



# Cross-System Collaborative Approaches to Promote Workforce Development for Youth with Justice Involvement: A Collection of Case Studies

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## About the National Youth Employment Coalition

Since 1979, the National Youth Employment Coalition (NYEC) has worked toward creating an America in which all young people are supported and prepared to become thriving members of our economy and society, regardless of their race, gender, ability, geography, or means. The National Youth Employment Coalition improves the lives of millions of young people who are out of school and out of work. We do this by improving the effectiveness of the organizations, and the systems, that serve these "opportunity youth." We collect, study, and support the implementation of best practices, while maintaining a strong equity focus. Since its inception, NYEC has strengthened hundreds of youth-serving organizations and influenced numerous pieces of federal legislation related to opportunity youth. Learn more about our work at [www.nyec.org](http://www.nyec.org).

In developing this project, we were informed by previous NYEC efforts including the [Job Training for Youth with Justice-Involvement toolkit](#) and the [Collaborative Outcomes from the Youth Justice and Employment Community of Practice](#).

## About the Urban Institute

The Urban Institute (Urban) is a nonprofit research organization that provides data and evidence to help advance upward mobility and equity. We are a trusted source for changemakers who seek to strengthen decision-making, create inclusive economic growth, and improve the well-being of families and communities. For more than 50 years, Urban has delivered facts that inspire solutions—and this remains our charge today.

In developing this project, we were informed by previous Urban efforts including the exploratory scan of [Community-Based Workforce Engagement Supports for Youth and Young Adults Involved in the Criminal Legal System](#).

## Acknowledgments

This report was funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. We appreciate their support and acknowledge that the findings and conclusions presented in this report are those of the authors alone, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Foundation, NYEC, or Urban. The NYEC and Urban are proud to be a part of the Foundation's ongoing commitment to improving outcomes for young people.





## Executive Summary

This report details the findings of a joint project between the National Youth Employment Coalition (NYEC) and Urban Institute (Urban) to conduct case studies of up to five sites that have launched or implemented a broad-based, cross-system collaborative to promote workforce development and better provide labor market opportunities for justice-involved (JI) youth. The following case studies include a detailed analysis of each site's collaborative efforts, key stakeholders, best practices for systems collaboration, an exploration of funding sources, and sustainability efforts.

Stakeholders come in many varieties in these cross-system collaboratives. Here we use the term to mean any business, nonprofit, institute of justice, elected official, or other such member of a public system that works to address the needs of JI youth seeking employment opportunities. Often-times, these stakeholders are siloed and work separately from direct service providers at the community level. This separation does not allow for productive collaboration between the best minds in the JI youth service space.

Thus, five cross-system collaboratives from across the country working to solve this issue were selected as case study sites and were interviewed about their work and collaboration efforts. Using informational interviews to determine level of interest and fit within the project scope, NYEC, in collaboration with Urban and the Foundation, selected these sites: Tulare County, CA; Denver, CO; Hartford, CT; Louisville, KY; and Manchester, NH.

In addition to informational interviews with the collaboratives, community interviews and youth focus groups were conducted with each of the five sites. Individuals or small groups in the workforce development and/or justice system sectors were amongst the community interviewees. Youth focus groups involved JI youth who are served by the sites.



These collaboratives identified five key elements that are crucial for success:

1. **Data and Outcomes:** Using and generating valuable data is key to successful collaboration.
2. **Strong Cross-System Approach:** Multiple stakeholders must partake in offering viable solutions to problems.
3. **Innovative Engagement Strategies:** Investment in the collaboration process must be interesting and offer those partaking new insights.
4. **Nature of the Collaborative:** Developing a list of best practices and then implementing those practices is key to sustaining any collaborative.
5. **Collaborative Goals:** Setting specific, measurable, and attainable goals helps keep collaboratives focused on their collective objectives and helps to explain their successes.

Yet, challenges persist. Collaboration is poorly defined in the workforce development space and is being developed. Furthermore, industry specific data sharing agreements and methods of accountability exemplars have yet to be established.





## Background and Purpose of Project

### What the Literature Says

Economic stability and employment during young adulthood are critical to long-term economic security, but today, many young adults face longer periods of financial insecurity than in the past (Vespa 2017). Young adults are also more likely to experience incarceration where mental health resources would be the more appropriate intervention (Pirius 2018). Many young people with histories of incarceration experience some form of a mental disorder. **Young people affected by the justice system face additional barriers to achieving economic stability and employment with research showing that formerly incarcerated people are almost five times more likely than the public to be unemployed (Couloute and Kopt 2018).** Access to a variety of community-based workforce development resources and supports can facilitate a stable transition to adulthood for this population (Sakala, White, and Hull 2022). However, JI youth are a high need population who have historically had difficulty accessing available resources across the United States. Additionally, structural challenges such as poverty and systemic racism can intensify barriers for justice-involved individuals already struggling to navigate this difficult path. Moreover, emerging adults may be negotiating multiple systems simultaneously, including straddling the juvenile and criminal justice systems, transitioning out of the child welfare system, or catching up on compulsory education requirements.

Collaborative efforts have long been recognized as a tool to address systemic issues within a population. **Bringing together stakeholders from different sectors through cross-system collaboration efforts can foster a comprehensive approach to problem-solving and is often a necessary first step for a county or city to address systemic issues faced by their citizens.** These efforts allow stakeholders to leverage collective expertise, resources, and perspectives, leading to enhanced coordination, efficiency, and innovation. Through shared goals and joint efforts, cross-system collaborations can break down silos, bridge gaps, and facilitate the exchange of knowledge and best practices.

Cross-system collaborative efforts have been developed nationwide to address underlying issues faced by JI youth while also improving their labor market opportunities. This is made possible by the sizable allocations to the Department of Labor in recent decades aimed at training youth offender populations as a violence deterrence strategy (US DOL 2023). These collaboratives form for several reasons at the local level that vary depending on the needs of each region.

In recent years, research in this area has been shifting towards developing a deeper understanding of robust and multi-faceted program models that can more effectively meet the needs of the youth populations served (Chuang and Wells 2010). Requiring a development of leadership within the collaborative, a shared resource management system, trust amongst collaborative members, and a commitment to collaborative efforts are considered key to maintaining effective and long-lasting collaboration (Banks, Dutch, and Wang 2008).

## Purpose of the Project

In early 2023, the National Youth Employment Coalition (NYEC) and the Urban Institute (Urban) partnered together to explore cross-system collaboratives that promote workforce development and better provide labor market opportunities for young people affected by the justice system. The Annie E. Casey Foundation (the Foundation) provided funding for this effort to learn from existing broad-based city and/or county collaborations that seek to expand and improve economic, labor market, and workforce development opportunities for youth who have been involved in the justice system. This work represents an effort to build on recommendations from the June 2022 Workforce Development and Youth Justice Consultative Session, hosted by the Foundation and Urban.

This project looks at five collaborative efforts across the country and examines their efforts as compared to other ongoing collaboratives supporting youth with justice involvement. The goal of this work is to help bridge the gap between research and practice for individuals in the youth justice and workforce space and provide a deeper understanding of current cross-system collaboration efforts.





## Report Overview and Project Site Selection

This report is the product of the partnership between the National Youth Employment Coalition and the Urban Institute to explore cross-system collaboratives that enhance workforce development and labor market opportunities for youth affected by the justice system. This work aims to bridge the gap between research and practice by examining existing collaborative efforts and providing recommendations for improvement.

Justice-involved (JI) youth face many obstacles on their journey towards more productive and healthy lives after exiting incarceration and reentering their community. The workforce development system is designed to address the barriers this community faces by providing them with the tools and experiences necessary to increase their chances of success while gaining economic stability. Broad-based, cross-system collaboratives within the workforce development system better provide labor market opportunities for JI youth by addressing the varying and specific needs of this vulnerable population.

This report focuses on the need to provide specified supports for justice-involved youth, who often struggle to access available resources due to structural challenges like poverty and systemic racism. Here we emphasize the importance of community-based workforce development partnerships and positive youth development principles in promoting success for JI youth. Economic stability and employment are crucial for long-term security, but justice-involved young people face additional barriers in reaching these goals.

This report discusses the importance of cross-system collaboration in addressing issues faced by populations of JI youth. By bringing together stakeholders from different sectors, collaborative efforts can lead to a comprehensive approach to problem-solving issues relevant to municipalities dealing with systemic issues faced by JI youth. These collaboratives allow stakeholders to utilize their collective expertise, resources, and perspectives, resulting in improved coordination, efficiency, and innovation.



Through this project, we examine the efforts of five cross-system collaboratives from across the country, all arranged to address issues faced by JI youth with the specific goal of improving employability over time. These collaborative approaches draw from public health models aimed at reducing risk and increasing opportunities for JI youth. This report calls for collaboration to advance the needs of JI youth, and underscores the need to trade reactive, deficit-oriented strategies for those that are proactive, empowering, and strengths-based (Herrenkohl 2019).

This report highlights common themes and practices from interviews conducted with five cross-system collaboratives.

Here we aim to:

- ♦ Provide a detailed analysis of collaboration efforts for each of the sites listed above,
- ♦ Identify key stakeholders and examine their roles within the collaborative,
- ♦ Highlight best practices for effective systems collaboration,
- ♦ Examine the role and availability funding plays in the efforts of the collaborative, and
- ♦ Note the unique sustainability practices employed by each collaborative.





## Methods

The purpose of this project was to identify existing, robust collaboratives and conduct case studies to better understand their collaborative goals, successes, challenges, and lessons learned, who is involved, and specific funding and sustainability strategies.

### Case Study Site Selection

NYEC developed a site selection rubric, with guidance from Urban and the Foundation, and conducted informational interviews with potential sites to determine their level of interest in being part of the case studies and assess their collaborative efforts to ensure they fit the project scope.

Selection criteria included having a broad-based, cross-system collaborative; an explicit focus on JI youth; overarching public system effort and support; long-term plans for sustainability; a defined set of outcome measures and active evaluation efforts; youth leadership in decision making; and community involvement and support.

Using information collected from the interviews, NYEC, Urban, and the Foundation selected five sites to conduct case studies in. The five sites included in this project are:

- ♦ Tulare County, California
- ♦ Denver, Colorado
- ♦ Hartford, Connecticut
- ♦ Louisville, Kentucky
- ♦ Manchester, New Hampshire

NYEC and Urban then conducted case studies in five sites across the U.S. that have launched or implemented a broad-based, cross-system collaborative to promote workforce development and better provide labor market opportunities for young people affected by the justice system.

## Research Questions

The following research questions, developed by Urban with guidance from NYEC and the Foundation, guided data collection and analysis for this project:

1. Where are there existing broad-based, cross-system collaboratives targeting system-involved and/or opportunity youth and young adults ages 16-24? What promising or effective strategies do they use to promote workforce development and better provide labor market opportunities for young people affected by the justice system?
  - a. What is the target population for these efforts?*
2. What are the goals or objectives of these collaboratives? What do they aim to achieve?
  - a. Is youth voice included when determining goals and objectives? Are there specific strategies to solicit input/feedback from young people in the community?*
  - b. Is there a shared mission between all members of the collaborative?*
  - c. Are there measures to reassess and revise goals and objectives when needed?*
  - d. Are there specific partnerships with other organizations that are helpful for achieving desired objectives?*
3. Who is involved in these collaboratives?
  - a. How do members join the collaborative? Which industries/sectors are represented?*
  - b. Are system-involved community members and actors from the criminal legal system part of the collaborative?*
  - c. How involved are employers in these efforts?*
  - d. Are there requirements on how many individuals are needed for the partnership?*
  - e. How are referrals and outcomes between partners tracked? Are there any data sharing agreements between members?*
4. How are collaboratives staffed and/or structured? Which actors commonly lead these efforts?
  - a. Is there an individual(s) managing the collaborative? Is there dedicated staffing to oversee organization efforts?*
  - b. Are there resources invested to cover the time of those staffed to manage collaboratives?*
5. How do collaboratives ensure partners have capacity to collaborate and dedicate the time/staffing/resources needed to be successful?
  - a. Are there formal partnership agreements with members?*
  - b. Are there clear expectations between partners? Does each member understand their role in the partnership?*
  - c. How do you ensure strong communication and effective alignment between members of the collaborative? Are there any accountability measures in place?*



6. What promising or effective strategies are collaboratives employing to retain funding and maintain sustainability in their efforts? What challenges are they facing?
- a. Are there any consistent funding sources/streams for the collaborative?*
  - b. Is this funding flexible? Are there measures to reassess funding and shift when needed?*
  - c. How are funds allocated across the various partners?*
  - d. What specific funding sources (e.g., federal, state, local, private, justice system, workforce system) support these collaboratives?*
  - e. How sustainable is this partnership? Are there efforts to maintain engagement in the collaborative?*

## Data Collection Activities

Data collection from the sites consisted of community interviews and workforce program participant focus groups.

Using the research questions, Urban assisted NYEC in the creation of the interview and focus group protocols. NYEC conducted interviews and focus groups with individuals from each of the sites ([Appendix A](#)). NYEC provided questions to individuals beforehand. With interviewee permission, the NYEC team audio recorded all interviews and focus groups.

Data gathered from the interviews and focus groups were analyzed and coded by NYEC. Audio recordings were transcribed into text using R, a statistical programming language, and then coded using QualCoder, a python-based qualitative data analysis application. From there, NYEC and Urban determined key project findings and lessons learned through a thematic analysis.

## Community Interviews

Community interviews were conducted at each site. NYEC worked with one organization from each site as their main point of contact for that collaborative. NYEC partnered with the point of contact from each site to recruit collaborative members to participate in the community interviews. Interviewees were active participants in the collaborative, meaning they were described by the point of contact as being hands-on, active in the ideation of the collaborative, or an individual that manages the collaborative. The interviews were an hour and a half in length.

Interviewees were asked about the following:

- ♦ Interviewee Background and Organizational Context
- ♦ Overview of Collaborative Efforts
- ♦ Outcomes and Measurement
- ♦ Key Partners
- ♦ Engagement Strategies
- ♦ Funding and Sustainability Efforts

## Focus Groups

The purpose of the focus groups was to better understand opinions on how an active collaboration between the justice and workforce systems can improve the lives of JI young people.

Focus group participants were young adults (ages 18-28) who have been affected by the justice system in one of the five communities: Denver, CO; Louisville, KY; Hartford, CT; Tulare County, CA; and Manchester, NH.

Focus groups were nearly an hour and a half in length and were held via video conference over Zoom. Discussion questions focused on participants' experience in workforce programs, opinions on the services they have received, any interactions they have had with partnership organizations in the community, and experiences being connected to employment and education. To recognize and thank participants for their contribution to the study, NYEC provided each participant with a \$100 digital gift card.

Participant focus groups asked about the following:

- ♦ Participant Background
- ♦ Program Referral Process
- ♦ Programmatic Elements and Supports
- ♦ Connections to Employment/Education
- ♦ Feedback on Services and Supports



## Results

The section below includes an analysis of the five case studies, overall project findings and key themes.

### Case Studies

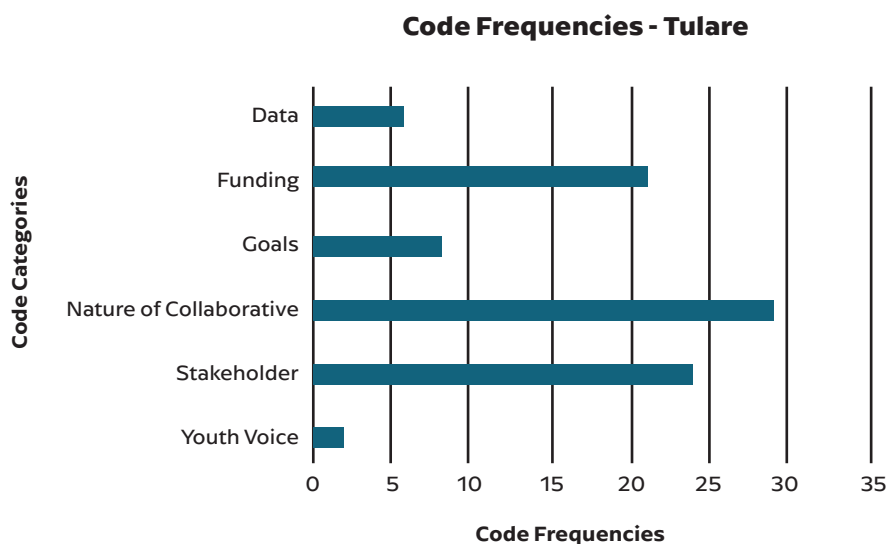
Each site case study includes a detailed analysis of site collaboration, key stakeholders, best practices for systems collaboration, an exploration of funding sources, and sustainability efforts.

#### Tulare County, California *Site Collaboration*

[Tulare Family Resource and Employment Connection](#) (also known as CSET) has operated within Tulare County, CA since 1976. They are part of the [American Job Center of California Network](#) (AJCC), and have more than 19 local partners providing employment, training, and other resources to the community. CSET works in partnership with AJCC to provide services to JI youth in Tulare County. The AJCC was developed as a one-stop recruitment and training center for employers, job seekers, and youth under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA) of 2014.

Figure 1 shows the code frequencies from Tulare’s coded interviews. This exemplifies the nature of the conversation and the number of times one of the themes of these interviews was mentioned by this site.

**Figure 1. Frequencies of Coded Categories Discussed During Tulare Interviews**





## *Tulare Collaborative Members*

This collaborative was established to address low rates of program participation from JI youth probation referrals by a now retired Chief of Probation. A Community Connection Partnership, established in 2001 by then Governor Brown, also supported the formation of this collaborative.

This collaborative also has a Youth Committee that is an influential part of their overall work within the collaborative. Their efforts vary but include being able to adjust help CSET adjust WIOA local formula youth funds percentages. Waivers to adjust WIOA funding can be requested after submitting to your state's Secretary of Labor. The law requires that 75% of funding be spent on out-of-school youth and 25% be spent on in-school youth. Tulare requested a waiver to adjust percentages to a 50/50 split between in school youth and out of school youth. This provided the collaborative more flexibility to enroll higher populations of JI youth, homeless youth and more youth that are in school. Prior to the waiver being sent to federal counterparts, a youth board had to vote to approve the measure.

## *Formalized Nature of Work*

Tulare County, CA has a strong collaborative setup utilizing Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) and formal Statements of Work (SOWs) to facilitate their work. This collaborative works with an 18–21-year-old population and adults referred to the collaborative directly from the probation department. Probation Officers share information about their referrals directly with collaborative providers using a shared case management system. This sharing of data allows Tulare collaborative providers to target services and optimize time when meeting with program participants. Tulare's collaborative efforts began in response to the probation department reaching out to service providers in the county frustrated that they were not seeing outcomes for JI youth referrals.

**Tulare utilizes an MOU agreement that defines how work should be conducted between the probation department and CSET. Providers are brought into the collaborative through a unique Request for Proposals (RFP) process where potential providers can bid on open positions on the CSET website. The providers who secure these bids work through a formalized statement of work that details expectations and goals for the provider that are to be met if they wish to remain a part of the collaborative. The goals and expectations are unique to each provider. Tulare's collaborative utilizes an evaluation model to ensure these goals are being met.**

The Executive Committee of this collaborative includes:

- ♦ Tulare County Superior Court
- ♦ Chief of Probation
- ♦ District Attorney
- ♦ Director of Tulare County Human Health Services
- ♦ Public Defender

Members of this collaborative include:

- ♦ Executive Director of CSET
- ♦ Assistant District Attorney
- ♦ Director of Court and Operations
- ♦ Community Administrative Officer

## Innovative Funding Strategies

The collaborative is funded by a variety of sources. The Workforce Investment Board receives funding directly from the [California Employment Development Department](#) (EDD). Both youth and adult WIOA formula funds support the efforts of this collaborative. More specialized funding sources are sought throughout the year from funders like Bank of America and Bank of Sierra. Funds are provided to service providers who join the collaborative through an RFP process. A Program Evaluation Committee determines if those service providers are meeting goals and ensure proper staff training to help providers remain compliant with a grant's guidelines by using a quarterly evaluation model.

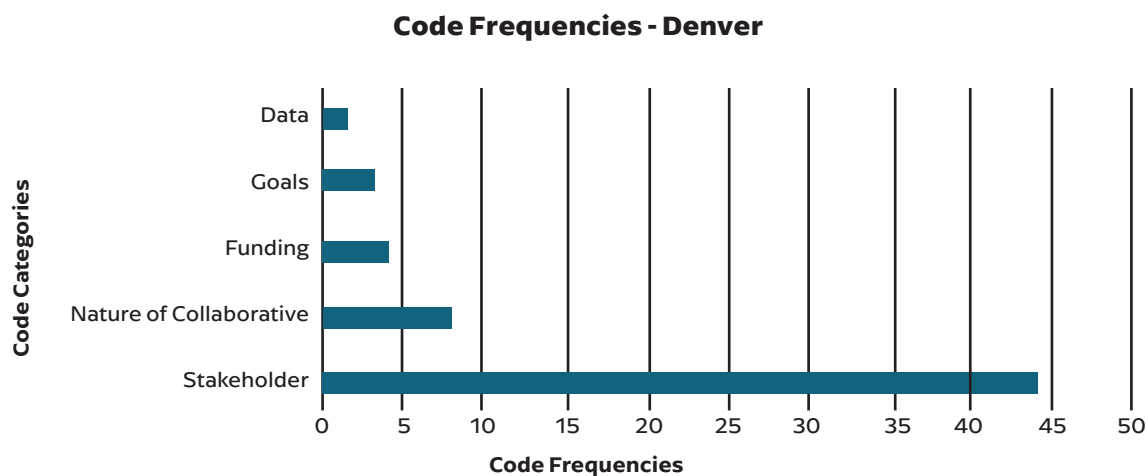
## Incentivizing Youth Skill Development

**Tulare is seeking to start new programming efforts that will serve currently incarcerated youth. The goal is to pay these youth to start a trade, like solar or welding, while incarcerated and pay them for the experience. Participants would not be able to use the pay they receive until after they exit incarceration. The idea is to provide them with a pool of funding and a new job skill prior to leaving incarceration as an incentive to reduce recidivism overall.**

## Denver, Colorado Site Collaboration

Denver's collaborative efforts can be traced back to a 1999 Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) that lasted until 2006. Much of their efforts are headed up by the Denver Office of Child Affairs. After 2006, this effort was moved under the Department of Workforce. The Safe City Program, housed under the Department of Safety, serves all JI youth through court-diversion referrals. Denver utilizes a hybrid approach with their collaborative relying on direct services, contracted services, a team of city employees serving youth, and other industry partners. A competitive RFP process has also been established to garner new service providers that will serve about 12 different populations in Denver including JI youth. An analysis of Denver's coded trends is included below in Figure 2.

**Figure 2. Frequencies of Coded Categories Discussed During Denver Interviews**



## Best Practices for Systems Collaboration

Using diverse funding structures, collaborative efforts are better able to meet the needs of those they serve. A best practice in collaborative administration, diverse funding types can ensure that a variety of program options can be made available to program participants, ensuring services most in-demand can be created.

### Funding Variety

The collaborative is made up of 14 unique vendors who used a competitive procurement process to receive funding. They seek workforce providers who can offer services to JI youth by using data to target specific neighborhoods and specified demographics. Recent efforts have targeted older JI youth who live in neighborhoods most at risk of being displaced.

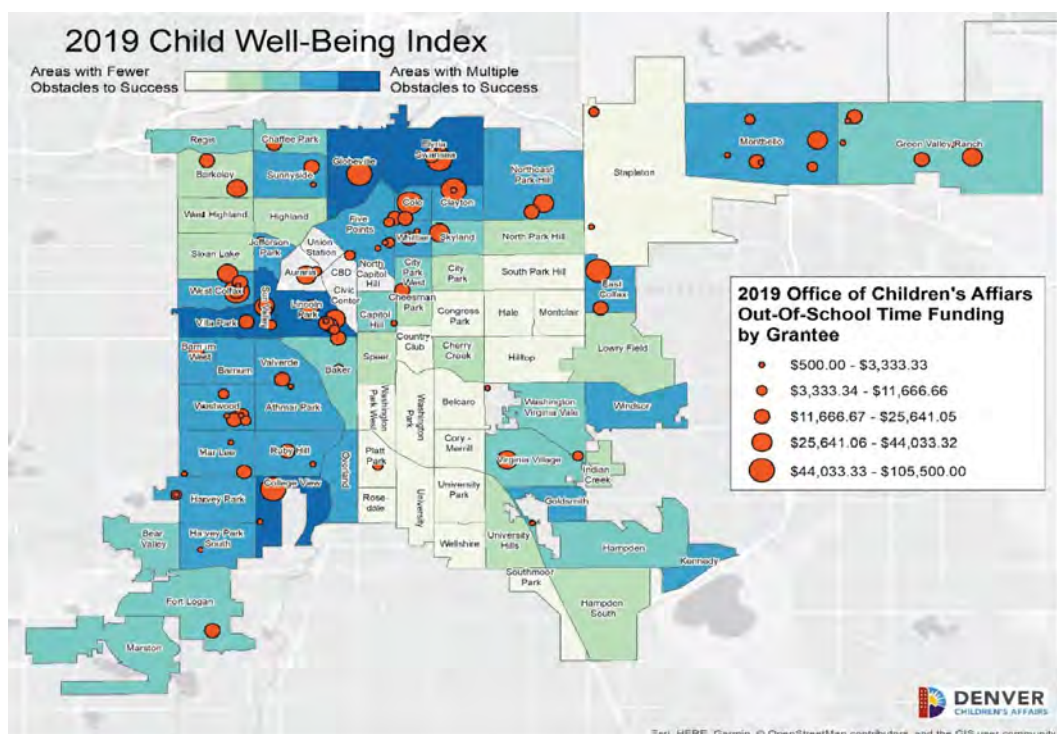
Funding is available through various sources. Much of the work is accomplished through a Pathway's Home grant specifically for JI individuals. This funding allows Denver to work inside city jails, sheriff's offices, and the Colorado Department of Corrections. Recruitment efforts are conducted while youth are incarcerated via a video recording that introduces incarcerated youth to the collaborative. Recent SYEP opportunities in Denver have been funded by Bank of America. This funding is targeted towards communities of color and helps the collaborative meet its internal goals of better serving Denver's youth of color.

Denver has a mix of collaborative members including:

- ♦ Bank of America
- ♦ Denver City Jail
- ♦ Colorado Department of Corrections
- ♦ Denver Office of Child Affairs
- ♦ Mayor's Office
- ♦ Department of Probation

The [Denver Office of Children's Affairs](#) produces a yearly report that details city demographics using a series of color-coded maps. The map in Figure 3 highlights out-of-school time funds that are spent by the community. This allows Denver to better target program services to those communities that are most likely being left out of current funding opportunities and thereby representing the highest needs.

**Figure 3. Heat map of Out-of-School Time Funds in Denver Communities**





## Sustainability Efforts

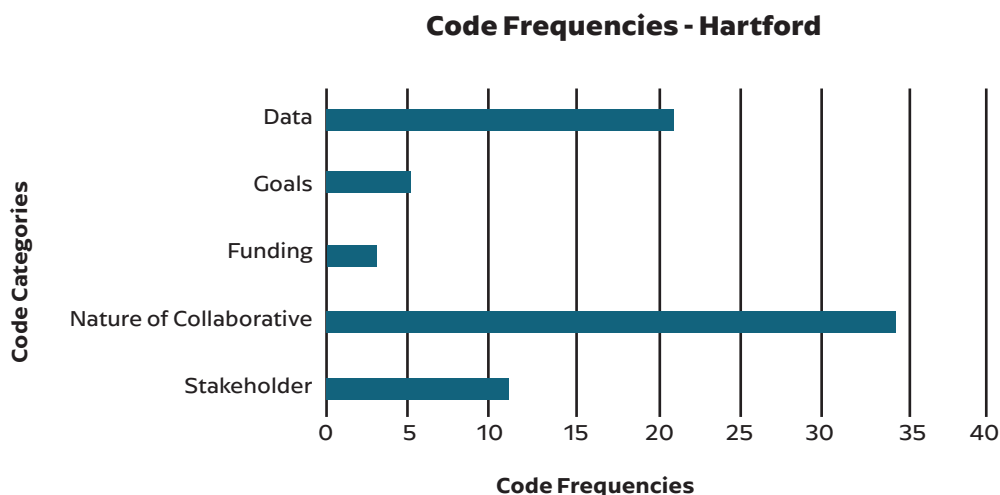
The Denver collaborative is seeking to leverage untapped resources that will help increase their collaborative efforts in the region. One way this is being accomplished is through collaboration between the Department of Safety and the Office of the District of Attorney. They have begun hosting twelve members of their local District Attorney's Office. The District Attorney's Office felt the collaborative could accomplish more and laid out some expectations, goals, and outcomes they wish to achieve with the collaborative in the coming years.

## Hartford, Connecticut

### Site Collaboration

The [Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative](#) is comprised of three Working Groups: Employment Training/Career Pathways, the Hartford Data Collaborative, and Youth Leadership. Overall, twenty-five to thirty organizations make up the core group of this collaborative ranging from banks to philanthropic funders and community service providers. Figure 4, below details code frequencies for Hartford's interviews.

**Figure 4. Frequencies of Coded Categories Discussed During Hartford Interviews**



## Employment and Training

The Employment Training/Career Pathways Working Group is made up of about 12 community-based organizations that ensure young people are connected to the career pathways that interest them most. Currently, this working group is operating under two priorities: increasing outreach to groups of needy young people and increasing access to mental health support for program participants.

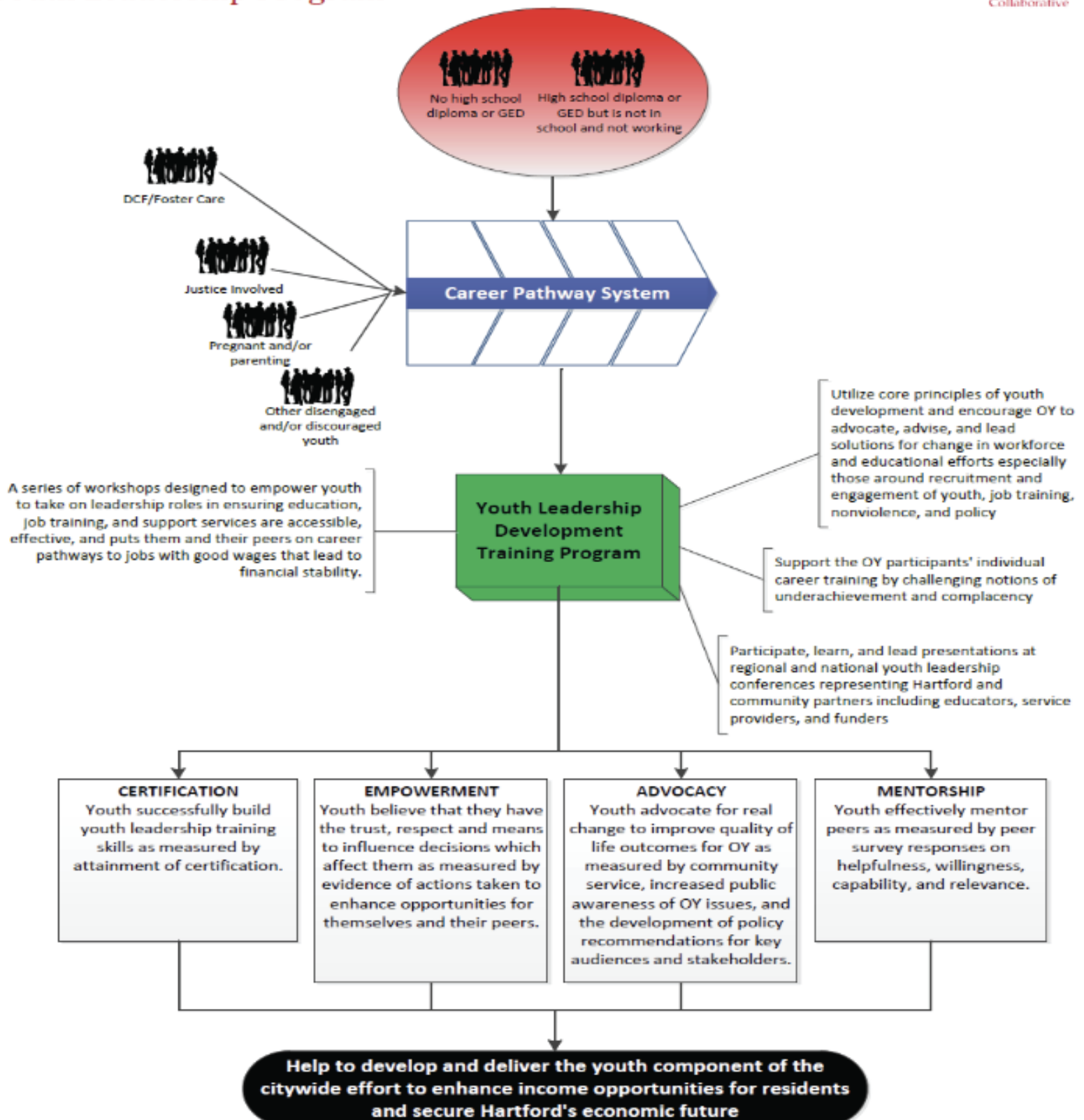
## Youth Leadership

The Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative relies on youth voices. About eight to ten young people, ages 14-24, work to support the Youth Leadership Working Group. They host networking opportunities, career navigation work, mentoring, and other event types. Their efforts draw more youth into the collaborative and help shape the efforts of the collaborative overall. **Figure 5, below, describes the structure of the Youth Leadership Program and its core tenets.**

Figure 5. Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative's Youth Leadership Program

## Youth Leadership Program

Hartford  
**OPPORTUNITY YOUTH**  
Collaborative



## *Innovative Data Integration*

**The Data Collaborative is a network of Hartford area nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and philanthropic partners that facilitates data sharing and data integration among its partners. This effort is unique to Hartford, in that among the collaboratives interviewed for this project, Hartford stood out as the only one that created a specific working group to handle internal data generated by the collaborative. This has allowed the collaborative to analyze gaps more accurately in program offerings and to suggest areas for future improvement. The collaborative produces many reports that help drive their overall efforts.**

Data sharing agreements from eight to ten service providers within the collaborative, including Hartford Public Schools, allow for a large amount of aggregated data to be gathered.

## *Funding and Community Partnerships*

The community of Hartford was recently awarded \$30 million to provide services to residents in the North Hartford Promise Zone. The North End of Hartford is known to be the largest area for JI youth with some of the highest need in the city. This federal designation in the North End of Hartford is managed through a major hospital in the area. The hospital provides a brick-and-mortar space for youth who may be at risk of becoming a youth offender to get connected to a resource navigator. These navigators connect youth to systems and programs that can offer them assistance with finding jobs and resources that will help them remain gainfully employed. This community level support strengthens the efforts of the collaborative while providing necessary resources for JI communities in Hartford.

Collaborative staffing is funded through a mix of grant funds. American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds have also been secured to fund five staff members throughout the end of 2024. The Department of Children and Families, Economic Community Development, and the Department of Justice have also awarded funds to this collaborative effort. Thus far, over \$2 million have been secured to ensure the collaborative can operate into the future.

## *Sustainability Efforts*

Utilizing ARPA funds can ensure millions of dollars to several infrastructure and programmatic issues afflicting communities across the country. Hartford has secured funding from this package that will help ensure program stability into the future. By utilizing a mixture of funding streams that includes many large contributions from a diverse group of funders, this collaborative can ensure that a variety of work can occur under their collaborative umbrella.

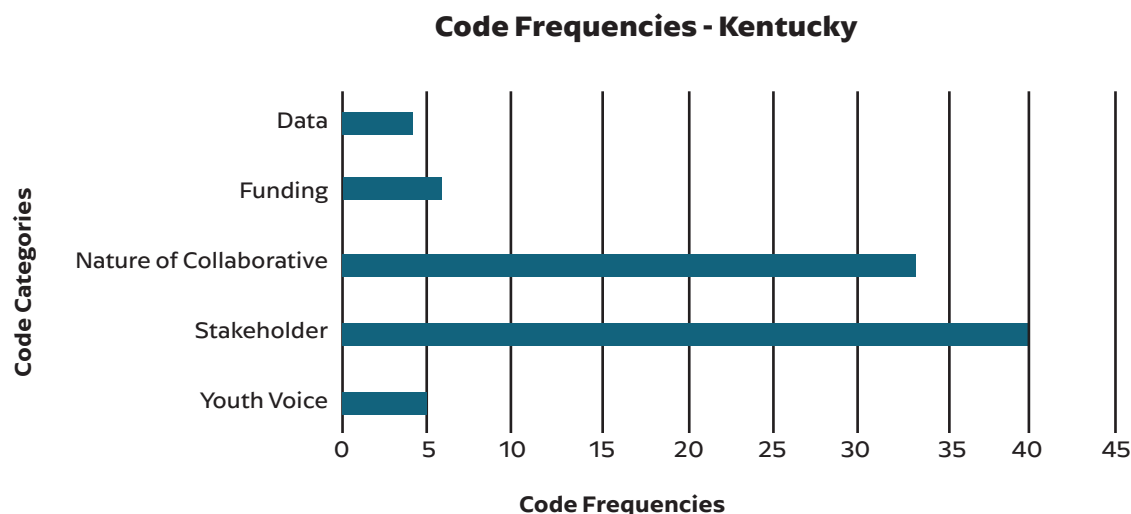
## **Louisville, Kentucky** *Site Collaboration*

Collaborative efforts in Kentucky are driven by [Kentuckiana Works](#) which formed under a collaborative mission of helping job seekers find good careers, education, and training, and helping employers meet their workforce needs by connecting them with skilled, qualified employees. Efforts to establish this collaborative began following a WIOA funded project that aimed to serve a 16- to 24-year-old population in the region. Figure 6, below, shows how many times Kentucky referred to the nature of their collaborative efforts during their interview as compared to other coded categories.

Some of Hartford's collaborative members include:

- ♦ Capital Workforce Partners
- ♦ American Jobs Centers
- ♦ Department of Labor (DOL)
- ♦ The City of Hartford
- ♦ Our Piece of the Pie
- ♦ Blue Hill Civic Association
- ♦ The Center for Latino Progress
- ♦ The Community Renewal Team
- ♦ Hartford Public Schools
- ♦ Hartford Foundation for Public Giving
- ♦ Bank of America
- ♦ JP Morgan Chase

**Figure 6. Frequencies of Coded Categories Discussed During Kentucky Interviews**



### *Flexibility in Collaborative Design*

Kentuckiana Works utilizes an informal collaborative approach, incorporating MOU's with only a few providers within the collaborative. Some coalition efforts that exist within the collaborative have more formalized goals and missions that differ from the collaborative itself, but these divergent goals still support the overall objectives of the collaborative.

### *Funding Sources*

Following COVID, the program experienced a surge of participants and Kentuckiana Works initially struggled to place them. At the time, Kentuckiana Works' grants were funded by WIOA, and it was difficult for these post-COVID participants to meet the eligibility criteria. This led to a search for new funding sources. One of the first sources of new funding was a grant to serve at-risk youth. This grant allowed Kentuckiana Works to define 'at-risk' in terms representative of the post-COVID surge of youth. Kentuckiana Works also partnered with local service providers, like Goodwill, to secure more specific funding from places such as the Department of Juvenile Justice. Additional funding, established under an MOU with Global Metro Connections, will allow Kentuckiana Works to meet youth while incarcerated and create individualized plans to ensure they succeed after exiting confinement.

### *Sustainability Efforts*

In seeking ARPA funding, collaboratives and many community-based organizations have been better able to take advantage of historic funding opportunities made available at the local municipal and county level. Kentuckiana Works received \$40 million of ARPA funding to address issues in their community. Awards from ARPA funds are allocated in the millions and are not required to be repaid. Nonprofits, small businesses, and local community organizations like those in the Kentucky collaborative can apply for these funds. These funds help ensure programs can continue despite COVID-related downturn.

The collaborative is an effort that includes multiple stakeholders in Kentucky including:

- ♦ The Office of Safe and Healthy Neighborhoods
- ♦ The Kentucky Workforce Board
- ♦ The Office of Development
- ♦ The Coalition Serving Young Adults
- ♦ YouthBuild
- ♦ Homelessness Boards of Kentucky

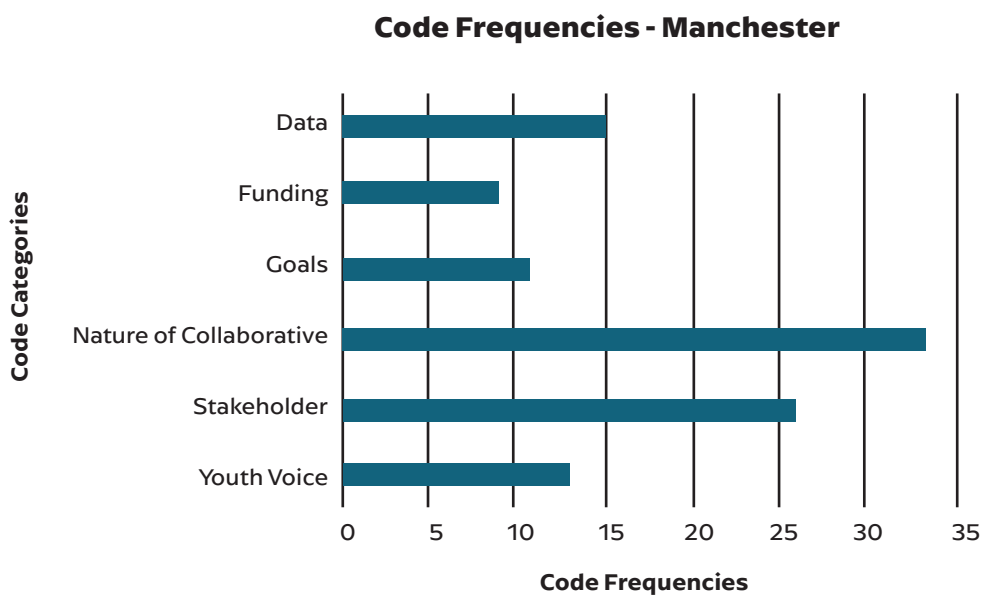


Manchester, New Hampshire  
Site Collaboration

Collaborative efforts in Manchester are driven primarily by [MY TURN](#), a nonprofit that has a long history of serving youth in the region. Three years ago, MY TURN worked to convene a group of existing community partners following a sharp increase in youth violence. MY TURN decided to sit down with long-standing community partners and service providers in the region to begin addressing youth violence more directly. They felt their programs were not meeting all the needs of the youth they served, stating that many of their participants at the time were impacted by the increasing youth violence. Youth perspectives were heavily incorporated into these discussions, with careful consideration being made to include more of the programming opportunities that youth identified as helpful. Afterschool programming, weekend programming, and street outreach efforts were identified as gaps in program offerings that, if filled, would help Manchester reduce incidences of youth violence. Utilizing funding from a local Police Department’s Project Safe Neighborhoods grant, MY TURN implemented Project Connect, allowing the organization to seed their street outreach work and open a drop-in center for local youth. Below is Figure 7, detailing the frequencies of coded categories mentioned during site interviews.

From Allie Joseph, Executive Director of MY TURN, “So we went from having like one or two students involved in a gun-related incident over the course of a year to we had about a dozen students involved in gun crime incidents in a relatively brief period of time, less than a year, and it kind of all came unexpected. ... we just started trying to figure out what our programs were missing, [how was it] that young people that were already connected with our services were still being impacted by the increased violence”

Figure 7. Frequencies of Coded Categories Discussed During Manchester Interviews



Some of Manchester's collaborative members include:

- ♦ Manchester High School
- ♦ Franklin high School
- ♦ Manchester Central High School
- ♦ Nashua High Schools North & South
- ♦ Greater Nashua Manufacturing Programs
- ♦ Lakes Region Manufacturing Programs
- ♦ Manchester Adult Education & HiSET Academy

### *Innovative Data Driven Strategies*

MY TURN's Project Connect has a primary objective of keeping youth alive. Workforce programming goals are secondary to youth violence reduction strategies. MY TURN's partnership with the local Police Department includes access to police data related to youth violence trends in the region. In their approach to reduce youth violence, the Manchester Police Department was using this data to create social network maps of JI Youth. MY TURN now incorporates this data-driven approach into their everyday work. MY TURN notes this strategy has dramatically increased the number of youth participants they serve while also increasing their credibility within the community.

### *Funding and Sustainability Efforts*

MY TURN has begun utilizing ARPA funding through their local Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). These funds are expected to support program operations well into 2024. MY TURN also has plans to seek Department of Justice funding alongside the police department (PD) to sustain their programs beyond that. They have been invited to apply for a congressional allocation from a local congressperson and have garnered support from the Manchester PD, the Manchester Mayor's Office, and Chandler's Angels Initiative. Other community funders include Comcast, their local Workforce Development Board and private funding. Reentry programming funds and Second Chance Reentry grants are also being considered as potential avenues of future funding. These multiple streams of funding, in conjunction with WIOA funding, are used to sustain their programming efforts and to ensure future viability of the program.

By mapping out social networks of JI youth, MY TURN can utilize the connections of the youth they had already served to bring in more program participants. More specifically, analysis of the social networks of young people allows MY TURN to draw in new program participants who are believed to be at risk of future incidences of youth violence.



## Key Takeaways and Overall Themes

Five themes arose from the interviews and focus groups conducted at each site. These themes follow closely to the general nature of the questions, primarily being grouped into the following categories: data and outcomes, strong cross-system approach, innovative engagement strategies, nature of the collaborative, and collaborative goals.

### Data and Outcomes

The use, generation, and tracking of data plays a crucial role in shaping the effectiveness of collaborative efforts. How a collaborative chooses to use available data and how it chooses to gather new data both play a role in determining the efficacy of any collaborative effort.

#### Site Example – Manchester

- ♦ **Through the collaborative in Manchester, MY TURN (a community-based workforce program) partners with the Manchester police department to access community-level data on youth violence and suspected youth violence trends. These data sharing efforts have led to a significant reduction in youth violence and victimization among program participants. This led to a reported 56% reduction in youth violence accompanied by a dramatic drop in MY TURN program participant victimization. In the nine-month period that MY TURN was tracking data related to these outcomes, none of their program participants were victims of violent crime.**
- ♦ Targeted enforcement efforts by local PD led to an increase in youth being referred to MY TURN's services. PD communicates directly with MY TURN, giving them information about youth crime as it emerges through text messages, often in real-time. MY TURN can work through networks of existing program participants to draw in these youth as the local PD identifies them. Manchester PD uses data about local youth violence to create social networks of JI youth. MY TURN now incorporates this data-drive approach into their everyday work. By mapping out social networks of these youth, MY TURN worked through previously served youth to bring in more program participants. Analysis of these social networks allows MY TURN to draw in new program participants thought

- ♦ Also, by incorporating a strategy to engage previous program participants as peer advocates, MY TURN garnered a higher level of trust amongst potential program participants. Trust between program providers and those served by the program is of the utmost importance as trust is considered a reliable metric in determining long-term program success.

### Site Example – Denver

- ♦ The collaborative in Denver also uses several innovative strategies to determine where to focus their programming efforts. By creating a series of heatmaps that shows available out-of-school time funding across various communities in Denver, their collaborative was better able to target their efforts to those communities with the most need. This helped meet a requirement of funders that stipulated them to serve specific populations of youth in Denver as a condition of their funding.

### Site Example – Hartford

- ♦ Hartford has a model that incorporates several collaborative efforts under one cohesive umbrella. Their collaborative includes the [Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative](#) (HOYC) and the [Hartford Data Collaborative](#) (HDC). Each group has their own independent design and approach to contributing to the overall collaborative efforts in Hartford. The HDC works to create a deeper understanding of the communities and uses a network of Hartford area nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and philanthropic partners to facilitate data sharing and data integration for the collaborative. This effort seeks to identify existing gaps in program offerings to offer suggestions for future programmatic improvements. This effort is unique among all the collaborative efforts examined here in that it is a separate entity within the collaborative tasked only with managing its data. There is also the Hartford Youth Leadership Program, which functions similarly to a youth board for the collaborative. Comprised of eight to ten youth program participants, the Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative aims to educate and train these youth to be leaders in the fields of interest. These youth also oversee and approve ongoing Hartford Collaborative projects.

## Strong Cross-System Approach

Having various stakeholders across systems engaged in collaborative efforts can lead to more effective and impactful outcomes. Including stakeholders from different systems—including community organizations and services providers, the public workforce, criminal and juvenile justice systems, and human services systems—can help strengthen the cohesiveness of a collaborative, as this inclusion gives stakeholders the opportunity to understand one another and the key role they play in this work. This empowers them to work together to address challenges and offer viable solutions to improve labor market outcomes for JI youth.

### Site Example – Tulare

- ♦ Tulare uses an innovative model within their collaborative to draw in new organizations. New organizations can respond to Requests for Proposal (RFP) advertised on the Community Services Employment Training (CSET) Tulare County Family Resource Center & Employment Connection Affiliate website.



This process allows new stakeholders to compete through a bidding process to fill vacancies within the collaborative itself. New organizations join the collaborative through this RFP process and new positions are opened as the need within the collaborative arises. This removes the burden around collaborative partners seeking funding, allowing them more time to focus on programming. MOUs between collaborative members and CSET detail yearly and quarterly goals for each member, holding them accountable to internal metrics as determined by CSET. Meeting these metrics ensures a collaborative member could remain in practice with the collaborative.

Once a part of the collaborative, members have access to funding opportunities that the collaborative procures for stakeholder organizations.

- ♦ Tulare County exemplifies a strong cross-system collaborative effort by incorporating youth voice in decision-making and implementing an innovative shared case management system to better serve youth referred from the probation department.
- ♦ After initial issues with some probation referrals not receiving services as expected, Tulare decided the best way to remedy the matter would be to create a shared case management model for collaborative members to access. This shared case management approach allowed Tulare to primitively understand the needs of referred youth prior to them arriving to receive services from the collaborative. As a result, the number of referrals increased, and fewer youth reported difficulties accessing the services they needed while on probation. Their innovative approach to building a shared case management system has allowed them to better serve youth populations while ensuring those referred to the collaborative from probation can receive services in a timely manner. This case management model allows Tulare to determine what services a referred youth may need before they ever arrive at their door for help.
- ♦ Tulare also incorporates youth voice into their work genuinely. From the inception of the collaborative, they have utilized youth voice to determine every aspect of how the collaborative operates. A youth council vote is required to approve changes to many aspects of the collaborative from program format to changes in WIOA funding allocations.

## Innovative Engagement Strategies

Working to reach communities of youth can be daunting. Innovative outreach and engagement strategies are often a necessary component to maintain collaborative efforts long-term. Best practices for such work should include proven engagement strategies that specifically tailor efforts to those communities in need.

### Site Example – Hartford

- ♦ Hartford, CT is taking a rather innovative approach to finding program participants. Often when working with JI youth, service providers will struggle to find and maintain program participants despite knowing the population exists in their community. Hartford uses data sharing agreements to find potential program participants and bring them into their network of services.

## Site Example – Manchester

- ♦ By using Manchester PD data, the Manchester collaborative can better target their services through a peer networking strategy. Knowing what neighborhoods and friend groups these potential program participants members are in, the Manchester collaborative can work through social networks to convince youth to seek help when they need it.

Utilizing these peer networks allows youth to hear from trusted people regarding resources available to assist JI youth and lends an air of credibility to Manchester's service providers.

## Nature of the Collaborative

How a collaborative operates is dependent on many factors ranging from regional need, funders interests, and the needs of the JI youth they serve. Each collaborative must determine the best way to structure their work to adequately address the needs of the youth they seek to serve.

### *Formalizing Work Under MOU's*

Managing the work of a large collaborative can be daunting. Best practices for such work should include some formalized method of accountability for members of the collaborative to ensure accurate delivery of program services.

## Site Example – Tulare

- ♦ Tulare uses an MOU agreement with their local probation counterparts that formalizes the nature of the work their collaborative seeks to accomplish. This change in their programming model occurred after the probation department noticed many of their referrals were not receiving the services they needed due to some breakdown in communication between their department and service providers in the area.
- ♦ Tulare also uses formalized statements of work with their collaborative's program providers that have detailed and specific goals unique to individual providers. Providers join the collaborative through an RFP process and are evaluated by a separate evaluation committee within the collaborative. The providers work through a formalized statement of work that details expectations and goals for the provider that are to be met if they want to remain a part of the collaborative. This formalized system of accountability ensures the collaborative can stay on track to meet yearly goals and expectations.

A formalized system of accountability dramatically reduced the number of youths who were referred and later reported they had not received the services they needed while on probation.

### *Adjustable Provider Expectations*

Hoping to maintain program longevity and productivity as consistently as possible, many collaborative efforts may choose to redefine collaborative member expectations in times of change. Collaboratives must determine if they should adjust to the time or hold-fast to what has worked in the past.

## Site Example – Kentucky

- ♦ Kentuckiana Works had to adjust their programming offerings amid the rapid change brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

As their program providers lost employees and financial backing, they would find themselves in positions where they could not serve the collaborative to the same extent they had in previous years. Kentuckiana Works realized that many of these providers would get back in touch with them after they gained some stability by addressing staffing or funding issues related to pandemic loss. To remain flexible during this time, Kentuckiana Works decided that it was best to be tolerant of these absences, attempting to remain in contact with service providers as they got back on their feet operationally. This flexibility allowed collaborative partners to continue to provide services after regrouping following the pandemic.

## Collaborative Goals

Each collaborative forms around a set of internal goals as an impetus that drives the collaborative's work. These objectives typically depend on factors related to the community the collaborative serves and their ongoing funding situation.

Funders inevitably shape the types of programming offered because funders often require their grantees to achieve a very specific, measurable result or outcome. Understanding this helps us to see why a collaborative will choose certain metrics/goals to measure their success. Additionally, the goals a collaborative aspires to achieve are reliant on many internal factors that are unique to specific municipalities.

The goals of any collaborative effort also vary according to the reasons a collaborative effort might form in the first place. Some will cite a need to bolster youth employment, while others form to curb incidences of youth violence. Ideally, all these goals should include input from those your services seek to impact.

### Site Example – Manchester

- ♦ Manchester's collaborative has very clear goals of reducing youth violence and loss of life within their region. This goal arose independently of a funder's interest or WIOA metrics. It can be solely attributed to a desire from collaborative members to address the issue of youth violence and death among their program participants. Noting a sharp increase in violence amongst their youth a few years ago, Manchester chose to address the issue of youth violence as a primary goal of the collaborative. More youth were attracted to the program following their shift to focus more on youth violence primarily. Youth participants were also more likely to remain in the program and complete job training and internship-based employment opportunities as compared to those youth served prior to the shift I focus on youth violence deterrence. This is attributed to an increase of trust amongst program participants following the shift in program goals that came with their unique violence reduction strategies.

Flexibility in how the collaborative decided to handle the changes brought on by COVID allowed their partner network to remain strong during times of unpredictable change.

By addressing long standing issues of heightened youth violence in their region, Manchester was better able to serve the employment needs of JI youth in their area.

## *Incorporation of Youth Voice*

Best practices in terms of defining program goals for a collaborative should include the voices of the youth the effort intends to serve.

Each collaborative noted a differing approach when including the voices of the youth they serve in their efforts. Some choose to include youth voice in their board governance model, using youth voice as input for every programmatic change. Other collaborative efforts used youth input to make programmatic changes but would leave them out of conversation about funding or WIOA formula changes.

Each collaborative effort had a unique approach to incorporating the voices of those JI youth served into their work, which exemplified a consistent effort towards more equitable program development across all collaborative efforts interviewed.

### *Site Example – Tulare*

- ♦ **Tulare’s approach to incorporating the voices of the young people their collaborative services really stand out as unique in comparison to other collaborative efforts we examine here. Many collaboratives seek youth input when considering potential programming changes, but often this is only one of many factors that will determine what programming options will be considered. Many of the decisions the collaborative makes must filter through Tulare’s Youth Committee to get final approval. This is a great example of a genuine incorporation of youth voice inside of one’s work.**

### *WIOA Metrics, Goals, and Funding*

The goals of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funding are clearly outlined and determined, not from a local level, but from the Department of Labor (DOL). This means that WIOA metrics skew towards a more generalized, broad-based approach focusing on in/out-of-school time youth who face barriers to employment or educational attainment opportunities. WIOA goals focus on credential attainment in every municipality as a measure of program success. Skills and credential attainment to achieve the goal of long-term employment is ubiquitous among the work of every WIOA program nationwide, despite the issues unique to their communities.

A common theme among the five sites was the importance of determining goals in conjunction with the community and the youth they anticipate serving.

Tulare holds themselves more accountable to the young people they serve by allowing them to make decisions regarding everything from programming options to WIOA formula changes.





## Areas for Future Exploration

*Future research should include more program participant interviews.* With this project, we were only able to interview a handful of youth who were all associated with one of the five collaboratives. Time limitations associated with this project required us to limit the number of youths interviewed for the report and ultimately led to a reduction in the youth voice data overall. Additionally, it can be difficult to recruit youth for virtual focus groups. In-person engagement may have allowed for greater connection with youth participants. Incorporation of youth voice and those at the center of this work and related research is a critical resource. Future efforts would do well to include more youth voice and data into their work, as it is necessary to learn directly from those these collaboratives aim to serve.

*The variety of collaborative efforts here exemplifies just how unique each collaborative is in their approach to addressing the needs of JI youth.* Themes and findings from this report should be considered as helpful insights from collaboratives actively working in this space, rather than major themes of cross-system collaborations more generally. A larger sampling size in future reports could help researchers and program practitioners understand larger, overarching trends align with most collaborative efforts.

*Collaboration is still poorly defined in the workforce development space and continues to be developed.* Furthermore, industry-specific data sharing agreements and methods of accountability practices are yet to be standardized in youth collaboration work. As this field grows and develops more generally applicable standards of practice, we can expect that successful collaborative efforts will come to shape the field, further detailing what are presently ambiguous processes.

*A deeper examination of funding structures would be an insightful study to follow this work.* Funding is a central component to this work, and it structures how a collaborative chooses to approach any given problem. By understanding larger, nationwide trends in funding JI collaborative projects, stakeholders will be better equipped to develop sound funding strategies for their own collaborative efforts.

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## Appendix A. Interviews with Collaborative Stakeholders

### Interviews with Collaborative Stakeholders

Collaborative name	Program staff interviews	Legal system interviews	Community organization/ service provider interviews	Public workforce system interviews	Youth participants interviewed	<i>Total</i>
Tulare County Collaborative	2	0	0	2	0	4
Denver Collaborative	0	2	0	6	0	8
Hartford Collaborative	0	0	0	4	0	4
Manchester Collaborative	2	0	0	0	2	4
Kentucky Collaborative	3	0	1	0	0	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>24</b>

## Appendix B. Additional Resources

- ♦ [National Youth Employment Coalition: \*Job Training for Youth with Justice-Involved Youth Toolkit\*](#)
- ♦ [National Youth Employment Coalition: \*Collaborative Outcomes from the Youth Justice and Employment Community of Practice\*](#)
- ♦ [Urban Institute: \*Community-Based Workforce Engagement Supports for Youth and Young Adults Involved in the Criminal Legal System\*](#)
- ♦ [The Annie E. Casey Foundation: \*Juvenile Probation Officer as a Coach and Catalyst Video\*](#)
- ♦ [The Annie E. Casey Foundation: \*Albuquerque Youth Justice Community Collaborative\*](#)
- ♦ [Technical Assistance Partnership for Child and Family Mental Health: \*Successfully Collaborating With the Juvenile Justice System: Benefits, Challenges, and Key Strategies\*](#)