



## OUR YOUTH, OUR ECONOMY, OUR FUTURE

### ***A NATIONAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY FOR RECONNECTING AMERICA'S YOUTH***

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**A**s a nation, we face a challenge of tremendous consequence that we cannot continue to ignore. The economic future of our country depends on the next generation of young Americans becoming ready for college, work, and life. Sadly, however, many of our young people are reaching young adulthood without the skills and competencies they need to succeed. Millions of youth are being left behind, disconnected from the societal and economic mainstreams, and are falling into harm's way. We overlook disconnected youth at our own peril. One in three youth—and more than 50 percent of minority youth—who start high school will not graduate four years later. Employment for teens is at the lowest level in 57 years, with as few as 20 percent of black teens employed at any one time. It is our moral obligation to make sure all American youth have the opportunity to succeed, and it is our responsibility to ensure our nation's economic health. As the "baby boom" generation prepares for retirement, and as an increasingly competitive global market requires healthy workers with higher skills and education, our nation's youth must provide the brainpower and manpower to fuel our economy, fill our skilled jobs, renew our civic life, and keep our nation safe. Only comprehensive investments—made now—will reconnect these youth and secure their future and those of their families, their communities, and the nation as a whole.

#### **POLICY SOLUTIONS:**

- (1) Make reconnecting our youth a national priority: reconnect them to education, employment, service, and citizenship
- (2) Invest in building the youth service delivery capacity in communities of high youth distress
- (3) Recognize best practices and invest in scaling them up to meet the need for high-quality programming
- (4) Create "on ramps" and pipelines connecting youth to high-skill, high-wage labor market opportunities
- (5) Create a policy and research infrastructure to identify innovations, assess progress, and provide technical assistance to communities to build and sustain such efforts
- (6) Involve young people in finding solutions for their own generation

#### **(1) MAKE RECONNECTING OUR YOUTH A NATIONAL PRIORITY: RECONNECT THEM TO EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, SERVICE, AND CITIZENSHIP**

We need leadership within the White House to coordinate all federal efforts for youth. Current efforts to reach young people are insufficient and fragmented into narrow silos—no one is in charge; no one is accountable. Policy solutions:

- **Create a White House Office of Youth Policy** to coordinate federal efforts on behalf of our nation's youth
- **Designate a White House Director of Youth Policy** to lead and coordinate the efforts of all federal agencies to make this a priority
- **Activate the Federal Youth Development Council (FYDC)** and have it report to the White House Director of Youth Policy. Charge the council, in concert with the director, with supporting and advancing federal strategies for solving the problems that disconnected youth face in the context of our global economy.

- **Support FYDC through “on-the-ground” grants.** Provide grants to state and local youth development councils and community institutions that mirror the work of the FYDC, supporting them in implementing comprehensive and coordinated on-the-ground solutions.

## **(2) INVEST IN BUILDING THE DELIVERY CAPACITY IN COMMUNITIES OF HIGH YOUTH DISTRESS**

At present, nobody is accountable for youth who leave school prematurely or fall between the cracks as they transition between systems. Communities need to be supported in undertaking aggressive efforts to bring together all systems and sectors to create the support structure necessary to re-engage youth and connect them to positive pathways. Policy solutions:

- **Support community efforts to build a robust youth service delivery infrastructure that involves all systems and sectors.** Invest in local efforts to bring community providers, the business community, and private foundations together with public youth-serving systems to create a comprehensive and coherent youth service delivery system.
- **Provide communities with incentives and assistance to integrate new and existing services and funding streams to support youth programming**

## **(3) RECOGNIZE BEST PRACTICES AND INVEST IN SCALING THEM UP TO A ROBUST YOUTH SERVICE DELIVERY INFRASTRUCTURE**

We don’t need to reinvent the wheel to serve our nation’s youth—we know what works. Numerous programs around the country have a consistent, proven track record for transforming young lives; but demand for these programs far outpaces the supply. We must open the doors of opportunity to all young people, investing in our nation’s youth service delivery infrastructure in a way that acknowledges and honors the centrality of human capital to our nation’s economic viability. Policy solutions:

- **Replicate and take to scale existing best practice** programs that have demonstrated success and for which there is strong demand
- **Invest in promising and incubate promising innovations that may become best practices** once successful outcomes are documented
- **Strengthen the youth development workforce** by increasing professional development opportunities, training, and professional recognition

## **(4) CREATE “ON RAMPS” AND PIPELINES THAT CONNECT YOUTH TO HIGH-SKILL AND HIGH-WAGE CAREER OPPORTUNITIES**

Too many of our young people take wrong turns and end up in dead-end jobs or worse. Work skills and work ethic are not just learned in classrooms; they are acquired through hands-on experience. Business and industry must become active partners in creating the opportunities to provide young people with the hands-on experience that will prepare them for adulthood. Policy solutions:

- **Create flexible community- and work-based learning environments** that incorporate hands-on learning, employ innovative instructional techniques, and lead to postsecondary skills and credentials
- **Engage and incentivize business and industry to create employment and learning opportunities in emerging areas of the economy.** Issue a “call to action” to the nation’s business community by hosting a national CEO summit calling upon our nation’s businesses to ramp up their efforts to help young people.

- **Scale up successful work-based programs**, including paid work experience, internships, apprenticeships, community service, and on-the-job training

## **(5) CREATE A POLICY AND RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE TO IDENTIFY INNOVATIONS, ASSESS PROGRESS, AND PROVIDE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO COMMUNITIES ON BUILDING AND SUSTAINING YOUTH EFFORTS**

Continuous improvement is a hallmark of American success, and it should be applied to our efforts for youth. We must foster partnerships between nonprofits, foundations, research institutions, and corporations—not only to increase the quantity of programs for young people who need them, but also to ensure that programs are of the highest quality. Funders—both private and public sector—demand results, and we must build systems to adequately measure our successes and assess our shortcomings. Policy solutions:

- **Fund research and knowledge development to identify and document best practices that currently exist**, seed innovation and promising practices, and provide resources and technical assistance to states and localities so that all communities have the benefit of high-quality, innovative, and effective interventions grounded in research
- **Help communities to develop innovative sustainability plans** that include creatively leveraging existing funding streams, accessing foundation and private sector funding, generating new revenue streams, fundraising, and creating other income generation vehicles
- **Develop accountability, training, and technical assistance toolboxes.** Develop practices that can be utilized across federal, state, and local government departments and agencies to improve program quality.

## **(6) INVOLVE YOUNG PEOPLE IN FINDING SOLUTIONS FOR THEIR OWN GENERATION**

Young people can and should work hand in hand with adults to craft solutions to the challenges their communities face. We wouldn't dream of creating a commission on the status of women without including women on the commission. But every day, groups of adults discuss the problems young people face without ever consulting youth themselves. Policy solutions:

- **Form a National Youth Council**, comprised of young people from across the country, to work with the Federal Youth Development Council, bringing young people's unique perspectives to bear on the critical decisions affecting their lives
- **Encourage the development of state and local councils of youth** to bring perspective into local youth programming and to provide input on the work of the FYDC and the National Youth Council

### **THIS IS OUR CALL TO ACTION!**

*We need a national vision for youth anchored in the belief that all young people should have equitable access to the promise and prosperity of America. This belief should guide our priorities, our policies, and our actions as individuals in a caring community and as a nation. It should resonate across all levels of government and at the grassroots of community service delivery. Our nation must commit to realizing that vision by making the investments at the scale needed until we eliminate education and labor market disparities for poor and minority youth. Our commitment must be about more than just funding: it must involve rethinking systems, policies, relationships, and collective responsibility. Leadership on this issue begins with acknowledging that the status quo—millions of youth left behind—is unacceptable and that solutions must be bold, systemic, and collaborative. Every sector of the community and every youth-serving system should be mobilized to be part of the solution. **To Sign on to Support Our Campaign for Youth National Investment Strategy, Go to: [www.campaignforyouth.org](http://www.campaignforyouth.org)***