



# A Blueprint for Creating a Workforce Preparation System That Equips Young People for College and Career

*The coordinated efforts of all workforce preparation partners are needed to prepare young people for work and life.<sup>1</sup>*

When related programs, activities and strategies are woven together into a “workforce preparation system”, young people have more and better ways to navigate the Four Steps of Workforce Preparation. An effective workforce preparation system enhances, not subjugates, the existing efforts of these partners and provides an “infrastructure for coordinated and strategic action” between them.<sup>2</sup> A system maximizes the collective impact of each entity without diluting individual autonomy.

A systematic solution addresses many of the limitations of the traditional approach where entities with common goals are isolated into bureaucratic “silos”, often with varying strategies and competing programs.

### Partners in Workforce Preparation

- Employers
- Industry and trade unions
- Professional associations
- Workforce and economic development agencies
- Primary and secondary schools, districts and departments
- Colleges and universities
- Career and technical schools
- Community-based social service providers
- “Second chance” and adult literacy programs
- Public and nonprofit agencies serving youth in foster care or juvenile justice programs, parenting teens and others with disadvantages

*A well coordinated workforce preparation system can accomplish highly impactful goals that cannot be achieved by individual programs or entities alone. A system is able to:*

- **Analyze the existing network of services** to identify geographic and programmatic gaps or duplications. A system can provide a forum for negotiating the variety and frequency program offerings. It can promote data and idea sharing and ease concerns that may develop between “competing” entities.
- **Engage employers**, industry groups and professional associations who have a high stake in the emerging workforce but often have limited involvement in its development. A system can make it easier for these stakeholders to find the schools or programs that need their support and avoid duplicative contacts with multiple agencies.
- **Anticipate and address labor market demands**. An effective system can help identify workforce trends and attract young people to occupations that will be needed in the future.
- **Help understand workforce preparation problems and solutions**. A system can conduct research that answers intractable questions: what are the most significant barriers to success during the transition to adulthood; what are the most effective ways to address these barriers; what role can parents and employers have in preparing young people for work and life; or what can a community do to close gaps in achievement?
- **Evaluate the effectiveness of specific strategies or programs**, making it easier to know what is working and why. Rigorous and controlled assessments conducted by the system can pinpoint the qualities of programs that should be duplicated, modified or discontinued.
- **Coordinate outreach** efforts so more youth can learn about and access programs and activities. Current technologies permit very low cost and targeted marketing via social networking sites and personal internet devices. Young people can sign up for alerts that are individualized to their needs and interests. A system can also track youth participation, making it possible to individualize goals and assess progress.
- **Identify funding sources**. A system can identify new sources of funding and make better use of existing sources.
- **Develop new tools** for use in administering or delivering services. For small to medium size programs, identifying and implementing new curricula, educational materials, professional development training and technology can be time consuming and cost prohibitive. A system can make available tools that enhance programming, without increasing expenses.
- **Investigate the viability of new strategies or programs**. For instance, a system can test a variety of strategies that support college completions (i.e. performance-based tuition programs, employer-sponsored tuition programs, loan forgiveness for public service, a common financial aid application, processes that facilitate the transfer of credits between institutions, etc.) before large scale investments are made. Also, a system can launch a new program in an “incubator” where the effective elements can be identified and replicated.

*An effective workforce preparation system has several essential entities or components.*

Building a workforce preparation system is a complex and ambitious task that can be accomplished in many ways. No two communities implementing a collaborative system will adopt the same structure or processes. However, systems should be comprised of a set of closely linked components.



**Guiding and Providing Entities**

**Data and Communications Hub**

**Funders Collaborative**

**Workforce Preparation Institute**

### **Guiding and Providing Entities**

These organizations and individuals are on the frontlines of service provision. While they deliver a variety of services with different models, each of the providing and guiding entities are committed to giving youth individualized attention from recruitment through graduation.

#### *Guiding Entities*

In an effective workforce preparation system, each young person has a formal or informal adult guide – a parent, mentor, school counselor, agency case manager - who provides a “home base” as they develop competencies in the Four Steps of Workforce Preparation. These entities engage and motivate youth, provide direction and support, and monitor individual progress. Specifically, “guiding entities”:

- Recruit youth, help them develop career and education plans, and connect them with workforce preparation activities;
- Conduct a basic assessment of each youth’s educational and personal needs including social strengths and vulnerabilities and a performance-based evaluation of skills. As needed, some entities can provide more in-depth assessments for participants with special needs;
- Help each young person record their workforce preparation activities, interventions, and achievements. This record keeping allows youth to track their progress and permits the system to compile data to assess community-wide progress.
- Connect young people with resources that help with problems before they escalate into major barriers;
- Facilitate “Youth Voice” surveys and other research projects.

“Guiding entities” provide the continuity needed to retain youth and young adults and help them find resources in the community. While intensive case management is unrealistic on a wide scale, personal interaction and holistic attention to the needs of each young person is critical. Retention – in school, programs or the community – is closely tied to long-term, high-quality interactions with caring adults. Interactions between mentors and program staff are the most commonly cited reasons youth stay in workforce preparation programs and their involvement can positively affect the many important choices young adults make early in their lives.

### *Providing Entities*

These organizations create and conduct activities that address one or more of the Four Steps of Workforce Preparation. Activities take place throughout the year or during school breaks, community-wide or small group, one-time events or ongoing programs, focused on youth or involving youth, target in school or out of school populations. The entities, programs or people, focus on very specific objectives - providing financial aid advice, for instance - or have a wider array of activities that address a broad issue such as “dropout prevention”. Specifically, “providing entities”:

- Develop competencies in one or more of the Four Steps of Workforce Preparation—Connect to the Community, Explore Jobs, Develop Skills, Make a Plan;
- Celebrate and support youth achievement. To encourage youth to develop competencies, providing entities record their accomplishments into a data system. As youth complete certain community-defined benchmarks, they may be eligible for relevant incentives such as a scholarship, referral to highly competitive jobs or internships, or an Individual Development Account (IDA) to help save for college or starting a business;
- Involve youth and young adults in evaluating program effectiveness, designing new strategies and mentoring other young people;
- Cover a wide range. They can be afterschool clubs, in-school enterprises, service learning projects, volunteer corps, career exploration events, summer job programs, youth apprenticeships and internships, college preparation workshops and other activities;
- Link young people to activities and programs that relate to their career interests or build needed skills. A providing entity may, for instance, offer a career workshop related to a certain industry. Youth attending this event will then be invited to attend a tour of local workplaces in that industry and then, after successful visits, to participate in a ten-day work experience program at one of the companies.

**Data and Communications Hub:** This component of a workforce preparation system is the focal point for communication between entities, including youth and young adults, and for maintaining a complex array of information. The high-tech, comprehensive data system can continually monitor demand for activities so capacity can be increased as needed, track and document the achievements and needs of individual youth, and identify disengaged young people and immediately reconnect them to high-quality services. Specifically, the “Hub”:

- Collects information from youth and young adults about their needs, interests and abilities. When youth first enter the system, on their own or with the help of an adult guide, they answer a series of questions on the “Hub”. This information is used to identify the specific things a young person can do to prepare for college and career. Youth can sign up to receive text messages about events that connect to their interests and goals. The information youth enter also helps the network of providing and guiding entities know what types of services are needed and where services should be located.
- Accepts registration for various events, activities and services available across the community. After attending, participants use the “Hub” to comment on the format and content of the event. This real-time feedback from youth provides information on the availability and quality of services, permitting changes to be made as needed rather than at the end of a program year.
- Tracks the progress of individual youth as they gain competencies within the Four Steps and move toward their goals. Because the “Hub” is internet based, young people can access their information at any time.
- Conducts surveys on workforce preparation topics relevant to youth and young adults across the community. Using the online format, entities in the system can suggest questions for a formal survey or a less structured “virtual conversation”. For instance, the community can learn how effective a “go to college” marketing campaign has been, what young people believe schools could do to address the dropout issue, or what would make financial aid more available. “Hub” surveys can tap into the vitality and concerns of a large cross section of the community’s young people. They are easy to construct, administer, and analyze, making the results highly useful to program directors and policy makers.

Over time, information from the “Hub” can be used to track the number of young people interested in various career fields or in the educational pipeline for the community’s most critical occupations. The information can document how well young people are getting ready for college and career, which programs are most effective and what types of strategies represent an efficient use of resources. When linked with academic and demographic information, a deeper understanding of what it takes to help young people succeed is possible.

The Data and Communications Hub should be managed by an entity with the technological and organizational capacity to develop and maintain the system. The “Hub” should be easy to access and understand, its information must be updated continually, and its appearance must be professional yet appealing to young people. Aggregate data from the “Hub” should be available to professionals and analysts upon request.

**Funders Collaborative:** This component increases the efficient use and impact of financial and in-kind resources. The funders collaborative is comprised of decision makers from private and corporate foundations, public funders, economic development agencies, and the community’s largest or fastest growing employers. Together, the funders collaborative is able to do more than individual grants and programs can do separately. Specifically, the collaborative:

- Convenes local workforce preparation partners to set system level goals;
- Reviews long-term trends in funding needs and resources;
- Pools financial and in-kind resources for greatest impact over time;
- Sets priorities for funding relative to population, region, and approach;
- Solicits funds and issues grants for strategies and direct services.

Objective analyses of program effectiveness and labor market trends inform the decisions of the collaborative. Over time, the “funders collaborative” can measure the short- and long-term return on its investments. A detailed description of the Workforce Preparation System Funding Model is in the *Cost and Benefactors* section.

**Workforce Preparation Institute:** This component of the workforce preparation system builds the capacity of organizations to individually and collectively deliver excellent services and programs. Specifically, the “institute”:

- Assesses progress made toward community and system goals;
- Identifies best practices and effective strategies;
- Pilots model programs and practices before they are brought to scale;
- Provides intensive and immediate technical assistance to programs that are experiencing a problem with service delivery or administration;
- Identifies or develops resources, including curricula and tool kits;
- Provides training for professionals, parents, and policymakers.

These responsibilities can be fulfilled by a workforce investment board, community-based organization, college or university or other intermediary in a position to objectively assess community-wide needs and skillfully negotiate new partnerships. The staff and leadership of the “institute” must tactfully break down long-standing bureaucracies that prevent sharing of data, ideas and resources.

***A quality system strives to meet specific criteria.***

Workforce preparation systems must set a high standard for both the individual partners that make up the network as well as for the network itself. A model system exhibits the following qualities, modeled from the Corporate Voices for Working Families recommendations outlined in *Strengthening America’s Economic Competitiveness: Public Policy Strategies to Improve Workforce Readiness*.

**Relevant**

The system focuses on the skills needed for success in college, careers, and life by:

- Coordinating with industry groups, business networks, professional associations and labor market analysts to identify high-demand occupations and industries;
- Providing experiences in workplace-related environments and exposure to state-of-the-art equipment and technology;
- Assessing youth participants’ level of workplace skills including “professionalism, communication, interpersonal skills, decision making, teamwork, and leadership;”
- Linking activities and learning opportunities to statewide and national core content standards, when possible.

**High Quality**

The system delivers an emerging workforce that is skilled and motivated. It accomplishes this important and complex mission by:

- Supporting the use of evidence-based best practices;
- Evaluating the outcomes of activities and identifying specific areas of improvement;
- Bringing together partnering entities – schools, programs, employers and others – to develop dynamic programs and services;
- Continually monitoring issues that impact the quality of the emerging workforce and making recommendations on steps the community can take to strengthen the readiness of all its youth and young adults for work and life.

**Comprehensive**

The system is interconnected, inclusive, and extensive. It accomplishes this by:

- Providing catalyst activities that link to other activities. Youth don’t simply attend isolated events or programs. They are invited to attend subsequent activities that build higher level skills or provide more information on an area of interest;
- Displaying sensitivity to diversity in youths’ backgrounds, learning styles and special needs while setting the bar for achievement high for all participants;

- Expanding the reach of workforce education to spaces outside of traditional academic environments and locating activities throughout the community in businesses, colleges and non-school settings;
- Covering a wide range of career- and college-related interests and being responsive to requests for opportunities to learn about new careers.

### **Engaging**

The system operates in a way that youth and young adults eagerly anticipate attending the activities it sponsors. Such a feeling is created by:

- Offering services on a drop-in basis or during non-traditional hours to accommodate youth and young adults who may be working or parenting;
- Empowering youth to speak up on issues important to them, to directly impact the content of the programming, and to learn how to become leaders in their communities;
- Offering appropriate incentives (scholarships, job referrals, or savings matches) that encourage young people to develop skills and enter high-demand, high-wage career fields;
- Promoting programs that are hands-on, educationally stimulating, and have a clearly defined purpose;
- Soliciting from youth participants immediate feedback on the quality and value of activities;
- Developing new activities quickly, in response to changing needs.

A Workforce Preparation System will vary between communities or regions. They will evolve over time to reflect changes in social and economic conditions of a region. This level of variation can make it difficult to imagine how they might actually work. *Appendix A: Youth Profile* illustrates the type of activities that can take place through an effective system and how these activities can impact the lives of young people.



## *Building a workforce preparation system requires a specific plan for funding.*

To fully implement a systematic infrastructure that links, not replaces or complicates, workforce preparation efforts, communities must develop a detailed and aggressive funding plan that creates a structure for making and implementing funding decisions, ensures resources fully cover system-level costs, identifies duplicative efforts that waste existing resources, and taps into new sources of funding.

### Create an integrated structure for making funding decisions.

Establishing a system requires the commitment of a core group of “founding funders”. These funders secure start-up costs (3 to 5 years), help develop a financial infrastructure for the system that is based on best practices, and assist in finding resources for ongoing operations and growth. “Founding funders” provide the system with the financial support and expertise needed to launch on a firm foundation.

After the system is established and a funding plan developed, the focus should turn to forming an ongoing “funders collaborative”. Ideally, this is a group of decision makers from private and corporate foundations, public funders, economic development agencies, and the community’s largest or fastest growing employers who are committed to maximizing the results of new and existing funds across the system. Using data generated by the Workforce Preparation System, the collaborative focuses resources on the most effective strategies, increasing the efficiency and impact of both financial and in-kind resources. A detailed description of the responsibilities of the “funders collaborative” is provided in the *Systematic Solutions* section.

### Fully fund system-level costs.

The “funders collaborative” is responsible for developing a funding strategy that supports the creation and expansion of successful workforce preparation activities in the community. It is unlikely any collaborative will locate or manage funding for all workforce preparation activities; the scope is simply too large. However, collaboratives should aim to fully fund the system that ties together and increases the impact of these school- and community-based activities. Table 3 outlines the types of costs of a highly effective, fully operational network and includes examples of how these costs can be covered at different levels.

**Table 3: Types and Levels of Costs**

Types of Costs	Level of Costs
<b>Funders Collaborative</b>	
<p><b>Community-wide Strategic Planning:</b> personnel to facilitate the process; facilities in which to meet; means to maintain communication with stakeholders and members of the funding collaborative</p>	<p><i>High:</i> Full-time management staff for facilitation; rent facilities; part-time staff for marketing and communications</p> <p><i>Mid:</i> Contracted professionals; in-kind use of facilities; communications maintained electronically</p> <p><i>Low:</i> Faculty/staff from local university or executives “loaned” by businesses or professional groups; in-kind use of facilities; communications maintained electronically</p>
<p><b>Fund development:</b> personnel to find existing and new sources of funds, write grants and make presentations to funders; marketing materials for informing key stakeholders and potential funders of the ongoing need for financial support</p>	<p><i>High:</i> Full-time development and public relations staff; extensive advertising on multiple media outlets, highly produced materials for distribution</p> <p><i>Mid:</i> Contracted fund development professional; targeted advertising and materials distribution</p> <p><i>Low:</i> Loaned executive; existing sources of funding currently available in the community; wide spread outreach on social media sites</p>
<p><b>Grant Making:</b> pool of funding from members of the collaborative or new funds to be distributed via a competitive or noncompetitive granting process; personnel to work with funders to broaden limits as much as possible, to issue requests for proposals, to review proposals and to oversee grant follow-up</p>	<p><i>High:</i> Full-time fund management staff</p> <p><i>Mid:</i> Part-time or contracted grant management professionals</p> <p><i>Low:</i> Staffing provided in-kind by an entity that neither provides nor receives funding</p>
<p><b>System Monitoring:</b> personnel to objectively analyze data produced through the HUB and to prepare recommendations to funders and other stakeholders</p>	<p><i>High:</i> Full-time policy and fiscal analysts</p> <p><i>Mid:</i> Contracted professionals</p> <p><i>Low:</i> Faculty, staff and students from a local university</p>

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**Institute**

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**Community Assessment:** personnel to inventory local activities, to conduct assessments of progress made toward system's goals, and to track local policies that impact workforce preparation

*High:* Full or part-time staff

*Mid:* Contracted professionals

*Low:* Secondary and postsecondary students assist with data collection; faculty or loaned executives interpret data

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**Research:** personnel to conduct research on issues impacting the community's ability to prepare the emerging workforce and to identify strategies and services that are effective in other communities

*High:* Full or part-time research staff

*Mid:* Contracted research professionals

*Low:* Postsecondary students assist with data collection; faculty or loaned executives conduct evaluation and analyses

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**Technical Assistance and Program Evaluation:** personnel to evaluate the effectiveness of promising programs and policies before they are expanded, to provide intensive and immediate guidance to programs experiencing a problem with service delivery or administration and to evaluate individual program effectiveness and impact

*High:* Full or part-time staff

*Mid:* Contracted professionals

*Low:* Postsecondary students assist with data collection; faculty or loaned executives conduct program evaluation and technical assistance

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**Professional Development:** personnel to develop training materials, to make the materials/information highly accessible and to present materials to professionals, parents and policy makers; production costs of materials; facilities and other costs for conducting workshops; website for publishing materials online

*High:* Full or part-time curricula and website development staff and trainers; highly produced materials for distribution; rented training facilities

*Mid:* Contracted professionals; contracted website services; facilities donated by system partners

*Low:* Staff or faculty time contributed in-kind; training materials distributed free online; training facilities donated by network partners

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**Resource Development:** personnel to develop new curricula, tool kits, software and other materials for guiding and providing entities; production and distribution costs

*High:* Full or part-time writing and curricula design staff; highly produced materials for distribution or developed for use in interactive format online

*Mid:* Contracted professionals; all materials available online

*Low:* Staff or faculty time contributed in-kind by network partners; all materials available online

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## Data and Communications Hub

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**Assessment Survey for Youth:** personnel to develop and implement a tool for collecting individualized information from young people about their college and career readiness; technology to administer the assessment tool over the internet

*High:* Full or part-time staff; technology to administer the assessment tool

*Mid:* Contracted professionals and technology

*Low:* Currently available online assessments that make general recommendations to youth on how to prepare for college and career

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**Outreach, Registration and Feedback System:** personnel to establish and maintain an online database of activities that accepts registrations and feedback from young people attending events; technology to implement the registration and feedback system

*High:* Full or part-time staff and technology to maintain online system

*Mid:* Contracted professionals and technology

*Low:* Young people are recruited via social networking sites and call guiding and providing entities to register; feedback is contacted using paper/pencil evaluation forms completed post-event

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**Student Tracking System:** personnel to establish and maintain an online student record keeping system that logs attendance and competency attainment; technology to implement the database system

*High:* Full or part-time staff to create a new system; technology to collect and process information

*Mid:* Contracted professionals and technology

*Low:* Currently available student data systems that are available free of charge to school districts

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**Youth Voice Surveys:** personnel to create, conduct and analyze surveys of youth and young adults; technology to implement the surveys via the internet and to analyze

*High:* Full or part-time research staff; technology to collect and process responses

*Mid:* Contracted professionals and technology

*Low:* Currently available surveys available free of charge to school districts (Gallup)

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Highly effective workforce preparation systems are immensely dependent on quality personnel and state of art technological infrastructure. Without the professional expertise to design and administer the overall system and the IT capacity to manage communications and data collection, a system is not viable. These dual expenses, which together comprise a large percentage of the total costs, can be considerable. However, as illustrated in Table 3, there are options for managing these costs.

*Identify current overlaps and areas for coordination.*

It is easier to reduce the waste of duplicative efforts than to develop new funds. Organizations and agencies providing workforce preparation activities across a community have many of the same types of program and administrative costs, including:

- Data/record management
- Facilities
- Transportation services
- Staff recruitment and hiring
- Professional development
- Program evaluations
- Marketing to employers
- Participant outreach
- Fundraising

These areas of overlap present opportunities for organizations to work together in ways that save time and resources. Most programs are experienced in creating collaborations that benefit their students and participants but they often overlook opportunities to consolidate administrative functions that are needlessly repeated. An effective Workforce Preparation System funding strategy would include an analysis of these common expenses and suggest ways in which the system could provide these or other services at a cost much below current levels. Much as a food co-op saves its members through bulk purchases, individual entities can save resources by coordinating their duplicative services. A community-wide system can facilitate this process, saving limited resources while providing a higher quality of services.

*Identify new funding sources for system-specific expenses.*

The long-term sustainability of a network is dependent on the infusion of new and diverse funding sources. Table 4 outlines the variety of funding types and specific examples within each type that could be accessed.

**Table 4: Types and Examples of Funding**

Funding Type and Proportion of Total Budget (Sample)	Examples
Federal Government Grants  20%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Corporation for National and Community Service: Social Innovation Fund, AmeriCorps, Learn and Serve America</li> <li>▪ Department of Agriculture: 4-H Youth Development Program</li> <li>▪ Housing and Urban Development: Choice Neighborhoods Program, Neighborhood Networks Program</li> <li>▪ Department of Justice: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Program</li> <li>▪ Department of Labor: Youth Build, Youth and Young Adult Offender Programs, Community Based Job Training Grants, Workforce Investment Act funds</li> <li>▪ Department of Health and Human Services: Compassion Capital Funds, Assets for Independence Funds, Community Services Block Grant</li> </ul>
State and Local Government Grants  20%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Local departments of youth development, education and recreation</li> <li>▪ State departments of public education, economic development, higher education and workforce development</li> <li>▪ Public and private colleges and universities</li> </ul>
Foundation Grants  20%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mott Foundation: funds afterschool, citizen participation, vulnerable youth, and work development projects</li> <li>▪ Wallace Foundation: funds afterschool system development</li> <li>▪ Bill &amp; Melinda Gates Foundation: supports education reform efforts</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Youth Transition Funders Group: convenes a network of grant makers committed to helping youth successfully transition to adulthood</li> <li>▪ Annie E. Casey Foundation: funds strategies that help communities end poverty and boost child security</li> <li>▪ Robert Wood Johnson Foundation: funds youth apprenticeship and youth development systems</li> <li>▪ William Randolph Hearst Foundation: funds afterschool programs, workforce collaboratives and jobs programs</li> <li>▪ The Rockefeller Foundation: funds regional workforce collaboratives</li> </ul>
Support from Network Members 15%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Local schools, colleges and universities, community organizations and public agencies: in-kind support through donated facilities, shared technology, volunteer professionals and expert advisors</li> <li>▪ Guiding and Providing Entities: contribute funds for network activities they would otherwise expend individually (i.e. communications, data collection, outreach, program evaluation)</li> </ul>
Support from Employers 15%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Local and regional employers</li> <li>▪ Unions and professional associations</li> <li>▪ Chambers of Commerce</li> <li>▪ Sector or industry groups</li> </ul>
Earned Revenue 10%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Training workshops, conferences</li> <li>▪ Curricula and classroom materials</li> <li>▪ Reports and program evaluations</li> </ul>

Although Table 4 indicates contributions from employers and related entities could comprise a relatively small proportion of a system’s budget, these investments reflect the interdependence between workforce preparation and employer success.

“Corporations, with an ongoing need for skilled young people to enter their workforces, have much to offer to, and much to gain from, a stronger talent pipeline. In order to remain competitive in the global economy, business must work with educators, policymakers and other community-based leaders to implement strategies that improve the workforce readiness of young people in this country. Corporations also have a more general interest in the well-being of young people because in time they will be customers, innovators, investors, colleagues and neighbors.”<sup>3</sup>

Assistance from employers could comprise a much larger percentage of a workforce preparation system budget. In-kind contributions from business and professional groups are particularly valuable, as they are in a position like no other entity to prepare young people for work and life. They may, for instance, encourage policymakers to create a new system that supports such development; provide real work experiences to young people that are not available through classrooms; partner with schools and other organizations to provide internships, job shadowing programs and summer jobs; encourage their employees to serve as mentors and tutors; and invest in youth programs at the local, state and national level that have demonstrated outcomes for young people.<sup>4</sup>

Creating an impactful network of workforce preparation activities requires a “next generation” funding strategy that improves on the well-established program-based approach. In communities and states across the country, the program-based funding strategy has promoted competition and weak associations between entities, a focus on short-term outcomes that can be demonstrated during the life of the grant, and a fragmented set of activities that fail to address the holistic needs of individual youth much less the collective needs of all youth in a community. **An effective system-based funding strategy can reverse these weaknesses by finding ways to:**

- Identify and address unnecessary bureaucratic funding requirements that limit the development of great workforce preparation activities;
- Redesign “outputs and outcomes” that focus on longer term results and reduce the incentives to work with the easiest to serve youth and young adults;
- Incentivize true collaborations between entities that have common goals but traditionally operate in isolation;
- Develop a standard for evaluating the efficiency of programs or activities that is applied openly and consistently;
- Increase funding flexibility so entities with high-demand and successful strategies (as defined by young people and the labor market) can access resources as needed;
- Encourage the continual infusion of new financial resources into the system

*The next steps require partners, information and a commitment to young people.*

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Experiences that connect youth to their community, introduce them to locally vital jobs, help them develop skills to fill those jobs and provide guidance in developing a plan to succeed are fundamental to long-term success at work and in life. When a young person develops the competencies related to these Four Steps of Workforce Preparation, they are ready for college and career, even if they have experienced significant childhood hardships. High levels of these competencies have been linked to increased job satisfaction, employment retention, and community involvement.<sup>5</sup>

When *all* young people are equipped to succeed in college and careers, the quality of life and economic vitality of communities are significantly impacted. A well-coordinated system of workforce preparation partners can ensure that each young person has the skills and information to fill labor market and community needs. Although developing a system can be complex, the actions outlined below present a starting point.

*Gather Information*

To track community-wide progress and identify effective strategies, the system must initially and continually collect reliable, relevant and current data. The information, objectively analyzed and in an accessible format, should focus on the following areas.

- ❑ Policies – what entities are involved; what are their priorities and requirements; what local or state regulations are mandated or recommended; why were these policies put into place; in what ways do entities duplicate efforts; how have these entities worked together in the past and what were the results; what policies or regulations could be adopted or changed to improve the system; what are funding priorities and how were these set.
- ❑ Programs – what workplace preparation activities are currently taking place; what approach or methods do they use to develop and deliver the activities; how are these activities funded; what is the impact of these activities; how do programs work together now; what are the trends in service delivery that impact programs now (changes in population, funder preferences, other factors).
- ❑ Labor market – what occupations exist in the community; how are the demands for these occupations changing; what are the locally available career paths for different occupations; how well is the education pipeline preparing workers for the most needed occupations; how are employers communicating their labor force needs to educational entities;
- ❑ Young people – what do youth believe would help them prepare for college and career; what are the barriers that most often keep young people from success; how can policies and programs better understand and help youth with more intensive needs; how can the workforce preparation system better serve young people who have dropped out of high school and college.



### *Develop Partnerships*

Forming partnerships is fundamental to creating the system. Several strategies can help identify and develop strong relationships from the start.

- ❑ Invite traditional partners (educators, community programs, workforce investment boards) and nontraditional partners (professional and trades organizations, recent college graduates, parents, mental health professionals, financial counselors) to identify their current and potential roles in a workforce preparation system.
- ❑ Specify expectations, needs, limits and responsibilities early in the relationship and develop a structure for regularly reviewing and revising these components of the partnership.
- ❑ Establish communication systems that meet the needs of individual partners and respond immediately to issues that could lead to misunderstanding.
- ❑ Present opportunities for partners to participate in the system at different levels. Develop an environment where every entity, particularly parents, have an opportunity to network, contribute suggestions, and expand their own capacity to help develop the emerging workforce.
- ❑ Identify ways to align in-school and out-of-school activities to reinforce certain skills or highlight the need for specific career fields.

### *Build an Aggressive Funding Strategy*

Changing funding priorities and restructuring financial management strategies will require persistence and creative solutions. Attracting government funders, which often gravitate to traditional solutions, and private funders, which may have limited grants for capacity building or infrastructure projects, will require a targeted strategy. <sup>6</sup> Therefore, it will be important to:

- ❑ Be prepared to illustrate the ways in which a “systematic” approach saves money and impacts work readiness for an entire community. Provide quantifiable information on the evidence based strategies used by individual programs and qualitative information from employers, youth and other stakeholders;
- ❑ Cultivate strong relationships with decision makers at every level. Understand the motivations and priorities of the funding decision makers;
- ❑ Create incentives for individual partners to break down the traditional protectionist model of funding.

### *Listen to Young People*

In a study conducted by the Emerging Workforce Initiative, young people indicated they are more likely to consult their friends than a community program for advice on finding a job, selecting a career or solving a personal problem. <sup>7</sup> If a workforce preparation system is going to assist young people to be college and career ready, the system must be in tune with their needs and interests. It is very important for developing systems to engage youth in discussions, as

illustrated in a 2009 report by Child Trends. The results of these discussions, outlined in Table 5, are highly instructive.

**Table 5: Summary of Youth Feedback** <sup>8</sup>

<b>Why Youth Don't Attend Programs</b>	<b>How to Get Youth To Show Up</b>	<b>What Youth Want In Programs</b>	<b>What Youth Want from Staff</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lack of awareness</li> <li>▪ Concerns about neighborhood safety</li> <li>▪ Need to work or care for siblings</li> <li>▪ Lack of caring staff</li> <li>▪ Negative perception of program, stigma of "not cool"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Peer recruiters</li> <li>▪ Engaging advertisements</li> <li>▪ Electronic media</li> <li>▪ Involve parents</li> <li>▪ Improve parents' perceptions</li> <li>▪ Incentives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Build in flexibility</li> <li>▪ Offer a variety of activities (age and gender appropriate)</li> <li>▪ Portray the program accurately</li> <li>▪ Teach practical skills</li> <li>▪ Offer a convenient location and hours</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ People who treat youth with respect</li> <li>▪ People who are skilled at working with youth</li> </ul>

Developing an effective workforce preparation system to meet the dynamic needs of a community, employers, and young people, is complex, yet unquestionably worthwhile. The process requires committed and creative actions from program administrators, policy makers, educational and community leaders and others that, in many ways, require the skills we most need to develop in the next generation – the ability to objectively consider the consequences of any action, to think of innovative solutions to difficult problems, and to courageously reach across longstanding divides to work with people who may seem quite different. Demonstrating these skills on behalf of a community's young people would yield results for generations.

*The impact of a system can be measured in the life of a young person.*

This profile describes the experience of a young person participating in an effective, community-wide workforce preparation system. “Lynn” is fictitious, but her story represents the type of experiences that thousands of young people can have when a system is implemented as designed by the Emerging Workforce Initiative. The *Guiding Entities* described in the case study could represent a variety of community- and school-based organizations that recruit, assess and refer young people to other entities in the system - Boys and Girls Clubs, high school programs, and other accessible, engaging organizations. The *Providing Entities* described here could represent an even wider array of organizations that serve young people through workshops, programs, one-on-one appointments or other opportunities that help build skills or overcome barriers to success. Providing Entities in a community-wide system might include TRIO programs, volunteer placement organizations, leadership training programs, summer jobs programs, apprenticeship or internship programs, or college financial aid programs.



**When she was young**, Lynn was certain about her future. She knew someday she would be a lawyer, advocating for the people who lived in the type of struggling neighborhood where she lived. No one in her family had graduated from college but her grandmother had always told her to follow her dreams.

School had not been very challenging for Lynn. She didn't have to study a lot to pass the tests but her grades were weak because she didn't put much effort into homework. Lynn's teachers encouraged her, but when it came time to register for courses in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, she didn't sign up for higher level math, science or English. At fifteen, Lynn was losing interest in school and she began to wonder how she could stick it out though enough college to earn a law degree.

Outside of high school, Lynn liked hanging out with her friends and watching TV (mostly courtroom dramas). She had looked everywhere around her neighborhood for a part-time job but the employers who once hired teens were mostly hiring adults now. Lynn had been worrying about how she would pay for college since her high school counselor talked about tuition costs at a recent assembly. Even with a job, saving money for college seemed difficult to imagine because she was beginning to understand how much it would take to live on her own.

One afternoon, Lynn went with a friend to a place she heard helps teens with jobs and college. At the *Guiding Entity*, Lynn met a *Guide* (counselor, mentor, program staff) who talked with her and helped her sign up on a website. The website accessed Lynn's school records (transcript of classes, attendance, and individual learning plan) and had connections to several portals of information on colleges, careers and jobs. The *Guide* walked through all the information available on the website, then started a questionnaire for Lynn to complete online.

The questions asked Lynn about how connected she was to her community, what she knew about jobs and how to get the skills to be qualified for these jobs. She also answered questions about her plans and how she thought she'd reach her goals. When she finished, the program listed some

things Lynn could do to prepare for success in college and a career. The information was personalized, taking into consideration her current academic progress, her long term goals and her report of circumstances that may make her goals more difficult to attain. The list of suggestions included things she could do on her own, with her parents or through various organizations around her community. The *Guide* gave Lynn a bit more information, more intended to encourage than to give detailed academic or financial advise, and helped Lynn sign up to receive text messages on her cell phone when activities provided by community organizations or schools were available near her.

The online system introduced to Lynn by *Guiding Entity* staff was the HUB, a portal for giving and collecting information on supports young people often need to be ready for college and careers. The HUB links young people with available user-friendly, high-quality websites that locate jobs, search for scholarships and financial aid, and explain the wages and entry requirements of occupations. The HUB also helped Lynn to register for locally available activities that interested her and gave her a chance to share her opinions on how to improve activities she attended or services in general.

In the next three years, Lynn received regular text messages – some were general notes encouraging her to do well in school while others asked her opinion about local issues impacting young people. But the messages Lynn looked forward to the most were the ones inviting her to attend an activity or event that seemed to have been designed just for her. If Lynn didn't register online in a few days, her *Guide* called to see if there was a better time or location or whether, perhaps, her interests or goals had changed.

By the time Lynn graduated from high school, she had been connected with a wide variety of activities through *Providing Entities*. Each activity helped her build competencies in the four fundamental steps of workforce preparation:

**Photo Contest** (*Step 1: Connect to the Community*) – The local art museum sponsored a photo contest designed to get teens to look at their communities in new ways. The museum loaned a digital camera to a small team of teens for two weeks. After taking photos of their community, each team worked with an artist to present a shot that was both inspiring and aesthetic. Lynn's team won second place and earned an opportunity to talk about their photo in a presentation to the city council.

**Teen Court Volunteer** (*Step 1: Connect to the Community and Step 2: Explore Needed Jobs*) – Lynn attended an orientation to become a Teen Court volunteer working on cases involving other teens who have committed minor offenses. As a volunteer, Lynn learned about the court system and participated in about five cases as a peer juror. While Lynn loved hearing court cases, the sessions usually lasted too long for her to catch the bus home, so her attendance drifted off after a while.

**Job Journal** (*Step 2: Explore Needed Jobs*) – Lynn's *Guide* helped her access some online resources and suggested that she use a notebook to keep track of job announcements or descriptions that interested her. Lynn highlighted the employer, pay rate, level of

education and experience required for each job and made notes about what she liked most and least about each position.

**Informational Interview** (*Step 2: Explore Needed Jobs*) – Each year, public officials in Lynn’s town agree to schedule up to 10 informational interviews with young people. Lynn signed up to meet with the local County Attorney. To prepare for the meeting, *Providing Entity* helped her list possible questions, gave her some advice on what to wear to the interview and made certain she had directions on where the meeting was located. Following the informational interview, Lynn logged onto the HUB to describe what she had learned.

**Volunteer** (*Step 3: Develop Essential Skills*) – Lynn signed up to be a volunteer in the children’s section of her neighborhood library, working one day a week. After a year of volunteering, she was offered a job working 10 hours a week, shelving books in the children’s section. Lynn loved the time she spent at the library because she felt it was important work.

**SEED Grant** (*Step 3: Develop Essential Skills*) – Lynn completed an application for a SEED (Stipend for Education and Employment Development) Grant through *Providing Entity* and received \$150. She used the money to take an ACT preparation class and to pay for a weekend visit to an out-of-state college. Lynn met with admissions and financial aid counselors and stayed in the dorms.

**Financial aid counseling** (*Step 4: Make a Plan*) – Lynn was connected with a counselor at *Providing Entity* that met with her four times during her junior and senior years in high school about ways to pay for college. The counselor helped Lynn complete scholarship applications and the Free Application for Financial Student Aid. In small group workshops, Lynn learned how to manage the costs of college and other personal expenses. With feedback from youth like Lynn, the *Providing Entity* added a session on managing housing costs during college.

Whenever possible, Lynn’s *Guide* met with her in person to look over the progress and address any new concerns or interests. Together, they talked about how to improve her grades, what college is like or how to get along with co-workers. Their conversations allowed Lynn to ask questions that were on her mind and, when needed, her *Guide* connected her with organizations that could give her more information. As Lynn accomplished some of the steps they laid out together, her *Guide* occasionally gave her items like a backpack with “college survival” supplies and gift cards for a local bookstore.

Lynn finished her bachelor’s degree in political science after five years of study at the public university in her community. She worked in the library part-time during semesters and worked full-time at an elementary school’s summer enrichment program. Working and sharing a small apartment near school with some friends allowed Lynn to finish her degree with low debt. At graduation, Lynn’s academic record, solid work history and experience working with youth paved the way for Lynn to get a position as Youth Program Coordinator through the YMCA. She

planned to work for a couple years before deciding whether she would like to pursue a law degree or a graduate degree in recreational therapy.

Looking back at her experiences in high school and college, Lynn knew the *Guiding* and *Providing Entities* offered support and taught her skills she needed. According to Lynn, it worked for her because it was:

- **Self-directed:** The menu of activities and services available to her were varied and she was able to select what she needed most. Although the information and encouragement from her *Guide* was helpful, Lynn knew the things she most enjoyed were those that she selected. Lynn had been in after-school programs in middle school that gave few choices to students about what they would do.
- **Hands-on:** Lynn got a chance to try out new experiences and learn new skills in the real world. She started to see why her high school classes taught some of the things they did; she even started using some of the things she learned in school.
- **Connected to her community:** Lynn got to know people in different parts of her community that she never would have met. She learned about how decisions were made and how things were improved or changed in her community, inspiring her to think of things she could do. As she came to see herself as needed by her community, it gave her the confidence and knowledge to speak out when she would not have ordinarily.
- **Focused on progress:** Lynn could see how she was making progress as she got closer to graduation. The HUB kept track of the activities she attended and pointed out other experiences that would be helpful to her. Lynn's *Guide* could see where she was heading and could give her the individualized support she needed.
- **Easy:** Lynn didn't have to remember to check a website to find information she wanted, the information came to her. And, she could invite her friends to attend activities with her with just a few clicks.

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<sup>1</sup> National Youth Employment Coalition, *WIA Title I Youth Activities Reauthorization Recommendations*, (February 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Corporate Voices for Working Families, *Strengthening America's Economic Competitiveness: Public Policy Strategies to Improve Workforce Readiness*, <http://www.cvworkingfamilies.org/system/files/CVWFStrengtheningAmerica'sEconomicCompetitiveness.pdf> (2009).

<sup>3</sup> Corporate Voices for Working Families, *Workforce Readiness Principles*, (2008)  
[http://cvwf.org/system/files/2008workready\\_princp\\_print.pdf](http://cvwf.org/system/files/2008workready_princp_print.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Corporate Voices for Working Families, *Tomorrow's Workforce: Ready or Not It's a Choice the Business Community Must Make Now* (2008)  
<http://cvwf.org/system/files/2008WorkforceReadiness-ReadyorNot.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability, *InfoBrief: "The Workforce Development System & the Professional Development of Youth Service Practitioners: Why Professional Development?"* (February 2006).

<sup>6</sup> William Landes Foster, Peter Kim, & Barbara Christiansen, *Ten Nonprofit Funding Models*, (2009)  
[http://www.ssireview.org/pdf/2009SP\\_Feature\\_Foster\\_Kim\\_Christiansen.pdf](http://www.ssireview.org/pdf/2009SP_Feature_Foster_Kim_Christiansen.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Emerging Workforce Initiative, *Emerging Workers Survey Results: Louisville's Youth and Young Adults Describe their Career and Education Plans*, <http://www.emergingworkforce.org/Final%20Report.pdf> (2008).

<sup>8</sup> Mary Terzian, Lindsay Giesen, and Kassim Mbwana, *Why Teens Are Not Involved in Out-of-School Time Programs: The Youth Perspective*, Child Trends Research to Results Brief (July 2009).