

How Philanthropy Is Working Together to Help  
All of America's Youth Connect by Age 25

# safe passage



Youth Transition  
Funders Group

## chapter 7: a call to action

“To borrow from the cliché “talk is cheap,” it is now time to put our ideas and words into action. We must remain committed to finding resolutions to common issues and difficulties that youth experience in the child welfare system.”

*April Curtis, former foster youth*

Every grantmaker and policymaker faces a choice: Support effective and proven strategies that keep youth on the right path or throw money at ineffective methods that close the door on the future of our young people. YTFG hopes that this publication prompts grantmakers, policymakers, and advocates in your community to get serious about helping all youth to connect by age 25.

The best way to begin is to identify the unique issues that face youth in your community. The following assessment tool and policy checklists provide a framework for beginning a dialogue about current practices in your state and asking the hard questions that need to be asked. But don't stop there. After assessing the unique issues in your community, log on to our website at [www.ytfg.org](http://www.ytfg.org) to learn more about how to invest in systematic reforms that will benefit all youth.

### WHAT'S GOING ON IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

This tool is designed to help funders ask key questions that will help them to better assess challenges in the communities where they invest.

- **Are we offering a future or poverty?** What is our four-year high school graduation rate (excluding GED)? How great is the racial disparity in the graduation rate? Has the rate increased or dropped over the past 5 years?
- **To what extent is institutional racism at work in our policies?** To what extent does youth disconnection have a disproportionate impact on youth of color in our city or state? Which communities in our state have been effective in reducing racial inequity in education, juvenile justice, foster care, and teen pregnancy?
- **How are we doing as guardians?** Many students are in public care. What is the high school graduation rate for youth in foster care or on welfare? Has it increased or dropped over the past 5 years? What percentage of youth is homeless within a year after leaving foster care?
- **Do paths lead to helping hands or closed doors?** What are the literacy rates for court-involved youth? What is

the high school graduation rate for youth who have been imprisoned or detained? Are suspension and expulsion rates going up or down? How many of the children who are court-involved or suspended/expelled have health issues or disabilities (cognitive problems, substance abuse problems, mental health problems), and how many receive effective treatment?

- **Do policies challenge or reinforce racial disparities?** How do policies, assessment tools, and information systems help guide effective methods for reducing racial disparities in promotion and graduation? Which communities or systems have been effective in reducing racial disparities? Which have tried?
- **How effectively are public funds used?** What percentage of available federal youth funding is being accessed at the state and local levels? How effective are the systems designed to help prepare youth for the adult world? How do the systems in your city compare to those in other cities in your state? How do programs in your state compare to the best in the country?
- **How accessible is the information?** If you have difficulty collecting data to answer these and similar questions, you have a lot of work to do!

## POLICY CHECKLISTS

These checklists are designed to help state and local officials explore how their policies impact specific segments of the youth population.

### ✓ Youth with Interrupted Educations

1. What percentage of students who have left school, recently immigrated, or been retained receive their high school diplomas?
  - Exit exams and graduation requirements aligned only with four-year college admissions
  - Programs linking the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to traditional high schools (6 hours of classroom per day)
3. What policies allow students who have left school or who have been retained to accelerate their learning (e.g., credit for proficiency, dual credit)? What policies support educational advocates in helping youth solve cross-cutting issues?
4. Are graduation requirements and exit exams aligned to provide the greatest access to college?

5. How do funding streams and policies create incentives or disincentives for school holding power? For recovery of youth who have dropped out?

### ✓ Court-Involved Youth

1. How can states prevent the transfer of youth to adult prisons?
2. What policies ensure that the juvenile justice system operates as a rehabilitation system?
3. How do policies ensure that young people have access to counsel?
4. What incentives are in place to encourage the development of effective, small residential facilities rather than ineffective, large institutions?
5. What policies support after-care and re-entry services?

### ✓ Foster Youth

1. What services are available to foster youth through age 21? Health care through Medicaid? Housing assistance? Tuition? Case management?
2. To what degree are foster youth accessing magnet, charter, and small schools? What policies are in place to ensure that they are exempt from geographic or zoning requirements for school selection unless they choose not to be? What policies are in place to ensure that they have immediate access to all enrichment and support services?

3. What policies are in place to ensure that foster youth can attain economic self-sufficiency? Access to job development? Individual Development Accounts? Financial literacy and life skills?

### ✓ Teen Parents

1. How many teen parents are in your city, region, or state? What are the birth rates for teens, and how do they disaggregate by race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status?
2. What services are in place to help teen parents stay in school or re-enter school?
3. What services are available to help teen fathers improve their relationships with the mothers of their children? Are parenting-skills classes offered to fathers, as well as to mothers? Are job-training services available for young fathers?
4. What services are available to teen parents? Medical? Welfare? Educational? To what extent are services offered by different agencies coordinated within cities, regions, or the state?

Much is already being done to answer these questions and to get our older youth at risk back on track. Funders working across the fields of justice, education and foster care are making strategic investments through small, moderate, and large grants. Foundations

are supporting research and policy reform, funding innovative programs, convening government and community-based stakeholders, and supporting training for government and nonprofit leaders.

But there is much more to do.

Through the Youth Transition Funders Group, grantmakers in all fields that affect older youth can align their efforts, share strategies and knowledge, coordinate investments, capitalize on one another's expertise, avoid duplication of effort, and

expand opportunities to build upon one another's work. Increasingly, we are finding occasions to fund together.

We hope to entice other grantmakers—especially from the private, corporate, and public sectors—to seize this call to action to support the safe passage of America's youth to successful adulthood. After all, these are all of our children. Let us profit from what they become.

Reach out to YTFG and find out more.







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The Youth Transition Funders Group and its work groups include leaders from the following grantmaking institutions:

The Annie E. Casey Foundation  
The Atlantic Philanthropies  
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation  
The California Endowment  
Carnegie Corporation of New York  
Casey Family Programs  
Charles Stewart Mott Foundation  
The Children's Trust  
Coalition of Community Foundations for Youth  
Eckerd Family Foundation  
The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation  
Eugene & Agnes E. Meyer Foundation  
Edward W. Hazen Foundation  
Girl's Best Friend Foundation  
The James Irvine Foundation  
JEHT Foundation  
The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation  
Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative  
Lumina Foundation for Education  
Open Society Institute  
Stuart Foundation  
Surdna Foundation  
The Tow Foundation  
Walter S. Johnson Foundation  
The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation  
William Penn Foundation  
W. K. Kellogg Foundation  
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