster care providers, municipalities, and local non-profits. At the state level, partners include the Department of Education, the Department of Employment Training and Rehabilitation, the Nevada WIB Youth Council, the United Way, and the State Education Association. Ready for Life recently received a portion of the Governor’s Discretionary WIA Youth funds (received under the ARRA) to support efforts aligned with the goals and strategies of the Nevada WIB Youth Council Strategic Plan.

State Youth Network: Maine

The Maine Governor’s Children’s Cabinet provides statewide cross-agency coordination, leadership, and policy development to improve the well-being of Maine’s...
children, youth, and families. Guided by a set of 12 outcomes-based indicators, the Cabinet works toward a range of goals including preparing youth for the workforce and creating partnerships within communities.

Although each agency tracks the primary measures in a separate database, they are all pulled into a single Web-based “Maine Marks” format, used to assess youth success at the state level. Currently, as part of a broader cross-systems longitudinal data-sharing system in development, the Departments of Education and Labor are developing the Maine longitudinal data sharing system which, when fully implemented in 2013, will capture data from early childhood through postsecondary educational institutions and allow for linkages with Department of Labor data. The final step will be to integrate data from the public safety and judicial systems, making it possible to look at trends and more effectively align and manage programs.

**Regional and State Youth Networks: Iowa**

The Workplace Learning Connection (WLC) is a non-profit intermediary organization in Iowa representing a partnership of Kirkwood Community College and Grant Wood Area Education Agency. After receiving a two-year federal School-to-Work (STW) grant in 1998, WLC launched an interagency group to centralize coordination of career awareness activities between K–12 schools and businesses. As STW funding drew to a close, the group collectively decided to continue their collaborative work together, focusing on coordinating workplace learning experiences for youth and professional development for educators in districts across the region. Now in its 13th year, the WLC has developed collaborative relationships with many diverse partners throughout the region, including seven counties, 34 public and private school districts, higher education institutions, local businesses, regional foundations, and WIA-funded training providers.

In recent years, WLC’s regional success has catalyzed a movement to replicate WLC’s structure and expand the model statewide. In 2005, the WLC was instrumental in developing the legislation that created the policy framework for this statewide initiative and in securing funding, in 2009, in a joint effort with the Iowa Departments of Economic Development and Education. They have also been impacted positively by other statewide legislative policies: For example, the state now requires all 8th graders to draft four-year plans prior to entering the 9th grade which has increased the requests for services at the middle school level. In addition, all accredited schools must submit annual reports describing the career-related activities they have provided to their students. The WLC provides detailed reports to the superintendents to document their efforts to meet the requirement. This type of value-added service supports the on-going collaboration and sustainability of the partnership.

### 2. KEEP STUDENTS “ON-TRACK” TO HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

Supporting youth as they complete secondary education and prepare for their next steps toward college and careers requires a coordinated effort. Local educators are working with workforce development professionals, businesses, social service agencies, and other partners to help high school students understand the relevance of academic learning, to motivate them to graduate and, ideally, to pursue postsecondary educational opportunities.

Successful youth networks use these powerful strategies to increase high school graduation rates:

- Design smaller, high-quality alternative schools, especially for vulnerable populations.
- Support academic relevance with work-based learning opportunities that are connected to classroom learning.
- Provide support for students as they plan their futures, beginning early with college and career exposure.

**Strategies in Action**

**Local Youth Networks: Austin, Texas**

**Skillpoint Alliance**, a non-profit youth intermediary organization in Austin, Texas, works in partnership with industry and education on numerous programs designed to support academic relevancy and rigor, beginning in the elementary grades. Through **Discover Engineering**, students in elementary and middle schools conduct hands-on explorations of engineering and physics concepts with engineers who volunteer their time. **Step Up**, a challenging, hands-on summer program for middle school students, is designed to spark interest in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) careers. **Digital Media for Youth (DMY)** implements digital media curricula in Central Texas high schools, providing students and teachers advanced technology workshops, college and career awareness events, and a regional competition and showcase. Through **Velocity Prep**, high school students...
work together as a mock company, researching a problem, developing a solution, and delivering a final presentation and professional report to the real client and school officials. The annual College & Career Expo introduces thousands of high school students to career pathways through the participation of local businesses, community colleges, universities and education and training centers.

State Youth Networks: New Mexico

New Mexico’s Children’s Cabinet advocated for the governor’s high school reform plan, which now guides alignment of state programs that support the integration of economic development, workforce training, and public secondary and postsecondary education goals. Out of this has grown New Mexico’s Career-Focused Student Learning System, which requires the integration of academic programs that meet New Mexico’s graduation requirements and provide career-technical education, including an experiential work-based learning component for all students. In addition, the state now requires 11th graders to create a “Next Step Plan” before beginning 12th grade. Similarly, the Carve Your Path Web-based program helps middle and high school students plan their futures and many school districts now offer a college and workforce readiness assessment.

State Youth Networks: Nevada

Nevada has the country’s lowest rates of high school graduation and college enrollment or completion, and the highest rate of unemployed youth who are not attending school. To address these challenges, Ready for Life has catalyzed numerous local and statewide efforts with the end goal of connecting Nevada’s youth to education and productive employment by the age of 25. On a local level, Ready for Life and its partners in Washoe County cleared the way for students to earn concurrent credits in high school and college beginning in 9th grade, rather than in 11th grade as previous policies allowed. In Clark County, they brokered an agreement between Workforce Connections (their WIA-funded system) and the school district to create a summer program that awards WIA-enrolled high school students elective credits for work experience and extends academic summer school classes. Currently, Ready for Life is brokering an agreement to leverage Perkins, WIA, and private funding to increase the number of WIA youth receiving quality work experiences.

On a state level, Ready for Life and its partners have been able to catalyze legislation that supports probationary high school for overage and under-credited 8th graders, allowing them to go on to high school, make up the credits they have missed and expand opportunities to earn additional high school credits. Ready for Life partners have also gained approval for revisions to statewide proficiency exams, allowing more diverse ways for youth to demonstrate competency—something particularly beneficial to youth with disabilities.

3. SUPPORT YOUTH TRANSITIONING TO POSTSECONDARY TRAINING, COLLEGE, AND EMPLOYMENT

Cross-system networks of organizations and agencies help young people transition to postsecondary training and education by helping them navigate through various agencies and programs. Linked with efforts to support high school completion, many collaboratives form to support integrated academic and vocational training. Whether they work with youth in high schools or with those who drop out, community networks are able to meet young people where they are and help move them through the next steps toward further education, careers, and economic viability.

Youth networks with a good track record helping youth transition to postsecondary training, college, and careers employ several powerful strategies:

- Develop synchronized career and college pathways informed by employer needs and aligned with high-growth industries.
- Provide concurrent credit (high school/college) to high school students for participation in college-level career activities.
- Provide disconnected young adults with support for high school equivalence completion, while easing their transition to postsecondary education and career development.
- Increase access to higher education and job training opportunities, particularly for low-income students.

Strategies in Action

Local Youth Network: Los Angeles, California

Through initiatives launched by partners engaged with UNITE-LA and the Los Angeles Compact, representatives from government and civic organizations, public schools, workforce development agencies, and local employers are designing new schools and structures to link career education with college preparedness and to support multiple career and educational pathways for youth. Specific efforts focus on reengaging high school dropouts by helping them return to school, complete their GEDs, and access pathways to postsecondary education and careers. For example, the Los Angeles Conservation Corps (LACC), building on its 23-year track record of supporting at-risk young adults with job skills training, education, and work experience, is one of eight sites across the country participating in the National Youth Employment Coalition’s Postsecondary Success Initiative (PSI). In partnership with Los Angeles Trade Technical College and Sierra Community College—and in conjunction with the
city’s extensive work on the high school dropout crisis—the LACC pilot program focuses on helping disconnected youth go beyond completing high school equivalency by helping them navigate the pathway to and through college and into gainful employment.

Regional and State Youth Network: Iowa

The Workplace Learning Connection (WLC) supports an effort launched by Kirkwood Community College—Career Edge Career Academy Programs—which to encourage students to graduate from high school and complete college by awarding concurrent credit for successfully completing career-targeted college programs. The WLC provides the work-based learning activities in high-demand occupations through a statewide Career Edge Academy Program. Many of the youth who participate in these Career Academy programs—offered through 15 Iowa community colleges—are motivated to complete Associate’s Degrees after graduating from high school: with the concurrent credits, they are already on the path to college success. The program, supported through economic development funding, encourages a higher percentage of community college graduates to remain in the state, providing a skilled and available workforce to businesses seeking to invest in the state.

Regional and State Youth Network: Louisiana

The Consortium for Education, Research and Technology of North Louisiana (CERT), an intermediary based in Shreveport, connects its 12 member institutions—11 colleges and universities and the Biomedical Research Foundation—with business and industry, K–16+ educators, and economic and workforce development partners to facilitate the expansion of pathways to higher education and high-demand occupations. In an effort to increase access for low-income people, CERT launched a regional pilot, Continuum of All Louisiana Learners (CALL) that offers adults, including eligible, WIA-enrolled older youth, online portfolio assessments of prior college-level learning for credit and on-line, fast-track degree programs.

4. DEVELOP COMMUNITY-WIDE JOBS AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCES

Federal initiatives like the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 changed the way local communities approach youth services. WIA, for example, mandated that local Youth Councils—comprised of workforce training providers, schools, community organizations, employers, youth and others—collaborate to design systems that support youth career development and employment. In several communities surveyed, the local Youth Council serves as a primary network for initiating cross-system strategies to comprehensively and holistically meet the needs of youth and support their career development.*

In addition, many community networks now focus on enhancing and expanding the services provided by workforce development agencies in order to reach more young people (especially the most vulnerable populations) and to link these services with programs run by other public agencies and systems. In order to provide jobs for youth and expose them to a variety of careers and occupations, employers must be actively engaged so that valuable relationships are supported and sustained.

Youth networks that have been effective in providing youth with employment and workforce training use these powerful strategies:

• Provide a single point of contact for brokering work-based learning opportunities between businesses and local education agencies

• Provide vulnerable youth with a wide variety of high-quality training opportunities in high-demand occupations.

• Provide soft skills training that complements academic and vocational training.

Strategies in Action

Local Youth Network: Los Angeles, California

Since at least the mid-1990s, the City of Los Angeles has placed great importance on supporting youth employment. For example, Hire LA Youth provides summer and year-round employment for youth in the public and private sectors. Spearheaded by the LA Chamber of Commerce and actively supported by the Mayor of Los Angeles, the LA City Council and other members of the LA Compact, the program provides thousands of subsidized employment and training opportunities for Los Angeles’ most vulnerable youth populations. Annual breakfasts with the Mayor strengthen partnerships with employers, and thanks to a match of public dollars, private employers such as ATT, Wells Fargo, and Kaiser Permanente are supporting a continuum of career development experiences that frequently lead to permanent positions for youth. In addition, the City of Los Angeles brokers and provides jobs for youth within the public sector.

Local Youth Network: Austin, Texas

Since 1993, Skillpoint Alliance in Austin, Texas, has coordinated initiatives among workforce, education, and private sector partners to help prepare youth and adults for employment while also meeting employers’ needs. Among their successful initiatives are the Gateway programs, which aim to prepare youth and disconnected young adults for education, training, and entry-level employment in high-demand careers. Together with Aus-
tin Community College (ACC), Skillpoint is responsible for the nationally-acclaimed, highly successful Gateway Construction program, and will soon launch additional programs in the electrical and health fields, as well as a Gateway High School. Hallmarks of these programs include a curriculum directly linked to industry standards and work readiness training that imparts the values, skills, and habits that employers (and life) demand. A portion of the training is delivered at ACC, enabling participants to see themselves as successful college students.

Regional and State Youth Network: Louisiana

In partnership with Encana Oil and Gas and Shell Oil, the Consortium for Education, Research and Technology (CERT) is initiating regional, cross-discipline efforts that address alternative energy, energy efficiency, and conservation that will positively impact the communities and economies of the Arkansas/Louisiana/Texas region. Through summer Energy Camps, for example, high school students spend a week on a college campus, applying academic and workplace skills as they explore different energy systems including petroleum, natural gas, wind, and solar. This program is supported with funds from both the private and public sectors.

State Youth Network: New Mexico

The Children’s Cabinet Career Clusters Initiative (CCCI) is an effort of the New Mexico Children's Cabinet and its partners—including industry leaders and the New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions—to create career pathways for youth while meeting the educational and career requirements of the state’s emerging industries. One important result of the work is the Career Cluster Tool Kit, designed to be used by students, parents, educators, and employers to help young people set and attain academic and career goals and make seamless transitions to employment in any of the state’s seven identified Career Clusters.

State Youth Network: Iowa

The Workplace Learning Connection (WLC) provides a single point of contact for connecting students to career development opportunities throughout the region. These opportunities include job shadows, internships, career speakers, worksite tours, career fairs, and financial literacy fairs. The WLC, in partnership with the regional business community, has also created a networking event (the UnMeeting) and directory of additional youth services available to out-of-school youth being served by WIA-funded partners.

5. SUPPORT VULNERABLE YOUTH

While successful cross-system networks work to meet the needs of young people in general as they transition to adulthood, most networks also include initiatives that focus on the most vulnerable youth populations, including older out-of-school youth, foster youth, parenting youth, and youth offenders. By joining together social service, child welfare, and juvenile justice agencies, these collaboratives provide the most vulnerable young people in their communities with a more coherent and unified support system.

Youth networks that have achieved success in supporting the most vulnerable youth populations in their communities use a number of powerful strategies:

- Design intentional outreach and retention strategies for vulnerable youth that addresses their unique needs.
- Coordinate services and minimize the number of agencies with which youth must interface.
- Work across systems to remove systemic barriers and align service strategies to more comprehensively meet the needs of vulnerable populations.
- Involve vulnerable youth in designing new programs and services.
- Design programs that guide vulnerable youth to postsecondary education and training and provide them with adequate support along the way.

Strategies in Action

Local Youth Network: San Diego, California

In 2004, the San Diego Workforce Partnership Youth Council (SDWP) formed a Youth Transition Action Team (YTAT) as part of a statewide initiative to support foster youth in their transitions to college and careers. As part of this initiative, SDWP made a deliberate effort to increase the number of foster youth it served, and made a strong connection with the Independent Living Skills community. Since then, SDWP has been able to leverage those funding streams to create a seamless system for transitioning foster youth to work experience, training, and employment.

For example, the Independent Living Skills program, created through a collaboration between the SDWP and the County of San Diego HHSA Child Welfare Services (CWS), supports foster youths’ transition to becoming self-sufficient. To create this two-tiered program, SDWP and CWS issued a joint Request for Proposals to provide a continuum of services to meet the unique needs of current and former foster youth. The first tier, which is primarily funded with County of San Diego independent living skill dollars, provides eligible youth with case management services as well as life skills training; work readi-
ness, and workshops that focus on college and career exploration. The second tier is the WIA-funded portion, which provides a more intensive level of services to youth who are willing to participate and commit to WIA services and outcomes, including subsidized and unsubsidized employment. Since the inception of the Independent Living Skills program in 2008, the two contracted direct service providers have served more than 500 youth transitioning from the Child Welfare System, and have annually exceeded the four required WIA common measures.

Local Youth Network: San Francisco, California

In 2006, San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom, in partnership with the San Francisco Youth Commission, created the Mayor’s Transitional Youth Task Force (TYTF). Leaders of city departments, representatives from community-based organizations, and young people came together to develop recommendations for how the City and County of San Francisco could improve outcomes for the area’s most vulnerable transitional youth—those ages 16 through 24 who are disconnected from education, employment, and social support systems. Following a year of research and analysis led by task force representatives involving both adults and youth, the Task Force released a report that is guiding the efforts of cross-system initiatives across the city. The report identifies deficiencies in current city plans and program services, and outlines 16 steps to address the needs of the most vulnerable populations. The Youth Commission continues to lead activities to carry out the vision.

State Youth Network: Maine

The Shared Youth Vision Council (SYV), a subcommittee of the Maine Governor’s Children’s Cabinet, is responsible for planning, guiding, and assessing cross-system efforts in the eight regional districts relating to youth in transition. The charge to form the SYV Council was contained in legislation that was enacted as a way to implement the recommendations of the Juvenile Justice Task Force and to increase Maine’s high school graduation rate. One of the SYV Council’s most successful programs is Keeping Maine’s Children and Youth Connected. This program helps students who experience disruptions in their educational programs—due to homelessness, foster care placement, correctional facility placement and/or in-patient psychiatric care—stay connected (or become re-connected) to their educational programs. It is a collaborative effort among Maine’s Department of Corrections, Department of Education, Department of Labor, Department of Justice, and Department of Health and Human Services.

6. INFUSE A YOUTH DEVELOPMENT APPROACH ACROSS PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Cross-system networks recognize that in order to support youth in making successful transitions to adulthood, they must address youth’s emotional, educational, social, physical, and career-planning needs in a comprehensive and coordinated manner. Further, they know that it is important to involve young people as partners in systems change and provide them with opportunities for participation and leadership in civic and community events. They have learned that engaging young people as respected, valuable members of the community helps counter alienation and antisocial behaviors—and has the additional benefit of bringing new talents, critical perspectives and innovative ideas to the table. These two features—using comprehensive, need-based service strategies and treating youth as partners and not just clients—make up what national organizations such as the Forum for Youth Investment have called a youth development approach.

Successful youth networks have found that they can infuse their programs and services with a youth development approach by employing the following strategies:

- Train youth service providers in the principles of youth development.
- Infuse workforce development and education programs with a youth development approach.
- Make One-Stop Career Centers and other adult service centers that serve young adults “youth-friendly.”
- Engage young people as advisors regarding program design and delivery.
- Involve young people as civic and community leaders and advocates for youth rights.

Strategies in Action

Local Youth Network: San Francisco, California

Building upon what has come to be known as the Children’s Amendment to the city’s charter—which guarantees funding for children each year in the city budget—San Francisco civic leaders continue to prioritize the needs of young people. Involving youth as active intentional partners and leaders alongside adults has been a key goal of the Mayor’s Transitional Youth Task Force (TYTF). Since 2006, leaders of city departments and representatives of community-based organizations have joined young people in equal partnership to develop recommendations for how the city can improve outcomes for San Francisco’s most vulnerable transitional youth and young adult populations. In 2008, young adult members of the TYTF took their message to the state capitol and to a national audience, participating in forums focused on addressing public policies affecting foster youth and other vulnerable populations.
State Youth Network: New Mexico

The New Mexico Youth Alliance, established in 2003 by the Youth Council Act, is a statewide advisory group comprised of a cross-section of informed New Mexico youth (up to one representative from each legislative district) that provides feedback and recommendations to state lawmakers and administrators and the New Mexico Children’s Cabinet. Recently, a New Mexico Youth Alliance member received a “My Idea” grant from the America’s Promise Alliance to produce a play entitled “Dropping In.” Inspired by statewide focus groups where youth identified and discussed barriers to graduation, the play will be performed throughout New Mexico to addresses issues teens must overcome in order to graduate from high school.

State Youth Network: Maine

The Communities for Children and Youth (CCY) initiative of the Maine Governor’s Children’s Cabinet promotes and implements positive youth development as well as diversion and prevention initiatives statewide. One of the initiatives supported through the CCY is the Maine Youth Action Network (MYAN), which trains and supports youth leaders so they can effectively advocate for positive changes in schools and communities. The MYAN works with the Cabinet’s interagency Shared Youth Vision Councils throughout Maine to bring youth perspectives and energy to the efforts of the local Councils.

State Youth Network: California

Statewide initiatives within California have influenced many communities to form cross-system youth networks that actively engage young people and target the most vulnerable populations for support. For example, the California Youth Council Institute (YCI), launched in 2001 with support from the California Workforce Investment Board, supports WIA Youth Councils with the implementation of the “All Youth – One System” strategic approach to meeting the comprehensive needs of young people in California. Most Youth Councils across the state (including those in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and San Diego) adopted this approach, which guides efforts across workforce, education and child welfare agencies to apply a youth development approach to system design and service delivery strategies. In addition, many of the Youth Councils in California actively engage youth and young adults on advisory boards and as fully active members.

As part of the Youth Transition Action Teams (YTAT) initiative in California, the counties of Los Angeles, San Francisco, and San Diego joined eighteen other counties in forming cross-system teams focused on improving the systems and services that support current and former foster youth. In 2008, local YTAT teams attended the Foster Youth Career Development and Employment Summit, where over 300 representatives from child welfare, social services, and workforce development agencies joined with more than 50 youth and young adults to address the career development needs of current and former foster youth. The summit—the first of its kind in the state—culminated in a hearing at the State Capitol.

RESOURCES AND INSTITUTIONS THAT ADVANCE YOUTH NETWORKS

Our scan of community networks for youth found that many of those with a record of success in collectively addressing the needs of young people participate in state and national youth networks to connect with and learn from peers. Through these national intermediary institutions, they had opportunities to focus on like-minded initiatives, receive technical assistance and professional development training, and influence higher levels of policy.

Below are several organizations that provide technical assistance, training, leadership development, and policy reform guidance for local, regional, and state-level youth networks and their intermediaries, partners, and constituencies.

The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)

CLASP has convened the Communities Collaborating to Reconnect Youth (CCRY) Network, whose members share ideas, challenges, lessons, and best practices for reconnecting vulnerable youth. The CCRY Network provides a national forum for aggregating collective experiences to inform congressional briefs and influence legislation. According to Linda Harris, Director of Youth Policy at CLASP and staff to the CCRY Network, members stay “ahead of the legislative curve,” and are therefore better able to take advantage of current and emerging funding opportunities.

http://www.ccrynetwork.org

The Forum for Youth Investment (the Forum)

The Forum launched the Ready by 21 Leadership Network to provide leaders with the tools and guidance they need to ensure that “all youth are ready for college, work, and life.” The Forum network creates tools that can be customized by intermediaries throughout the country. A current focus is advocating for and supporting data-driven, outcome-focused planning.

www.forumforyouthinvestment.org/readyby21

The Forum also partners with the National Governors’ Association to support the National Children’s Cabinet Network, which facilitates state-level, cross-system, policy-to-practice planning for improving child and youth outcomes. In 2008,
this partnership compiled a directory of the goals of over 20 statewide children’s cabinets. For a copy of the directory, visit http://www.forumforyouthinvestment.org/node/54

**The Intermediary Network (INet)**

INet is a national association of leading local education, workforce, and youth development organizations. Annual leadership forums and strategic planning institutes provide opportunities for members to share promising practices, network with colleagues, and develop future plans. Regular practice communities meet virtually to deepen their work in policy and advocacy and to address issues facing disadvantaged populations.

www.intermediarynetwork.org

**Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs (IWGYP)**

IWGYP, composed of representatives from 12 federal agencies, seeks positive, healthy outcomes for youth through a multi-pronged approach that involves enhanced collaboration at the federal, state and local levels; dissemination of critical resources, including programmatic and funding opportunities; development of a strategic plan for federal youth policy; and maintenance of a federal website that promotes and facilitates effective community-based, youth-focused services.

http://www.findyouthinfo.gov/

As a service of the IWGYP, the **Helping Youth Transition Community of Practice (CoP)** focuses on building strong local, state, and federal collaborations for the benefit of all youth who experience challenges in transitioning to adulthood.

www.solutionsdesk.ou.edu

**The National Youth Employment Coalition (NYEC)**

The National Youth Employment Coalition is a national member organization that offers a range of projects, programs, and activities that fall into four areas of core business: 1) track, craft, and influence policy; 2) set and promote quality standards; 3) provide and support professional development; and 4) build and increase the capacity of organizations and programs. The coalition’s annual conferences provide opportunities for youth service providers to share and learn about promising practices in the field and to engage in political advocacy. The coalition’s **Promising and Effective Practices Network (PEPNet)** provides standards and tools to enhance the quality of programs that link youth to work and education and help them transition to adulthood.

http://www.nyec.org/

**New Ways to Work (New Ways)**

New Ways launched some successful statewide initiatives that have expanded to a national audience. The **Youth Council Institute (YCI)** provides technical assistance and tools to support WIA Youth Councils across the country. Based on state-of-the-art processes and tools that have evolved from the input of practitioners and providers throughout California and around the nation, Youth Councils can apply the “All Youth-One System” frameworks to their approaches.

The **Foster Youth Pathways to Employment** initiative supports a national network of **Youth Transition Action Teams** and other community-based, cross-system teams of leaders and practitioners in the child welfare, career development, and workforce development arenas who are struggling to improve child welfare outcomes and prepare foster youth for successful transitions to adulthood.

http://www.newwaystowork.org/
SOURCES


ENDNOTES

1 Young people’s need for support and services does not necessarily stop at age 18, when most public youth services end. A public opinion survey conducted on behalf of the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities initiative showed that most people think the average age at which a young person is completely ready to be on her or his own is 23 (Lake, Snell, Perry, & Associates, 2003). Accordingly, community networks bring together those who provide both youth and adult services, typically serving individuals between the ages of 14 and 24.

2 See Local intermediary organizations: Connecting the dots for children, youth, and their families (Blank et al., 2003) for a thoughtful review of the role of local intermediary organizations.

3 For example, see The Teen Disconnection in Los Angeles at http://cdd.lacity.org/home_report_1of5.html.

4 The signers of the compact include the Superintendent and Board president of Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), the Mayor of the City of Los Angeles, the President of the Los Angeles City Council, the President and CEO of the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce, the President, Associated Administrators of Los Angeles, the President and CEO of the United Way of Greater Los Angeles, the Executive Secretary-Treasurer, Los Angeles County Federation of Labor/AFL-CIO, and eleven institutions of higher education within the greater Los Angeles basin.

5 For more detail, see http://www.nyc.org/page.cfm?pageID=110.

6 For a complete description of Maine Marks, including a list of indicators and sub-indicators, visit: http://www.mainemarks.org/priorities.htm#YIT.

7 To see the tool, visit: www.carveyourpath.org.
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Other sites involved in NYEC’s Postsecondary Success Initiative (PSI) are located in Dayton, OH; San Francisco, CA; Brockton, MA; Portland, OR; New York, NY; Jamaica Plain, MA; and New York, NY. For more information about the PSI, see the NYEC website at http://www.nycop.org/page.cfm?pageID=306.

For more information about the work of strategic WIA Youth Councils and a wide collection of promising practices, see information about the Youth Council Institute at http://www.newwaystowork.org/initiatives/yci.html.

For more information about the Gateway Programs, go to: http://www.skillpointalliance.org/gateway.

For more information about the Career Cluster Tool Kit, go to http://www.dws.state.nm.us/pdf/careerclusters.pdf.

For more information about Youth Transition Action Teams (or the current initiative – Foster Youth Pathways to Employment) go to http://www.newwaystowork.org/initiatives/ytat.html.

For more information about the San Francisco Mayor’s Taskforce and to review the report, go to http://www.dcyf.org/Content.aspx?id=1566&note=1572.

For more information about Keeping Maine’s Children and Youth Connected, visit: http://www.maine.gov/education/speced/ymcc/.

The Children’s Amendment was passed by San Francisco voters in 1991, and was reauthorized in November, 2000, when it passed with 74% of votes. For more information go to http://www.dcyf.org/Content.aspx?id=88. For more information about the Mayor’s Transitional Youth Taskforce, go to http://www.taysf.org/.

For more information about the Youth Council Institute and the “All Youth – One System” framework, go to http://www.newwaystowork.org/initiatives/yci.html. Since 2004, YCi has expanded its network to Youth Councils across the country, and the framework was used to inform the work of the Youth Transition Action Teams in California (http://www.newwaystowork.org/initiatives/ytatarchive.html) and has been adopted as a framework for the national Intermediary Network (www.intermediarynetwork.org).

For more information about the Youth Transition Action Team initiative, go to http://www.newwaystowork.org/initiatives/ytatarchive.html.

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