

A large, semi-transparent blue-tinted image of the Statue of Liberty. The statue's body and crown are visible, and the background of the image is a dense, layered collage of various New York City skyscrapers and buildings, creating a textured, architectural effect.

Equitable Recovery for Young Adults:

An Agenda for Young Adult
Workforce Development
in New York City

October 2021



About JobsFirstNYC

JobsFirstNYC creates and advances solutions that break down barriers and transform the systems supporting young adults and their communities in the pursuit of economic opportunities. Our innovative approach to developing new partnership models has helped shape public policy, private philanthropic investments, and the best practices of employers, colleges, service providers, high schools, and others. Over the last 16 years, JobsFirstNYC has worked with more than 160 organizations in communities across New York City to build innovative solutions that connect young adults to economic opportunities.

About this Paper

Equitable Recovery for Young Adults: An Agenda for Young Adult Workforce Development in New York City provides a set of citywide policy priorities rooted in the real needs of young people, the perspectives of on-the-ground practitioners, and the literature on successful policies and interventions. It details the changes needed to quickly connect young adults to employment now and to effectively prepare them for the future of work in a rapidly shifting, increasingly virtual economy. It builds on JobsFirstNYC's comprehensive, system-level view of the City's young adult workforce ecosystem. Finally, it proposes an actionable, realistic, and timebound framework to foster citywide systems change in the young adult workforce development field.



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Executive Summary

JobsFirstNYC and young adult service providers across New York City are more committed now than ever to ensuring that all young adults, and especially those who are out of school and out of work, have the resources, skills, and opportunities they need and deserve to find success in work and in life. The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed and exacerbated many inequities, from health outcomes to economic outcomes. Research has shown that young adult workers in New York City are 35% more likely to have lost work than all other workers since the pandemic began and that young adults and people of color were disproportionately employed in the city's hardest-hit industries.¹ The latest data from labor market analytics firm Chmura shows that 1 in 4 young adults were out of school and out of work in 2020, totaling over 183,000 individuals.² The pandemic has also accelerated the future of work, namely increased remote work and the displacement of workers by automation.^{3,4}

✓ **Throughout this document, priorities identified or emphasized by young adults are noted in purple.**

New York City needs to act swiftly to reduce the number of out-of-school, out-of-work young adults; to connect these young adults to training, education, and work opportunities; and to advance these young people along educational and career pathways. To this end, this report outlines six recommendations for the city that were informed by a diverse coalition of young adult workforce development and education stakeholders and young adults:

 **RECOMMENDATION 1: Collaboration**

Encourage and reward collaboration across young adult workforce programs and providers.

 **RECOMMENDATION 2: Focus on Equity**

Prioritize economic mobility and pathways to prosperity for historically under-resourced and disproportionately harmed communities.

 **RECOMMENDATION 3: Employer Partnerships**

Significantly expand partnerships with employers and industry groups to create employment and career pathway opportunities.

 **RECOMMENDATION 4: Continuum of Services**

Create a seamless continuum of integrated services across education and youth workforce development institutions.

 **RECOMMENDATION 5: Youth-Centered Strategies**

Design youth-informed solutions that center young adults, their experiences, and goals.

 **RECOMMENDATION 6: Capacity Building**

Build the capacity of workforce providers to deliver high-quality, culturally competent, market-aligned services to young adults.

To enact these recommendations, JobsFirstNYC calls for a \$770 million increase in annual investment by the city. This proposed funding, further detailed below, would support sectoral training, bridge programs, and subsidized employment; expanded high school career development opportunities; preventative mental health services; and a range of capacity-building and system-strengthening projects, including a longitudinal data system and increased training for public agencies overseeing and administering workforce programs.



Introduction



JobsFirstNYC and young adult service providers across the city are more committed now than ever to ensuring that all out-of-school, out-of-work young adults have the resources, skills, and opportunities they need and deserve to find success in work and in life.

The pandemic has revealed and exacerbated existing inequities. Even before COVID-19 arrived in New York, too many young adults, especially young people of color and in low-income communities, lacked access to pathways to economic mobility. Prior to the pandemic, 107,000 young adults (15% of 18- to 24-year-olds) in New York City were out of school and out of work. These numbers had been steadily decreasing since 2016, masking the barriers that some faced in accessing education and careers. For example, Black and Latinx young adults were disproportionately likely to be out of school and out of work, making up 74% of all young adults who were not in school or working.⁵ Additionally, a large number of young adults were working in part-time, minimum-wage jobs with little to no path toward advancement. The latest data from labor market analytics firm Chmura shows that 1 in 4 young adults were out of school and out of work in 2020, totaling over 183,000 individuals.⁶

The recession caused by the pandemic has led to greater distress in already under-resourced communities. JobsFirstNYC found that the statewide PAUSE order issued on March 22, 2020, led to disproportionate job loss among young adults. Research from previous recessions suggests that the labor market will remain difficult for them for years to come, with jobs lost not expected to return until 2024.⁷ Further research has shown that young adult workers in New York City are 35% more likely to have lost work than all other workers since the pandemic began and that young adults and people of color were disproportionately employed in the city's hardest-hit industries.⁸

A Changing Future of Work

In addition to causing record unemployment, the pandemic also accelerated many of the trends shaping the future of work, which the workforce system was just beginning to address. Troublingly, these changes are most likely to harm low-income and minority workers and communities. To take one example, the pandemic has led to a prominent and sudden increase in telecommuting, a luxury less likely to be available to low-wage workers and people of color. A recent study found that “less than one in five Black workers and roughly one in six Hispanic workers are able to work from home,” while high-wage earners are six times more likely than low-wage workers to be able to work remotely.⁹ Data show that employers are unlikely to do away with remote work; a survey of executives from PwC found that “less than one in five executives say they want to return to the office as it was pre-pandemic.”¹⁰ If unaddressed, this shift will be especially harmful to young adults who lack reliable access to digital infrastructure and who may be excluded from internship and employment opportunities that require a laptop, a high-speed internet connection, and a private setting amenable to remote work.

A second example of the changing trajectory of the future of work can be seen in the context of automation. Prior to the pandemic, economists and labor market experts hotly debated the extent to which automation would eliminate or alter jobs in the years ahead. However, a recent analysis of unemployment data by the Philadelphia Federal Reserve Bank found that “the pandemic displaced more workers in automatable occupations, putting them at a greater risk of being permanently automated” and that these permanent job losses would disproportionately affect minority workers.¹¹ The paper concludes, “When trying to promote an equitable recovery from the pandemic, the groups that are threatened by both the health crisis and automation technology deserve more attention.”¹²

While this changing future of work poses great challenges, it also opens up great opportunities. As jobs become more automated, the economy will place an increasing premium on lifelong learning and skills development. Through innovations such as skills mapping—which map the ways that skills gained from one sector or work experience can be applied to other fields or jobs—young adults with the right training and access will have the opportunity to lead rich careers across a variety of sectors.

Solutions and Opportunities within the Workforce Development System

Nonprofit service providers stand ready to train and support those who have lost jobs or withdrawn from school and who need access to funding and services to achieve their goals. Nonetheless, nonprofits suffered revenue losses early in the pandemic, and many organizations still fear the loss of programming due to budget cutbacks. Educational institutions are also struggling. For example, the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center found that first-year enrollment in community colleges decreased 23% nationwide.¹³ Meanwhile, public school enrollment in New York City fell 3.4%.¹⁴

Even prior to the pandemic, young adult workforce development was frequently deprioritized. The largest city investment was in the Summer Youth Employment Program and in CUNY, not in year-round services that lead to long-term employment. Mayor de Blasio's career pathways framework was an unrealized promise, leaving private philanthropy to assume the role of primary funder of innovation in the young adult workforce field. Even though the overall size of the out-of-school, out-of-work young adult population had been declining prior to the COVID-19 crisis, there was no coherent system to serve their diverse needs. The young adult workforce development system was woefully underfunded and lacking in quality, there was little opportunity for year-round subsidized jobs, bridge programs were scarce, and the city's main occupational skills training program served fewer than 1,500 participants.

The pandemic has had a deep impact on the communities where many of these service providers operate. As the city's recent Disconnected Youth Task Force report concludes, "The burdens of COVID-19 in New York City most heavily fall on low-income communities of color. These are the same communities that saw the highest concentrations of out-of-school, out-of-work young

Even prior to the pandemic, young adult workforce development was frequently deprioritized. The largest city investment was in the Summer Youth Employment Program and in CUNY, not in year-round services that lead to long-term employment. Mayor de Blasio's career pathways framework was an unrealized promise, leaving private philanthropy to assume the role of primary funder of innovation in the young adult workforce field.

adults before the pandemic and have borne the burden of systemic racism in virtually every aspect of public life.”¹⁵ A new mayoral administration and City Council provide an opportunity for young adults and their economic futures to be prioritized so that workforce development organizations and the system as a whole are properly supported in connecting young adults to work and education in meaningful ways.

Beyond New York City, policymakers and advocates are also looking to reinvest and restructure workforce development supports for young adults. President Biden’s American Jobs Plan calls for increased funding to the field, as well as the creation of millions of high-quality, career pathway jobs. In early hearings on the reauthorization of the Workforce Innovations and Opportunities Act, federal legislators cited a number of improvements required by the workforce development system, including increased work-based learning opportunities and interventions that reach young people before they become disconnected.¹⁶ In addition, a group of congressional leaders from Illinois have proposed the Connecting Youth to Jobs Act, which would create living-wage jobs for young adults facing barriers to employment, as well as critical wraparound services (such as transportation, childcare, access to technology, and housing support) that facilitate employment success.¹⁷ Meanwhile, New York and Massachusetts state legislators have called for workforce programs modeled after the New Deal-era Works Progress Administration for historically under-resourced communities (e.g., people with disabilities and Black and Latinx communities), through which young adults could be connected to employment in public works projects that also have a positive impact on the community.¹⁸ In addition to legislative efforts, thought leaders and providers across the country are mobilizing to address the employment and education needs of young adults. From the Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions to the Center for Law and Social Policy to the National Youth Employment Coalition, the needs of out-of-school, out-of-work young adults are being more regularly represented in research, advocacy, and public discourse.

Overall, the current juncture presents a tremendous opportunity to strengthen the young adult workforce development field. As more residents are receiving their COVID-19 vaccinations and new and surviving businesses begin looking for talent, the economy has begun to slowly recover. The time to adopt an ambitious agenda is now.



Recovery through an Agenda for Young Adult Workforce Development Practitioners

JobsFirstNYC recognizes that young adult workforce stakeholders are eager to serve those most impacted by the economic downturn and to collectively rebuild a young adult workforce system that ensures an equitable recovery. To this end, JobsFirstNYC led a months-long participatory and inclusive process to develop the present Agenda for Young Adult Workforce Development. We supplemented this process with documented best practices and research on current and historical data trends.

The foundational thinking for this agenda began prior to the onset of the pandemic, in November 2019, when we created [the first draft of our collaborative systems change framework](#), and was further fleshed out at the Aspen Institute's fall 2019 Opportunity Youth Forum and in policy meetings in the spring of 2020. The drafting of the agenda then took place between late 2020 and the spring of 2021 through a series of convenings. In particular, we held planning meetings starting in November 2020 that gathered over 40 field leaders, including representatives from youth and employer intermediaries, philanthropic institutions, workforce training providers, and community colleges. This group identified several priorities, which were further explored and turned into recommendations by a variety of working groups. In February 2021, we convened a youth forum to ensure that this agenda reflected the perspectives and priorities of young adults.

✓ **Throughout this document, priorities identified or emphasized by young adults are noted in purple.**

The agenda that follows provides a set of citywide policy priorities rooted in the real needs of young people, the perspectives of on-the-ground practitioners, and the literature on successful policies and interventions. It details the changes needed to quickly connect young adults to employment now and to effectively prepare them for the future of work in a rapidly shifting, increasingly virtual economy. It builds on JobsFirstNYC's comprehensive, system-level view of the city's young adult workforce ecosystem (Figure 1). Finally, it proposes an actionable, realistic, and timebound framework to foster citywide systems change in the young adult workforce development field.

To enact these recommendations, JobsFirstNYC calls for a \$770 million increase in annual investment by the city. These funds would support bridge programming; sectoral training and subsidized employment; expanded high school career development opportunities; preventative mental health services; and a range of capacity-building and system-strengthening projects, including a longitudinal data system and increased training for public agencies overseeing and administering workforce programs.

Figure 1. Workforce Development System Map



This map lays out a systems-level view of the young adult workforce development field. Each aspect is defined here and used to frame the recommendations that follow. The action steps and policy levers identify which part(s) of the system they are aiming to change.

Table 2. Proposed Annual Investment Increase

\$770 Million Call To Action

\$100 million	\$150 million	\$357 million	\$105 million	\$58 million
Bridge Programming	Sectoral Training	Subsidized Jobs	High School Degree Attainment and Career Preparation	Capacity Building and System Enhancement





1

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Collaboration

Encourage and reward collaboration across young adult workforce programs and providers.

Overview

New York City's young adult workforce ecosystem is composed of a diverse array of organizations, systems, and collectives that too often lack the capacity and incentives to work together. By encouraging a collaborative approach, the system can ensure that youth are better served through integrated services, seamless referrals, and innovative partnerships.



Action Steps

New York City's young adult workforce system stakeholders can make significant, measurable progress toward this recommendation by:

- A. Working toward the creation of a single New York City government agency to oversee policymaking, programs, and funding for out-of-school, out-of-work youth.** Although the Center for Youth Employment has worked to centralize young adult workforce policy, and the Department of Youth and Community Development oversees many youth-centered programs, there are still at least 14 city agencies currently delivering young adult workforce programs. This results in a lack of coordination at the city level, as well as opacity for providers hoping to identify and pursue funding opportunities. Having a lead agency would not only remedy this problem but also serve as a single point of contact for the 10 state agencies that fund, support, and oversee young adult workforce development initiatives in New York City.¹⁹
- B. Reconsidering procurement requirements and design to encourage collaboration.** By allowing and rewarding collaborative applications, funders can both incentivize partnerships and create access to city funding for smaller organizations that lack the capacity to provide a range of services on their own. Furthermore, funders should carve out funding explicitly intended to foster new alliances and cooperative efforts (e.g., by covering the cost of provider meetings or shared staffing structures).

The Rules

The Money

The Rules

The Infrastructure

The Money

C. Reducing or eliminating administrative barriers to participant data sharing and encouraging data transparency. When youth-serving agencies share relevant data on individual clients, they serve clients more rapidly and effectively. As proposed in *Re-envisioning the New York City Workforce System*, this collaboration should begin with the adoption of a shared assessment tool for young adults seeking workforce services, whose results can be shared across providers. It should then extend to program performance and completion data, along with case notes. This could create a “no wrong door” approach, whereby youth seeking services would be able to connect to the appropriate service or training, regardless of where they enter the system.²⁰ As an additional benefit, the publication of program performance data, particularly on outcomes for low-income clients and participants of color, can empower participants to make informed decisions about where to pursue services. The Infrastructure The Vehicles The Users

D. Advocating for increased support from and collaboration with the federal and state governments. As Albany and Washington, DC, create new programs and funding streams to support training in response to the pandemic and recession, a collective approach from New York City could help inform these decisions and ensure that the young adult workforce system secures the resources it needs to undertake critical work.²¹

The Movement

E. Working with private philanthropy to support innovative ideas. New York City is fortunate to have a robust philanthropic community that provides nearly \$80 million annually in funding for workforce development programs. Many organizations rely on private dollars for program operations, which should primarily be covered through government funding. This would create the space for philanthropic dollars to test and create innovative program models. These investments could be made in close partnership with the city, with government agencies committing to scaling those programs that prove to have the largest impact. The Money

F. Building new partnerships between youth-serving organizations and institutions of higher education. Higher education is undergoing a rapid reinvention due to a sharp decline in enrollment caused by the pandemic, and its institutions may be more willing than ever to pursue new partnerships. As a result, the time is ripe to replicate and scale successful models, such as community college–business partnerships that provide timely training for employers and support participants in gaining relevant work skills. For example, the National Skills Coalition is advocating that Congress revive the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training program, which funded the issuance of over 300,000 industry-recognized credentials before being defunded.²² The Vehicles The Infrastructure

Table 3. Potential Policy Levers

POLICY LEVER	SYSTEM ELEMENT(S) (from Figure 1)	AGENCY(IES) RESPONSIBLE	TIMELINE FOR NEXT ADMINISTRATION
<p>Centralize all funding and policies for young adult workforce development into a single city agency. Redesign the role of the Office of Workforce Development, or designate a separate office, to house all of the policies, funding, and programs geared toward young adult workforce development.</p>	<p>The Rules The Infrastructure</p>	<p>Mayor’s Office</p>	<p>First 6 months</p>
<p>Create a centralized database. Adopt the relevant city-level data-sharing recommendations in Accounting for Success: A Blueprint for Measuring the Performance of New York State’s Workforce Development System, which include developing an organized labor market information tool, a single and centrally managed set of outcome metrics for all programs and agencies, and a strategy to evaluate programs periodically to improve practice.²³</p>	<p>The Infrastructure</p>	<p>Office of Workforce Development</p>	<p>Year 1</p>
<p>Create a single website where young adults can access information about the programs and services offered throughout the city. Expand the city’s Career Discovery NYC website to include all programs in the city, including those that do not currently receive city funding, so that there is a centralized source of information about the opportunities available to young adults. An app version should also be created.</p>	<p>The Infrastructure</p>	<p>Agency designated to oversee young adult workforce programs (informed by Department of Youth and Community Development and Department of Small Business Services)</p>	<p>Year 2</p>

Priorities identified or emphasized by young adults:

✓ **a single website where young adults can access information about the programs and services offered throughout the city.**



2

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Focus on Equity

Prioritize economic mobility and pathways to prosperity for historically marginalized and disproportionately harmed communities.

Overview

The COVID-19 pandemic has done excessive damage to young adults of color and low-income communities. New policies and initiatives designed in response to this pandemic must meet the needs of these most-impacted groups.



Action Steps

New York City's young adult workforce system stakeholders can make significant, measurable progress toward this recommendation by:

A. Inviting and enabling broad participation in young adult workforce programs by designing initiatives with features that ensure the success of marginalized community members, such as subsidized employment, incentivized work-based learning, fast placement in entry-level jobs, and access to on-the-job training and skills training. The Vehicles

B. Using systems-level and place-based strategies to combat the structural poverty and racism that holds young people back from success. Workforce programs must be developed with an understanding of root causes. Moreover, stakeholders throughout the young adult workforce system can benefit from antiracism training and trauma-informed practice to ensure that programs and institutions do not perpetuate unjust power dynamics and oppressive practices. The Infrastructure

C. Designing initiatives that recognize the diversity of out-of-school, out-of-work young adults. Place-based, customized strategies built in collaboration with local communities will most effectively meet the distinct needs of individual neighborhoods and demographic groups. The process of shaping and adapting these initiatives should incorporate the wisdom of those with lived experiences of individual and structural barriers to success, and forego a one-size-fits-all model. The Infrastructure The Vehicles The Users

D. Prioritizing incentives and strategies that center economic mobility and prosperity as the desired ultimate outcome. Education completion, credential attainment, and employment can be critical metrics of success, but they do not guarantee that individuals can support themselves and their families. Future initiatives and funding opportunities should look beyond these indicators and focus instead on true economic well-being as an indicator of success. These initiatives should also invest in the proper data tracking systems to measure and track their success over time. Youth participating in focus groups to develop this agenda repeatedly expressed a fear of being unable to advance beyond minimum-wage jobs, which are not economically viable for them. The Frame

Priorities identified or emphasized by young adults:

✓ **access to on-the-job training** ✓ **prosperity as the desired ultimate outcome**

Youth participating in focus groups to develop this agenda repeatedly expressed a fear of being unable to advance beyond minimum-wage jobs, which are not economically viable for them.

Table 4. Potential Policy Levers

POLICY LEVER	SYSTEM ELEMENT(S) (from Figure 1)	AGENCY(IES) RESPONSIBLE	TIMELINE FOR NEXT ADMINISTRATION
<p>Incorporate antiracism and trauma-informed practices into funding. Requests for proposals (RFPs) for young adult workforce funding issued by the city should require applicants to conduct a root-cause analysis and name specific antiracist and trauma-informed strategies in their proposed programs.</p>	<p>The Movement</p>	<p>All agencies administering funds, guided by agency designated to oversee young adult workforce programs</p>	<p>First 6 months</p>
<p>Invest in programs connected to higher-wage jobs. Increase investment in high skills training programs that lead to jobs with higher wages. Public funding should be directed to job training programs that lead to career pathways to high-wage jobs.</p>	<p>The Money The Vehicles</p>	<p>All agencies administering funds, guided by agency designated to oversee young adult workforce programs</p>	<p>Year 1</p>
<p>Incorporate career development into secondary and postsecondary institutions. Budget for professional development for guidance and career development staff at the New York City Department of Education and CUNY in antiracist and trauma-informed practices, and provide them with the tools needed to help young people identify a career pathway beyond college enrollment and entry-level jobs. This strategy should include funding to build formal partnerships between educational institutions and workforce development programs.</p>	<p>The Money The Vehicles</p>	<p>Department of Education and CUNY</p>	<p>Year 2</p>

Table 4. Potential Policy Levers (continued)

POLICY LEVER	SYSTEM ELEMENT(S) (from Figure 1)	AGENCY(IES) RESPONSIBLE	TIMELINE FOR NEXT ADMINISTRATION
<p>Create subsidized jobs for young adults. The city should create more subsidized jobs for youth, building on models such as the Summer Youth Employment Program and Parks Opportunity Program, with a specific focus on sectoral training and physical/social infrastructure improvements.</p>	<p>The Money</p>	<p>Agency designated to oversee young adult workforce programs (informed by Department of Youth and Community Development and Department of Small Business Services)</p>	<p>Year 2</p>





3

RECOMMENDATION 3:

Employer Partnerships

Significantly expand partnerships with employers and industry groups to create employment and career pathway opportunities.

Overview

To ensure success in accelerating young people’s career advancement, the young adult workforce system must work in close partnership with employers and industry groups to ensure that programs are aligned with employer needs and preferences and that firms are well equipped to ensure the on-the-job success of skilled and motivated young adults.



Action Steps

New York City’s young adult workforce system stakeholders can make significant, measurable progress toward this recommendation by:

A. Centralizing employer engagement efforts and creating city-level industry partnerships in advance of RFPs.

Too often, the young adult workforce system loses out on valuable opportunities because employers are overwhelmed by requests from multiple agencies or don’t know how to engage the young adult workforce system. The city should intentionally work to improve and increase hiring opportunities for young adults through regular employer convenings and the negotiation of community hire agreements, such as the most recent project labor agreement with trade unions. In addition to city-level partnerships, the establishment of place-based industry/workforce roundtables composed of multiple employers and service providers can help create a centralized clearinghouse for information that informs curricula and allows for a rapid and coordinated response to funding opportunities. The Infrastructure

B. Proactively preparing employers to welcome, nurture, and grow talent from workforce programs.

Albeit unintentionally, many companies exhibit cultural and human resources practices that marginalize or alienate members of non-dominant groups. Employers partnering with the young adult workforce system should be strongly encouraged to participate in training and employ best practices in areas such as creating inclusive work cultures, mitigating implicit bias, and [deploying antiracism strategies](#). The Vehicles

C. Reframing employer partnerships from a focus on social responsibility to one on talent pipeline development. By understanding the fiscal, cultural, and business benefits of hiring diverse talent via relationships with young adult workforce programs, employers will see workforce development programs as an important added value. The New York Jobs CEO Council and OneTen are two initiatives working to diversify the workforce as an important business imperative. These initiatives provide a foundation for this work so that all employers see the value of a diverse workforce and the role that young adult workforce providers can play in building those pipelines. **The Frame**

D. Ensuring that workers' rights are upheld in traditional workplaces and in the gig economy. As inexperienced professionals who are vulnerable to abuses of power in the workplace, young adults may suffer discrimination or exploitation while lacking a robust understanding of rights and remedies. While the primary responsibility of labor law enforcement falls outside of the young adult workforce system, it is critical that young adults entering the workforce understand their rights and where to seek support if they experience mistreatment. Similarly, workforce programs should solicit data from participants and graduates and intervene with employer partners who seem to not be respecting the rights of their workers. **The Users**

Priorities identified or emphasized by young adults:

✓ **proactively preparing employers to welcome, nurture, and grow talent from workforce programs** ✓ **deploying antiracism strategies**

By understanding the fiscal, cultural, and business benefits of hiring diverse talent via relationships with young adult workforce programs, employers will see workforce development programs as an important added value.

Table 5. Potential Policy Levers

POLICY LEVER	SYSTEM ELEMENT(S) (from Figure 1)	AGENCY(IES) RESPONSIBLE	TIMELINE FOR NEXT ADMINISTRATION
<p>Support gig and freelance worker rights. Continue to adopt policies that support all workers, including gig and freelance workers, such as by extending antidiscrimination protection for gig workers and ensuring that gig work earnings do not disqualify a young person from receiving benefits.</p>	<p>The Users</p>	<p>Mayor’s Office, City Council, and Department of Small Business Services</p>	<p>Year 1</p>
<p>Create a central place for the city to facilitate connections with employers. Designate point people in the Office of Workforce Development or another agency as the city’s central point of engagement for employers, facilitating the talent pipeline from young adult workforce programs and ensuring that employers have the training and tools needed to support young people’s success in the workplace.</p>	<p>The Infrastructure</p>	<p>Office of Workforce Development</p>	<p>Year 2</p>
<p>Create workforce and economic development coalitions of providers and employers in each community district. Modeled after the Lower East Side Employment Network, these groups could facilitate collaboration between local employers and incoming economic development and workforce development providers, driving local training based on employer needs and offering recruitment and placement services.</p>	<p>The Infrastructure</p>	<p>City Council and Department of Small Business Services</p>	<p>Year 2</p>



4

RECOMMENDATION 4:

Continuum of Services

Create a seamless continuum of integrated services across education and youth development institutions.

Overview

To effectively support young adult participants over time, New York City's young adult workforce system must ensure that young people can utilize multiple points of entry and experience uninterrupted transitions between programs, systems, and service providers.



Action Steps

New York City's young adult workforce system stakeholders can make significant, measurable progress toward this recommendation by:

A. Providing early exposure to career development and workforce opportunities throughout the public education system. Studies show that the exploration of career options at a young age can have lasting effects; a recent literature review concluded that “young people’s pathways are formed early—with career aspirations often following traditional gender stereotypes, and tending to reflect students’ interest and achievement in traditional school subjects. A lack of interest in STEM subjects at age 10 is unlikely to change by age 14.”²⁴

The Rules

The Vehicles

B. Focusing on intervention wherever possible so that youth don't drop out of school or the labor force. By identifying and intervening with young adults who are on the cusp of becoming out of school and out of work, the young adult workforce system can leverage its existing public education and community-based programs to keep youth on a pathway to academic and professional success. Focus groups conducted by the city's Disconnected Youth Task Force have identified a number of factors that lead to youth becoming out of school and out of work, including the absence of a supportive adult in their life and the absence of adequate preparation for postsecondary or vocational training. By preemptively acting to prevent disconnection, the city's workforce system can keep young adults on track. As noted by the city's Disconnected Youth Task Force, “Research and analysis ... suggest that a greater emphasis on career exploration and work readiness in school

programming can help keep young adults engaged and ease their transition from classroom to workplace.”²⁵ The Infrastructure The Vehicles

C. Integrating mental health services, social-emotional learning, and financial literacy programs into schools and community-based providers as skill-building mechanisms. Long-term professional and personal success requires workers to deploy transferable professional skills, be emotionally resilient, and navigate a series of financial complexities. By creating contextualized offerings that embed these critical areas of development within academic and technical training, the young adult workforce system can more effectively prepare young adults to thrive at work and pursue economic mobility. The Vehicles

D. Increasing the availability of bridge programs. These initiatives, which typically provide long-term, multifaceted support to students and families in low-income areas so that they are able to access more intensive advanced training and postsecondary institutions, have proven effective in enabling participants to achieve postsecondary completion and secure future employment and advancement.²⁶ Some of these bridge programs should serve as a link between high school equivalency programs and subsidized jobs. The Vehicles The Money

E. Revamping postsecondary pathways to encourage successful transitions to employment. Data show that out-of-school, out-of-work young adults in New York City have higher levels of educational attainment than ever before, which suggests that the pipeline from postsecondary education to employment is not as strong as it could be. Significant investment should be made to strengthen this misalignment by better integrating career services and career development into postsecondary curricula in both traditional and alternative pathways.²⁷ The Vehicles

F. Integrating stackable, industry-recognized credentials throughout the workforce system and ensuring that young adults can easily access these credentials. Stackable credentials are a sequence of work readiness benchmarks that represent qualifications for a specific skill or role. For example, a young adult might get their certified nursing assistant credential and work as a certified nursing assistant for a few years while pursuing a registered nursing degree. By enabling students to earn these credentials while progressing through training programs, the young adult workforce system can help bridge the gap between classroom learning and employment opportunities while helping participants demonstrate their increasing readiness to seek employment in a new field. The Vehicles The Rules

- ✓ providing early exposure to career development and workforce opportunities throughout the public education system
- ✓ financial literacy programs
- ✓ revamping postsecondary pathways to encourage successful transitions to employment

Table 6. Potential Policy Levers

POLICY LEVER	SYSTEM ELEMENT(S) (from Figure 1)	AGENCY(IES) RESPONSIBLE	TIMELINE FOR NEXT ADMINISTRATION
<p>Invest in training on mental health, social-emotional learning, and financial literacy. Budget funds for the New York City Department of Education to build teacher and administrator capacity to understand these issues and secure community partners and volunteers who can help address them at school.</p>	<p>The Money</p>	<p>City Council and Department of Education</p>	<p>Year 1</p>
<p>Fund alternative pathways. Increase funding for transfer schools and other alternative pathway programs, providing additional resources for them to recruit students who are at risk of dropping out.</p>	<p>The Money</p>	<p>City Council and Department of Education</p>	<p>Year 2</p>
<p>Increase funding and opportunities for bridge programming. These programs will better prepare young adults for success in further education and job training, placing them on track for career success.</p>	<p>The Money</p>	<p>City Council, Department of Education, CUNY, Department of Small Business Services, and Department of Youth and Community Development</p>	<p>Year 2</p>

Data show that out-of-school, out-of-work young adults in New York City have higher levels of educational attainment than ever before, which suggests that the pipeline from postsecondary education to employment is not as strong as it could be. Intentional investment should be made to strengthen this misalignment by better integrating career services and career development into postsecondary curricula in both traditional and alternative pathways.





5

RECOMMENDATION 5:

Youth-Centered Strategies

Design youth-informed solutions that center young adults, their experiences, and goals.

Overview

Ongoing engagement with young adults, their families, and their allies is critical to designing new programs and enhancing existing ones. Young people know their assets and barriers, and solutions must be holistic to be effective.



Action Steps

New York City's young adult workforce system stakeholders can make significant, measurable progress toward this recommendation by:

A. Partnering with young people in meaningful ways at all stages of designing, implementing, and evaluating initiatives and projects. The direct input of young adults can help surface needs and opportunities that might not be obvious to other stakeholders, highlight innovative approaches for participant recruitment and service delivery, and provide unvarnished feedback on program effectiveness. *For example, the young adults who attended the forum that informed the development of this agenda highlighted the need for training programs to address diverse learning styles, especially given the shift to remote learning spurred by the pandemic.*

The Users

The Culture

B. Creating tailored workforce programs that meet the needs and accommodate the circumstances of specific populations of young people, such as those who lack stable housing, are aging out of foster care, lack documentation, have disabilities, or are reentering the community from the juvenile justice system.²⁸ Members of these groups may face severe logistical and legal barriers and may also be more likely to experience discrimination. Initiatives ought to be identified and modified for these groups, with input from young people and subject-matter experts to ensure their effectiveness. This program flexibility should also address the needs of young adults who are working while attending school or training

programs. Often, program requirements force these young adults to choose between the two rather than providing them with the flexibility to do both.

The Users

The Vehicles

C. Providing robust access to wraparound services to ensure that young people pursuing professional and economic advancement are able to seamlessly access social services and benefits, such as access to food, housing, and physical and mental health services.

The Vehicles

The Money

D. Enabling and encouraging young adults to exert individual agency in identifying their assets and setting personal goals. It is critical for the young adult workforce system and its members to recognize that each young adult has a set of skills, assets, and strengths that they can build on in pursuing economic mobility. Rather than being tracked into specific sectors based on demand or based on the programs that are most easily accessed in their individual neighborhoods, out-of-school, out-of-work young people need to have agency in selecting which careers to pursue, in the same way that more privileged people do. *Young adults also deserve choice and voice in pursuing their professional futures, and they are most likely to achieve economic well-being if they are presented with options rather than being directed to a single or available training program in their neighborhood.*

The Users

E. Expanding mentoring opportunities as a core component of workforce programs. A review of mentoring initiatives in young adult workforce programs concluded that these relationships could be impactful in “improving youth’s employability by building the necessary skills and work experiences that allow youth to succeed in a job and advance in a career path; facilitating continued academic engagement and achievement; and supporting youth in the development of noncognitive skills necessary for successful employment.”²⁹

The Vehicles

The Culture

Priorities identified or emphasized by young adults:

- ✓ training programs that address diverse learning styles
- ✓ mental health services
- ✓ choice and voice in pursuing professional futures in all different sectors
- ✓ expanded mentoring opportunities

Table 7. Potential Policy Levers

POLICY LEVER	SYSTEM ELEMENT(S) (from Figure 1)	AGENCY(IES) RESPONSIBLE	TIMELINE FOR NEXT ADMINISTRATION
<p>Engage young people in proposal development. RFPs for young adult workforce funding issued by the city should require applicants to engage young people in the design of their programs and proposal development and to have a young adult committee sign off on proposals before submitted.</p>	<p>The Rules</p> <p>The Culture</p>	<p>All agencies administering funds, guided by agency designated to oversee young adult workforce programs</p>	<p>First 6 months</p>
<p>Fund mental health services and mentorship. Increase city tax levy funding spending on mental health services and mentorship for young adults delivered through trusted community organizations and schools.</p>	<p>The Money</p>	<p>City Council, Department of Education, and Department of Youth and Community Development, guided by agency designated to oversee young adult workforce programs</p>	<p>Year 1</p>



6

RECOMMENDATION 6:

Capacity Building

Build the capacity of workforce providers to deliver high-quality, culturally competent, market-aligned services to young adults.

Overview

Funders, intermediaries, and collaboratives can improve services and outcomes for young adults by providing impactful training, resources, and data to New York City's diverse array of workforce providers.



Action Steps

New York City's young adult workforce system stakeholders can make significant, measurable progress toward this recommendation by:

A. Investing in professional development and ongoing training for workforce development professionals.

Frontline staff, managers, and executive teams all benefit from regular access to education, reflection, and coaching on industry trends and evidence-based best practices. Specific curricula based on the needs of certain subpopulations of young people (e.g., people without homes, those involved in the criminal justice system, people with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ youth) should be developed. Providing up-to-date information on industry and labor market trends would be especially useful for the young adult workforce development community. This professional development money should include investment in data, continuous improvement, and ongoing learning for all workforce development professionals. Finally, support should be provided for staff regarding their own mental health and wellness to mitigate the impact of vicarious trauma and direct staff to mental health resources as needed.

The Infrastructure

The Money

The Rules

B. Allowing flexibility for organizations to design programs that meet local needs.

Individual cohorts of out-of-school, out-of-work youth with shared experiences may benefit from customized service delivery models, similar to what was accomplished through the Young Adult Sectoral Employment Project (YASEP), which built customized sectoral pathways through partnerships among community-based organizations, sector programs, and employers. Customized service delivery models could meet the needs of a given subpopulation

(e.g., young adults without homes), the needs of a given sector (e.g., the healthcare sector as a result of the pandemic), or the needs of a specific community (e.g., a neighborhood facing a rezoning or other economic development opportunity). Where possible, funders should allow providers to customize program design and delivery models, and therefore intended outcomes, to meet the needs of specific communities. The Vehicles The Rules

C. Incorporating the needs, skills, and goals of youth participants in evaluation tools and standards. As discussed elsewhere, young adult workforce programs are most effective when they are responsive to the assets and desires of their participants. Accordingly, efforts to assess the effectiveness of programs and service providers should not be uniform but instead reflect the desires and objectives of individual participants.³⁰ At the same time, these metrics should be developmentally appropriate for the age cohort served by individual programs and services. The Rules The Culture

D. Creating training programs for non-traditional jobs, industries, and work arrangements, including entrepreneurship and self-employment. Due to lifestyle considerations, personal preferences, or labor market demand, some youth may desire a career outside the bounds of a single job or industry. Young adults should be able to access training programs and sources of information that prepare them to navigate the financial and legal complexities of alternative work arrangements, such as freelancing or work in the gig economy. The Vehicles The Money

Due to lifestyle considerations, personal preferences, or labor market demand, some youth may desire a career outside the bounds of a single job or industry. Young adults should be able to access training programs and sources of information that prepare them to navigate the financial and legal complexities of alternative work arrangements, such as freelancing or work in the gig economy.


Table 8. Potential Policy Levers

POLICY LEVER	SYSTEM ELEMENT(S) (from Figure 1)	AGENCY(IES) RESPONSIBLE	TIMELINE FOR NEXT ADMINISTRATION
<p>Allow flexibility in RFPs for young adult workforce programs. When possible based on requirements from funders, RFPs issued by the city should provide flexibility on target outcomes and metrics to allow local organizations and stakeholders to name the program goals and measurement plans that best meet participants’ needs and that speak to market demand and changes.</p>	<p>The Money</p>	<p>All agencies administering funds, guided by agency designated to oversee young adult workforce programs</p>	<p>First 6 months</p>
<p>Fund regular professional development for city employees and grantees. Require each agency that administers or oversees young adult workforce funding to budget and plan for professional development for agency staff (agency budget line item) and contracted organizations (set-aside in approved contractor budget).</p>	<p>The Money The Infrastructure</p>	<p>City Council and all agencies administering funds, guided by agency designated to oversee young adult workforce programs</p>	<p>Year 1</p>
<p>Fund a user-friendly online labor market information hub. This hub should be free and accessible to all and should have up-to-date labor market information that is easy to access and interpret. The hub should be funded at the state level and should offer regular trainings for workforce providers on how to apply this information to program design.</p>	<p>The Money The Infrastructure</p>	<p>City of New York partnership with New York State Department of Labor</p>	<p>Year 2</p>



Call to Action

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated numerous challenges for out-of-school, out-of-work young adults and the institutions that serve them. However, there are many reasons for hope, as made evident by the young adult workforce community that helped create this agenda. Above all else, the community has demonstrated a remarkable dedication to ensuring that the young people most harmed by the current economic downturn are given pathways to opportunity and security. As a new Congress and presidential administration begin their work in Washington, DC, and as we look forward to a new mayoral administration in New York City, we call on every stakeholder who cares about our young people's future to join us in making this agenda a reality. Together, we can create an equitable recovery that gives young adults in New York City the futures they deserve.



There are many reasons for hope, as made evident by the young adult workforce community that helped create this agenda. Above all else, the community has demonstrated a remarkable dedication to ensuring that the young people most harmed by the current economic downturn are given pathways to opportunity and security.



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The Staten Island Foundation
Union Bank

Appendix

Agenda Development Timeline	
MONTH	MEETING
November 2020	Planning committee meeting #1
December 2020	Fieldwide convening
December 2020	Planning committee meeting #2
January 2021	Planning committee meeting #3
January and February 2021	Work group meetings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infrastructure and policy • Labor market information, employer partnerships, and emerging sectors • Program design and support services • Systems collaboration and accountability • Young adult leadership, power, and autonomy
February 2021	Planning committee meeting #4
February 2021	Young adult forum
March 2021	Stakeholder review of agenda draft

Promising Practices from Across the Country

The following examples of innovative approaches being used across the country offer useful models for achieving the action steps aligned with each recommendation in this agenda.

RECOMMENDATION 1: **Collaboration**

Jobs for the Future’s Back on Track Initiative. The Back on Track initiative, designed by Jobs for the Future and recently rolled out at five sites in Texas, empowers community-based organizations to support returning college dropouts in preparing for postsecondary education through a three-phased approach focused on enriched preparation, postsecondary bridging, and first-year support.³¹

Department of Youth and Community Development Cohort-Based Training. The Department of Youth and Community Development contracts with the Workforce Professionals Training Institute, the Literacy Assistance Center, and JobsFirstNYC to deliver training and technical assistance to Advance and Earn programs, a multiyear career pathways initiative that combines comprehensive high school equivalency test preparation, employer-recognized trainings, credentials and certifications, and paid internships. These cohort-based trainings provide spaces for program directors and staff to discuss successful practices and troubleshoot challenges, and they are typically focused on a guiding topic, such as managing teams or equity and inclusion. These settings provide an ongoing opportunity for relationship-building and peer support across city contractors.

Performance Partnership Pilot (P3). Los Angeles’ P3 initiative brought together more than 50 youth-serving stakeholders, including nonprofit organizations, philanthropists, city agencies, and educational providers, to coordinate the provision of various social services to youth. This project was part of a Department of Labor effort that permitted select communities to treat federal rules and funding streams flexibly.³¹ Los Angeles was relatively unique among P3 participants in its explicit desire to use P3 to pursue lasting systems change and realignment in service of encouraging cross-sector collaboration to support disconnected youth. With this intent in mind, the P3 effort led to the creation of the ReLAY Institute, a joint venture hosted by five regional California State Universities, designed to create a permanent hub for “innovation, research, activities, and information sharing” in service of out-of-school, out-of-work young adults.³² Today, the ReLAY Institute serves as a central coordinating body that identifies underserved youth and missing services and initiates collective action to address those needs.

2



RECOMMENDATION 2: **Focus on Equity**

LIFT-NY's focus on economic stability and mobility. LIFT-NY partners with CUNY to deliver integrated financial, educational, and employment coaching along with direct cash payments to community college students who are parents. Trained coaches partner with students to build their personal well-being, financial strength, and social connections, ultimately fortifying CUNY's career services programming to help them attain employment upon graduation.

Orange County's Earn and Learn. In Orange County, California, a new earn-and-learn entrepreneurship-focused program created during the COVID-19 pandemic will pay wages during training to participating young adults as they progress in a variety of training modules, ranging from vocational training to financial literacy. This program is unique in its focus on teaching transferable employability skills through the lens of entrepreneurship, as young adult participants are supported in developing and refining a business plan throughout the program.³⁴

3



RECOMMENDATION 3: **Employer Partnerships**

Boston Private Industry Council (PIC) shift to year-round employment. After many years of successfully helping 3,000 young adults attain summer employment through a public-private partnership that includes Boston public schools, the City of Boston, and industry leaders, PIC has turned its attention to shifting those jobs from summer to year-round work experiences. PIC career specialists now support young adults in transitioning into school-year roles to provide more extensive supported work experience than the summer months allow.

Lower East Side Employment Network (LESEN): LESEN is a partnership between eight community-based organizations and Manhattan's Community Board 3 to improve connections between local jobseekers and employers. In response to neighborhood rezoning and incoming hospitality development, LESEN has focused on connecting local residents to quality jobs in high-demand industries. It also works closely with the hospitality sector to design customized training programs and streamline recruiting processes for hotels and related businesses. Since its creation, LESEN has engaged nearly 200 employers and facilitated 900 local hires.

4



RECOMMENDATION 4: **Continuum of Services**

Stackable Credential Toolkit. Community colleges offer the best example of stackable credentials to date, as evidenced by the US Department of Education’s Mapping Upward initiative. This project supported 12 colleges in embedding stackable, industry-recognized credentials within technical associate degree programs. Promising practices from this effort are discussed in the Center for Occupational Research and Development’s *Introduction to Stackable Credentials* toolkit,³⁵ which builds on earlier reports highlighting case studies that explore how stackable credential programs were implemented at an array of community colleges.³⁶

Wisconsin’s Academic and Career Planning process. In an effort to mandate career exploration activities for younger students, Wisconsin has introduced a universal requirement for school districts to engage every student in an Academic and Career Planning (ACP) process, beginning in the 6th grade, to help students connect their interests and skills with an understanding of career and educational pathways, and start planning for their futures.³⁷ Some districts in the state have extended ACP programs to even younger students; for example, the West Allis–West Milwaukee School District has incorporated a project-based career exploration element into elementary schools to inspire students to think about the connection between school and careers.³⁸

5



RECOMMENDATION 5: **Youth-Centered Strategies**

One Degree. One Degree is a technology platform that aggregates community resources for people in need. It currently serves New York City with support from the Foster Care Excellence Fund and in partnership with Fair Futures through a searchable and sortable directory of workforce training programs and alternative high schools. To more holistically meet the needs of the city’s out-of-school, out-of-work young adults, New York City stakeholders could explore expanding the scope of One Degree’s New York platform to include a broader array of resources that could benefit youth, such as services for those experiencing food insecurity or mental health distress. One Degree already hosts this sort of expanded catalog in other communities.³⁹

YouthBuild USA. YouthBuild USA is a national nonprofit with a lengthy record of formally involving participants and alumni in decision making. The organization’s Policy Council model, which is a core part of the program’s model at all its program locations (including those in New York City), gives young people the opportunity to offer meaningful guidance on questions of policy, hiring, and programmatic evaluation.⁴⁰

6



RECOMMENDATION 6: **Capacity Building**

BX Start. When organizations are allowed the flexibility to design programs that meet local needs, they can create programs that are aligned with the interests of young adults as a promising way to entice them to participate in training programs, particularly when presented as natural outgrowths of affinity groups. For example, the Dreamyard Project in the Bronx operates BX Start, an innovative initiative aimed at engaging young adults enthralled by video games. It offers a video game center along with various programs and events, including training programs and hiring events in this booming industry.⁴¹ Furthermore, BX Start was designed specifically to unlock career pathways in gaming for youth of color and women, who are often passionate consumers of an industry that is predominantly white and male.⁴²

National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability report. The National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth has collected evidence demonstrating the impact of investing in youth service professionals, drawing on training efforts from Baltimore, Los Angeles, and New York's own Adult Career and Continuing Education Services–Vocational Rehabilitation program that showed evidence of long-term implementation of best practices and other positive behavior change as a result of professional development.⁴³



Endnotes



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