HIGHLIGHTS from CCRY NETWORK'S FALL 2021 CONVENINGS

EQUITY and the FUTURE OF SUBSIDIZED YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

The Communities Collaborating to Reconnect Youth Network (CCRY) is a national learning community of leaders working across systems to help young people reconnect to education and career pathways.

Originally composed of members from the Department of Labor's Youth Opportunity Movement, the CCRY Network (CCRY) consists of youth workforce development leaders from over a dozen communities across the country, convened by the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) and FHI 360.

This document captures key ideas shared by CCRY Network members during our September and December 2021 conversations about subsidized youth employment. This document includes insights on:

- Challenges and strategies for scaling up subsidized youth employment programs
- Integrating youth leadership opportunities in program design
- Resources needed for targeting equity
- Program spotlights from CCRY Members

AT A GLANCE:

September Meeting: Discussion of what would it take to launch and/or scale up youth subsidized employment programs in the event of a large influx of dedicated funding.

December Meeting: Discussion focused on strategies to ensure that legislation, regulations, federal guidance, and program design would center racial equity and prioritize youth leadership.

Challenges and strategies for scaling up subsidized youth employment programs

In the September meeting, we discussed what would be necessary to ensure quick distribution of funds and effective expansion of programs if a large influx of funding for youth subsidized

employment were to take place. Any funding vehicles, even those prompted by emergency situations, should be designed to help communities build capacity to maintain scaled-up programming and continue supporting youth after an immediate crisis passes.

What are some of the <u>challenges</u> that you face in scaling up a subsidized youth employment program?

- **One size does not fit all:** Geography, local industry, demographics, available services, community relationships and other factors can vary significantly by state, region, local jurisdiction, and even neighborhood. Local regions have various capacities.
- **Distribution of funds is complicated**: Federal funds pass through several bureaucratic layers, often delaying implementation.
- **Restrictions on use of funds complicate budgeting:** Administrative burden of managing federal funds is not cost-effective.

- **Hidden costs of administrative infrastructure**: Scaling up a youth employment program may come with hidden costs. It becomes costly and difficult to launch and manage a flexible payroll system across employees, employers, youth program providers, and trainers.
- **Documentation**: State agencies often impose documentation requirements based on outdated Workforce Investment Act guidance. Leaders must review their policies considering current federal guidance and reverse unnecessarily restrictive policies.

What would it take to scale up programs?
What are possible <u>solutions</u> to these challenges?

- **Idea:** Allow providers to use dedicated subsidized jobs funding to meet WIOA (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act) wage requirements for co-enrolled youth, freeing up other WIOA funds for administrative, programmatic, and supportive uses.
- **Idea**: Identify and pay for third-party administrators to support small providers with grant reporting, compliance, and payment systems.
- **Idea**: Consider possibilities for shared funding for regional strategies depending on local and regional economy, geography, demographics, etc.

- **Fund transfers**: Need for quick, simple system for paying providers and youth. Consider contracting with a staffing firm that has the capacity for managing complex payroll scenarios.
- **Minimize data requirement burdens:** DOL (Department of Labor), workforce boards, intermediaries and other funders must let providers know what they plan to do with the data they require, ask providers what data would be useful to them.
- **Documentation:** Electronic documentation should be universally available and acceptable.

- **Cash injections need to be sustained permanently:** Money needs to be built into funding formulas to support wrap-around services and cash incentives for post-secondary/credentials that scaffold future opportunities.

Youth Leadership

CCRY members were asked what it would take to ensure that youth are driving program design. Members emphasized that we need to ensure that youth are not just invited to the decision-making table, but youth must be fully integrated in our systems, so they do not become 'side-table' conversations.

Integrating Youth Voice in Leadership Roles:

Providers shared examples of how we can integrate youth voices in meaningful leadership roles to help drive program design. Some of these examples include:

- Having youth co-chair committees
- Invite youth to be a part of hiring committees and panels
- Create a Youth Advisory Board that provides an opportunity for youth to advise program design
- Reinstate youth committees that became optional under WIOA

Providers shared that the following supports and resources are needed to make these youth leadership experiences meaningful:

- Prepping them for meetings and understanding the issue that will be brought up
- Providing support like paying for their time, transportation, etc.
- Build a youth leadership group among peers by providing youth opportunities to mentor each other and include alumni to return to speak to current participants
- Integrate ways to celebrate youth and acknowledge agencies that are doing well with youth leadership
- Utilize **Youth Activist Tool kits** and youth leadership tool kits
- Identify and share youth success stories
- Pay youth for their expertise and experience
- Rebranding services in youth-centered language

Lastly, CCRY members shared a need for an actionable definition of youth leadership/youth engagement to use in RFP's.

Resources Needed for Targeting Equity

What resources do you need to ensure equity and target programs to youth who have had the least access to these kinds of opportunities?

- **Hybrid/virtual work experience**: Some public funding dictates 100% in-person opportunities despite pandemic restrictions. Need to educate funders of value for hybrid/virtual experience and advocate for funding flexibility.
- **Tech equity**: Students do not have equal access to broadband internet services. Need to ensure baseline technology services are available to all youth.
- **Budget for youth leadership opportunities:** Budget to pay youth to attend conferences (ex. professional clothing, food, fees, transportation). Resources to pay youth for their expertise and experience in leadership opportunities such as Youth Advisory Boards.
- **Language accessibility:** Engage members of target populations in program planning. Ensure that resources are translated and provided in the diversity of languages spoken by the community populations.
- **Funding to maintain wages**: Need funding to maintain wages/ incentives introduced during the pandemic.
- **Community engagement**: Need resources to support parents to engage in the workforce system and support their kids.
- **Mental health supports**: Youth are experiencing a prominent level of mental health challenges and needs that fall on program providers.
- **Streamlined screening and referral tools:** Program providers need administrative resources such as screening tools, and referral processes to better screen and serve youth.
- **Disability resources**: Providers need better training and resources for supporting youth with disabilities.

What *data* resources do you need to ensure equity and target programs to youth who have had the least access to these kinds of opportunities?

CCRY Members describe the need for data on:

- The unemployment and youth disconnection rates at the community and neighborhood level.
- The kind of jobs and career pathways that youth want.
- The number of jobs available for youth in the gig economy.
- The demand for entrepreneurship opportunities and 'hot jobs' in demand such as IT and healthcare.
- The mental health challenges youth are facing.
- The impact of how American Rescue Plan (ARPA) funds have supported youth.

Program Spotlights from CCRY Members:

Hartford, CT - Youth Advisory Board & Young Legends

Our members in Hartford shared two youth leadership engagement opportunities that allow for youth voices to be included in workforce program design. The **City of Hartford Youth Advisory Board (HYAB)** provides an opportunity for Hartford youth to advise the Department of Families, Children, Youth and Recreation (DFCYR) in its efforts and strategies related to this mission. The HYAB has 11 youth members from age 13 to 18.

Young Legends is a group of young adults who are actively engaged in the development of leadership skills. They are committed to applying these skills to strengthen career pathways and improve employment outcomes for young adults in Hartford. Young Legends serve as critical partners and decision-makers through formal roles with the Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative and Working Cities Initiative.

Louisville, KY - The Spot Young Adult Opportunity Campus

Our CCRY members in Louisville, Kentucky renamed their young adult opportunity campus to 'The Spot' based on feedback from how youth referred to it. They also revamped materials such as their website to center a youth audience. **The Spot** offers free career resources for youth and young adults ages 16-24.

CCRY Member Communities

Albany, NY	Kansas City, MO	Philadelphia, PA
Atlanta, GA	Los Angeles, CA	Pittsburgh, PA
Baltimore, MD	Louisville, KY	Seattle, WA
Boston, MA	Nashville, TN	Southeast Arkansas
Denver, CO	New Orleans, LA	St. Louis, MO
Hartford, CT	Orlando, FL	Tacoma, WA