



December 20, 2014

Lili Allen
Program Director
Back on Track Designs
Jobs for the Future
88 Broad Street, 8th floor
Boston, MA 02110

Dear Lili,

On behalf of the Boston Opportunity Youth Collaborative (OYC), the Boston Private Industry Council and the Boston Opportunity Agenda are pleased to submit this proposal for funding from the Jobs for the Future/Aspen Institute Social Innovation Fund project.

The decision to focus on young adults – 20-24 years old who are out of school and out of work – came naturally to the diverse group of stakeholders that has been meeting regularly, as a whole and in committee, since January of 2013. More than four times as many opportunity youth are in this age group as compared to 16-19 year-olds, yet there is very little public attention given to their plight and not much in the way of programming available to address their needs.

Our proposal sustains a remarkably inclusive community engagement process that has benefited from expert facilitation and high quality staff support, as well as a vibrant Youth Voice Project which features both veterans from previous years and new Peer Leaders. Boston Opportunity Youth Collaborative (OYC) members have examined data, listened to one another, set priorities, agreed on a strategic plan, and selected program providers to implement the plan. Dozens of individuals and organizations have participated in the development of this proposal and will continue to participate in its implementation.

The Boston OYC has already committed to reaching these young adults through a new Connection Center. A site and an operator have been chosen, and we are ready to open in an office setting within the Ruggles Street MBTA station in Roxbury. A dynamic nonprofit organization, X-Cel Education, will staff the Center, which will conduct outreach, intake, assessment, and referral. This operation will make opportunity youth visible to the community and provide an in-depth look at their needs and their potential.

This new Connection Center will engage young adults who don't have the option of returning to the public school system and don't know how to get back on track toward a career that will make them financially independent. Our Boston proposal also invests in postsecondary bridging, persistence coaching, employment services, and occupational training. This new capacity, within four partner providers, will be dedicated primarily to the young adults who come through the Connection Center. In addition, we have forged exciting new relationships with our community colleges. Boston has two new community college presidents, and each of them has joined us for national Opportunity Youth convenings over the past year.

Though the program components of our new proposal will focus on 20-24 year-olds, the conversation within the Collaborative will continue to include 16-19 year-olds who have left school without a diploma. Boston's Re-Engagement Center continues to bring back more young people than the system can accommodate appropriately. This dynamic keeps the Collaborative, as well as Boston's public and private sector leaders, aware of the dropout crisis that underlies so much economic and social distress.

Boston is proud that it has been able to cut its dropout rate in half over the past eight years. We know that we have much more to do in this area, but we are also confident enough to expand our view of this crisis by reaching out to a new population of opportunity youth.

Sincerely,



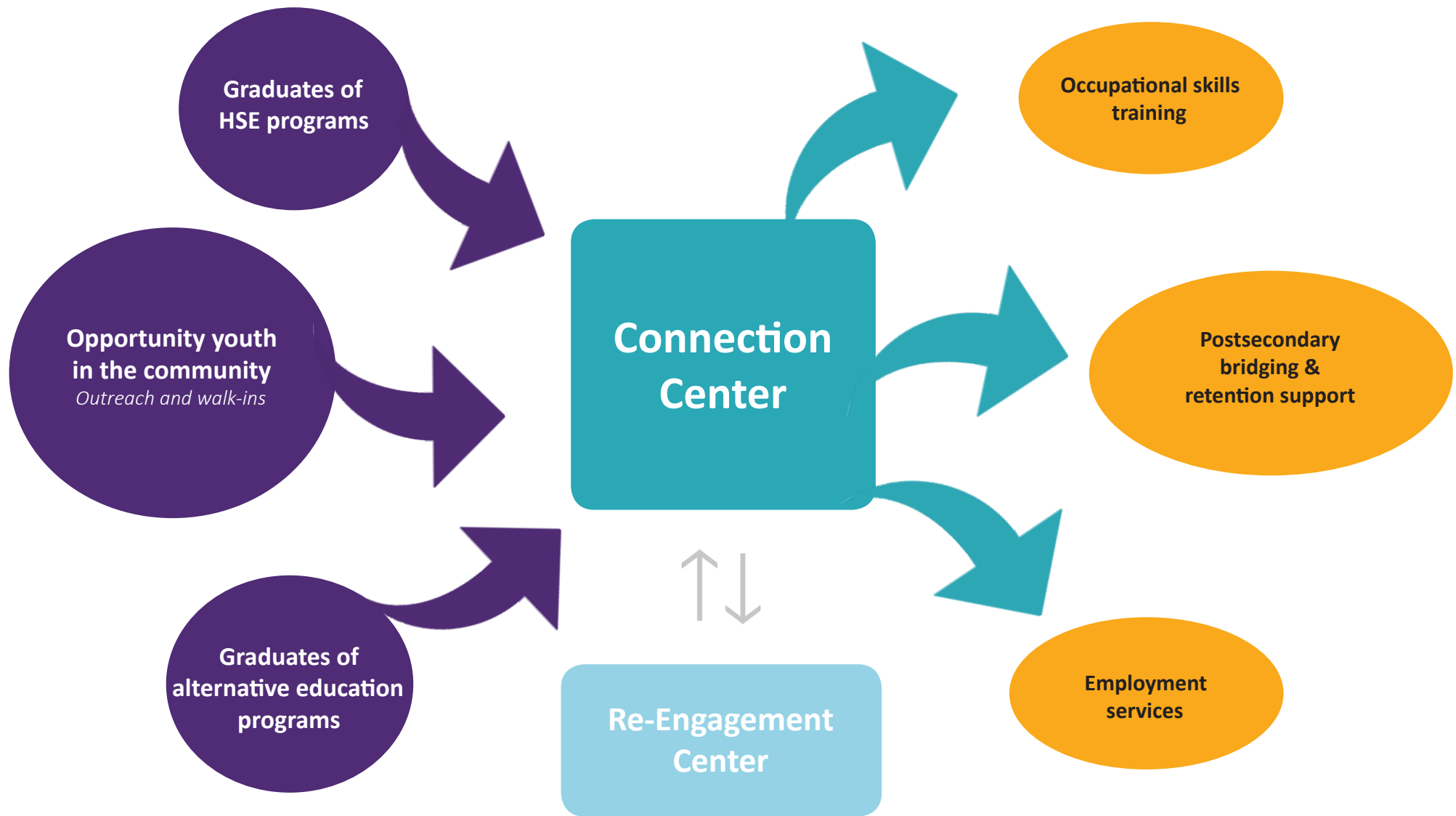
Neil Sullivan
Executive Director
Boston Private Industry Council



Kristin McSwain
Executive Director
Boston Opportunity Agenda

Implementation plan for Boston's opportunity youth proposal

Pathways to career-oriented employment and financial independence



Proposal to Jobs for the Future / Aspen Forum for Community Solutions (abridged)
Boston Opportunity Youth Collaborative
Submitted December 20, 2014

High-Performing Nonprofits

A. Leadership aligned around OYC's implementation and scaling of Back on Track interventions

The Boston Private Industry Council (PIC) and the Boston Opportunity Agenda (BOA) jointly convene the Boston Opportunity Youth Collaborative (OYC), a dynamic collaborative of 80 stakeholders working to improve systems and outcomes for disconnected 16 to 24 year-olds in Boston. The work began with a planning grant in 2013, and this year, the OYC received a one-year \$150,000 implementation grant from the Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund to:

- 1) reconnect young adults (16-24) to differentiated education and employment pathways,
- 2) use innovative solutions to fill gaps and better connect stakeholders in the systems that currently serve opportunity youth, and
- 3) strengthen its efforts to affect systems and policy changes at the local and state levels.

The PIC and the BOA bring distinct strengths to the OYC. The PIC staff excels in convening, connecting, and measurement activities. The BOA organizes public and private leaders and funders to set priorities across the cradle-to-career spectrum. Finally, the OYC benefits from the expert guidance of facilitator Mo Barbosa of Health Resources in Action.

Robust Cross-Sector Collaborative

On December 17, the dedicated stakeholders of the OYC – representing postsecondary institutions, the BPS, local community-based organizations, philanthropic partners, and city and state agencies – came together to finalize this proposal, which promises to make opportunity youth a major focus for public policy and programming in Boston for years to come. The excitement in the room built as various organizations stepped forward to take responsibility for building a new opportunity youth pathway system – a new Connection Center for disconnected young adults, career pathways, youth voice, data sharing, and a broad-based mobilization on behalf of opportunity youth.

OYC partners have been meeting since March 2013 to make a plan for creating new pathways and improved outcomes for opportunity youth in Boston. The Collaborative integrates a wide variety of players from the youth and adult service sectors, from postsecondary education, workforce development, youth development, and social services. This high-level conversation has created an environment in which community colleges and adult skills training programs have become eager to include opportunity youth in their programs and to work with youth development agencies to support them.

Youth leadership is a cornerstone of the OYC. Facilitated by experienced staff from DSNI and BYSN, a team of paid youth Peer Leaders spoke to opportunity youth around Boston, conducting focus groups to glean recommendations for what disconnected youth need to succeed. The Peer Leaders attended OYC meetings and their input was invaluable in planning pathways. In the OYC's initial planning year, the Peer Leaders'

work culminated in a series of recommendations that included opening a Connection Center and continuing to hire youth to collaborate on program design. A new team was recently hired for year two to continue their predecessors' work. They will attend meetings, conduct surveys around the Connection Center and new pathways, and provide feedback to the OYC and the pathway programs. In addition, they will work with OYC members to help build youth input structures within individual member organizations and agencies.

During its first planning year, the OYC went through a collaborative decision-making process in which members considered a great deal of research, data, member experience, and youth voice input. The OYC collectively planned pathways for three segments of opportunity youth: 16-19 year olds, 20-24 year olds with a diploma or high school equivalency (HSE), and 20-24 year olds without a credential. Over the course of the year, we identified existing programs that serve opportunity youth: the REC and alternative high school programs, HSE-to-college programs, adult training programs that served some opportunity youth, employment programs, and college completion programs for on-track high school graduates.

Our process revealed a challenge and an opportunity: of the approximately 12,000 opportunity youth in our city, 72% of them are youth who have completed high school but remain disconnected from school and work, and this group has the least amount of targeted programming available to them. As a result, the OYC identified older disconnected youth with a credential as the largest and most under-served segment of the opportunity youth population in Boston, and chose them as our focus population for implementation. At the same time, we elected to continue advocacy in the area of dropout prevention and recovery as a secondary activity.

The OYC reviewed the literature on best practices such as Back on Track interventions and career academies. In an iterative process, we developed a wish list for elements that would enhance existing pathways for opportunity youth. This list became the foundation for our proposed interventions. Those interventions are:

- The Connection Center: an outreach, intake, assessment, and referral center for OY
- Navigation coaching to help opportunity youth make the transition between programs along longitudinal pathways and to persist in completing those programs
- Career explorations to give young people experience that will inform their education and career decisions
- Supported pathways through college
- Increased occupational training capacity for young adults

Throughout our process, we collected information on the funding landscape for pathway elements that the group identified as crucial to opportunity youths' success. These activities sparked the ongoing conversation about existing structures and programs for opportunity youth, and it enabled the Collaborative to develop a clear plan of action for addressing our priority issues. In recent months, the OYC has begun to put its planned pathway elements and enhancements into place.

Strong, Specific, Achievable Plan for Implementing Interventions

A. Identification of intervention

The OYC will focus largely on Postsecondary/Career Bridging interventions for opportunity youth. However, we are including some Enriched Preparation through an HSE-to-college program for those young adults who come to the new Connection Center without a high school diploma or HSE credential.

B. Specific schools/programs

The strongest consensus among Collaborative members was around the need for a “Connection Center” for opportunity youth who already have a high school diploma or HSE. The high volume of traffic and surprisingly positive outcomes at Boston’s Re-Engagement Center (REC) over the last five years has demonstrated that disconnected youth have a strong desire to reconnect and need a central point of contact to do so. Every year, over 800 students visit the REC, with 400 enrolling and about 100 graduating each year. We wrote the Connection Center pathway element into our Aspen OYIF grant as an action research project. We issued an RFP in an open and competitive process, with a committee of OYC members overseeing the process.

Eight community-based agencies submitted proposals in October. The committee conducted follow-up visits with the top four agencies, and, in late November, elected to award the contract to X-Cel Education, a local community-based organization and HSE-to-college provider. X-Cel Education won the contract due to its experience serving opportunity youth, supporting them to complete both HSE and postsecondary credentials in the context of career exploration and development. Its 68% first-year persistence rate has been nationally recognized. The Connection Center will conduct outreach to and recruit opportunity youth with a high school credential, assess their needs and interests, refer them to appropriate programs and services, and dispatch navigation coaching to help them make successful transitions. As the Connection Center provider, X-Cel Education will assess clients over several visits, looking to identify assets, barriers, career interests, and personal interests. Once X-Cel develops a personalized plan for each youth, the team will provide a supportive handoff to their next step, following the young person’s progress for at least the first year. The OYC plans to use its new data system to follow individuals beyond the first year.

The Connection Center team at X-Cel is currently meeting with agencies from all over the city to develop a robust referral network of partnerships to both engage young people and bring them to the Connection Center, and to serve as referral points. Through the OYC’s program census, we learned that many programs serving opportunity youth face the challenge of filling available seats with youth who are a good match. With the launch of the Connection Center, we will increase effective “best fit” supported referrals to these programs, leveraging more available seats. At the same time, through funded service contracts (see chart below) as well as in-kind services provided by OYC members, we plan to build a system of pathways for individuals and to strengthen the transitions among second-chance programs, postsecondary education, and occupational training.

The opportunity to apply for a SIF grant put our other pathway elements in play, particularly because they were a good fit with the Back on Track model. One lesson learned from the REC is that without a range of

appropriate programs to which youth can be referred, outreach and referral hubs can get backed up while youth wait for programs. Continuing our commitment to open process, the OYC elected to identify specific programs to serve as vendors through a Request for Qualifications (RFQ), broadcast widely among the OYC and other networks. We were specifically interested in programs that would increase the referral destinations available to youth through the soon-to-be-opened Connection Center.

We envisioned the programs selected as first steps onto career pathways for the range of young people coming through the Center and the anchor programs we will highlight and evaluate within the SIF grant. Composed of a cross-section of OYC member organizations, the RFQ Committee selected four pathway programs that will provide different options for young people to start their college and career pathways – College Bound Dorchester (CBD), Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción (IBA), Jewish Vocational Service (JVS), and Asian American Civic Association (AACA). All four are run by high-performing community-based organizations that provide postsecondary or career development services.

Organization	Agency Services	Proposed Services	OY Cohort	Agency Outcomes
College Bound Dorchester (CBD)	HSE credentialing, postsecondary preparation, college coaching	Postsecondary bridging, retention support	45 total <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30 bridge • 15 first-year college support 	74% first-year persistence or graduation rates
Inquilinos Boricuas en Acción (IBA)	HSE credentialing, postsecondary preparation, employability training, career coaching, job placement, on-site childcare	HSE preparation Postsecondary bridging, retention support Employability training, career planning	25 total <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 HSE • 10 bridge • 5 first-year college support 	37% graduation rate from community college Associate’s degree and certificate programs
Jewish Vocational Service (JVS), pharmacy technician training	Employment services, adult education and training	12-week occupational training, internship, national and state certification, job placement	8 total	75% completion rate, 67% job placement rate
Asian American Civic Association (AACA)	Job training and placement	Employment services, career exploration	65 total	77% job placement rate

Our collaboration with Boston’s community colleges is a powerful element of the proposal. Presidents Pam Eddinger of Bunker Hill Community College (BHCC) and Valerie Roberson of Roxbury Community College (RCC) have agreed to serve identified cohorts of opportunity youth as partners in our effort. Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology (BFIT) is also deeply involved in the OYC, and we have planned to work with BFIT to support opportunity youth attending that institution as well. We have secured memoranda of understanding with nine other pathway partner organizations from the OYC, who will make referrals to and accept referrals from the Connection Center and create a pathway network for youth with an array of services and opportunities.

C. Strategy for aligning systems, resources, and policies to scale and sustain pathways for OY

Our convening efforts support the success of our implementation pilot and scaling strategy. We will continue to convene monthly OYC meetings, including both youth and adult stakeholders. Our collective plan of action and our implementation elements were developed within these meetings over the last twenty-two months. Going forward, this forum will provide a critical feedback loop for our implementation project.

We will use our collective impact process for system alignment and scaling to:

- work with two-year colleges to provide more student support and career connections for first-generation college students,
- work with adult skills training programs to provide more on-ramps for opportunity youth,
- encourage dropout recovery programs to provide postsecondary bridging and coaching, and
- create a data infrastructure to track opportunity youth through secondary and postsecondary education and into careers.

Community college capacity: The first part of our scaling strategy is to help community colleges better equip themselves to succeed with opportunity youth in the areas of student support and career connections. Pell grants are the most accessible and least limited funding stream for expanding access to postsecondary pathways for opportunity youth. The OYC will work with community colleges and community-based organizations to organize convenings for integration of campus and community support of opportunity youth. BHCC piloted the first such convening in August 2014. Both RCC and BHCC have expressed interest in working together to increase coaching for these students and to minimize the need for developmental education and accelerate progress through these courses.

Adult training programs: The second part of the strategy is to create on-ramps to adult training programs. We will work with SkillWorks, a local workforce development partnership, to create on-ramps into training for opportunity youth. SkillWorks recently secured a grant from the National Fund for Workforce Solutions to provide opportunity youth with training options. SkillWorks members participate in a learning community to share practices and receive professional development around recruitment and instruction strategies for this age group. In addition, OYC members will join PIC-convened industry sector groups, such as the Boston Healthcare Careers Consortium and the Boston STEM Network, to become better informed about employer hiring interests. At the invitation of OYC member Year Up, the Collaborative participated in the recent launch of the national Grads of Life campaign to promote the benefits of hiring opportunity youth.

HSE programs and recovery high schools: We will promote postsecondary bridging as an important extension of HSE programs. Three OYC member HSE programs currently provide bridging, and others aspire to do so. Similarly, while alternative high schools provide college preparation and placement support, many students in credit recovery programs at the REC and elsewhere graduate off cycle and do not access these services. We plan to link these programs and students to the Connection Center and an expanding network of bridging programs.

Data strategy: We plan to develop a data infrastructure to track the characteristics of opportunity youth and their longitudinal progress within our network of programs. To extend our longitudinal reach and knowledge base, we are collaborating with our community colleges and two other collective impact projects in the postsecondary completion space, Success Boston and DSNI's Ford Corridor project. We have met three times with this group, with technical assistance from Chris Kingsley of Washington DC's Data Quality Campaign. We have identified the common goals of 1) building connections with the state labor force data to track the employment outcomes of college graduates, 2) tracking non-traditional students through college, and 3) developing a shared definition of college readiness. Additionally, our Collaborative has been working to identify a youth-facing data platform, potentially with a mobile application, that will serve youth to navigate college and career pathways and report on their experience doing so.

For the purposes of this project, OYC staff are designing a data collection and reporting system that a PIC data analyst will maintain. The database will track information on demographics and socio-economic status, program and enrollment activities, and education and employment outcomes. We will also track more granular information, such as college courses attempted, passed, credits earned, and grades, either through the colleges or the pathway bridging and support programs. We will leverage this data to better structure programmatic and systemic responses to barriers and gaps in our pathways.

Convening for collective impact: The OYC will convene opportunity youth pathway partners to create supported transitions within our emerging pathways, including from the Connection Center. The OYC will also convene the Youth Voice Project's Peer Leaders to develop a youth feedback loop for the Connection Center and pathway providers. We will work with organizations to evaluate their current youth voice structures or develop these structures for programs that do not yet incorporate youth voice. The goal is to institutionalize youth leadership within the collaborative and promote it at the organizational level among OYC members.

D. Implementation of activities for interventions, with annual goals and benchmarks

The Connection Center is at the heart of our plan in Boston. It will be a destination for disconnected youth from the community who finished high school, and for recovered opportunity youth graduating from HSE and alternative programs lacking strong postsecondary preparation and connection supports. We envision it as the center of a robust set of pathways leading to education, training, and employment. The Connection Center will reach out to youth through networking and traditional and social media. After assessment, the Center will make strong matches between individual opportunity youth and programs. In addition to our four vendors and Collaborative members, the Center will refer youth to career exploration programs supported through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and City funding and to adult training programs supported by WIOA and SkillWorks. For youth without a high school credential, the Center will refer them to IBA, the REC, and HSE programs, especially those with a strong postsecondary component.

Through our experience with the REC, we anticipate that it will take time to attract a steady stream of youth accessing the center. In the first year or two, we will track youth whom vendors recruit directly from the community, in addition to our main focus of tracking youth who enter pathways through the Connection Center.

Year 1 goals and benchmarks:

Number of opportunity youth served	
Connection Center	100
College Bound Dorchester	45
<i>Bridging</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>Postsecondary support</i>	<i>15</i>
IBA & Bunker Hill Community College	25
<i>HSE & bridging</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Postsecondary support</i>	<i>5</i>
JVS	8
AACA	65
Non-contracted OYC member programs	50
Total	150 *

Year 1 enrollment and placement outcomes	
Enrolled in college bridging programs	50
Enrolled directly in college	25
Enrolled in occupational training	10
Placed in internships/jobs	30

Data goals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purchase ETO data system for OYC data tracking • Develop and implement quarterly data collection strategy using our database • Collect and track student-level data from Connection Center and participating programs in data system • Document opportunity youth enrollment and progress in SkillWorks training programs

Capacity-building goals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build pathways into community college from Connection Center and HSE-to-college programs • Host 2-3 college/CBO convenings to strengthen student support through integrating CBO and college support services • Purchase social-emotional assessment program for the Connection Center • Develop a report on college-to-employment outcomes • Support Peer Leaders in designing and implementing a feedback loop for the Connection Center and pathway programs • Support Peer Leaders in choosing youth-facing pathway navigation platform or mobile application

** Numbers do not add up to 150, due to anticipated overlap between youth pursuing both school and work, and to overlap between Connection Center and pathway destinations*

Year 2 goals and benchmarks:

Number of new opportunity youth served	
Connection Center	125
College Bound Dorchester	45
<i>Bridging</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>Postsecondary support</i>	<i>15</i>
IBA & Bunker Hill Community College	25
<i>HSE & bridging</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Postsecondary support</i>	<i>5</i>
JVS	8
AACA	65
Non-contracted OYC member programs	50
Total	150 *

Year 2 new enrollment and placement outcomes	
Enrolled in college bridging programs	50
Enrolled directly in college	40
Enrolled in occupational training	20
Placed in internships/jobs	30

Persistence goals for Year 1 cohort	
College enrollees, one-year persistence rate	65%
Training enrollees, persistence/completion rate	70%
Graduated trainees and youth seeking employment, placement rate	60%

Data goals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue quarterly data collection process • Use data from Year 1’s database, youth feedback, and online platform/mobile app for pathway and program adjustments • Integrate college courses and other details within database • Develop a report on college-to-employment outcomes as a shared data project

Capacity-building goals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create strong connections among pathway partners: Connection Center, college and career bridging programs, and community colleges • Continue to improve student support on community college campuses, and integrate developmental education improvements into CBO-hosted bridging classes • Introduce new career-oriented offerings at community colleges • Fully implement youth-facing navigation platform or application

** Numbers do not add up to 150, due to anticipated overlap between youth pursuing both school and work, and to overlap between Connection Center and pathway destinations*

Year 3 goals and benchmarks:

Number of new opportunity youth served	
Connection Center	150
College Bound Dorchester	45
<i>Bridging</i>	30
<i>Postsecondary support</i>	15
IBA & Bunker Hill Community College	25
<i>HSE & bridging</i>	20
<i>Postsecondary support</i>	5
JVS	8
AACA	65
Non-contracted OYC member programs	50
Total	150 *

Year 3 new enrollment and placement outcomes	
Enrolled in college bridging programs	50
Enrolled directly in college	50
Enrolled in occupational training	25
Placed in internships/jobs	40

Persistence goals for Year 2 cohort	
College enrollees, one-year persistence rate	65%
Training enrollees, persistence/completion rate	70%
Graduated trainees and youth seeking employment, placement rate	65%

Capacity-building goals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connection Center and pathway programs refer OY to new career-oriented offerings at community colleges • Continue to improve student support on community college campuses and promote on-ramps to occupational training for opportunity youth • Publish and release a report on project accomplishments, lessons learned, and recommendations for policy and system development to benefit opportunity youth • Begin transition to sustainable funding streams

Data goals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue quarterly data collection process • Continue to use data from previous year’s database, youth feedback, and platform/app for pathway and program adjustments • Track OYC data on postsecondary transitions to employment or four-year college • Develop a strategy to regularly report on college-to-employment outcomes as a shared data project

** Numbers do not add up to 150, due to anticipated overlap between youth pursuing both school and work, and to overlap between Connection Center and pathway destinations*

E. Boys and men of color

In 2011, 37% of Boston's opportunity youth were Black and Latino males. Boston has been active in recruiting this population into programming. As a result, OYC and WIA youth programs and the REC serve populations that are approximately 40% Black and Latino males. Five of our six Peer Leaders are young men of color. We anticipate that the share of Black and Latino young men in OYC pathways will be 40% or higher. Mayor Walsh recently launched Boston's iteration of the national My Brother's Keeper (MBK) initiative. His cabinet members are leading community discussions to identify interventions. To date, eight OYC members have participated in the discussions, and we anticipate engaging more as the process continues. Turahn Dorsey, a founding OYC member and a member of the OYC Leadership Group, was recently named the Mayor's Education Chief and has been leading the education discussion within MBK. Another OYC ally, Chief of Economic Development John Barros, leads the workforce development discussion.

F. Capacity building to schools/programs that will complement coaching support from JFF/Aspen

The OYC will regularly meet with funded pathway programs to discuss common successes and challenges. In addition to creating a feedback loop based on data and youth input, the OYC will conduct labor market research to supply colleges and training vendors with employment forecasts tailored to the local market to inform the design of effective career pathways. We will also form relationships with new partners to serve as referral destinations for the Connection Center as well as recruitment pools for vendor programs. The Peer Leaders will assist partner programs in developing youth voice within their own organizations.

We will engage JFF's expertise in Back on Track designs to enhance and scale our programs, strengthen our pathway connections, and improve outcomes for our youth. We look forward to learning about performance and outcomes from comparable programs in other parts of the country.