



## **Rebuilding the Workforce System for Young Adults**

The sudden shock of the COVID-19 pandemic to the American economy is proving to be devastating to many communities and families. One class of workers are particularly negatively impacted; America's youngest workers, ages 16-24 and already in crisis, will be decimated in this unexpected economic shakeup. Many have already lost their jobs and high percentages of youth and young adults will join them in the ranks of the unemployed soon. Educational and training programs have already paused, leaving these young people to navigate the uncertain path forward on their own.

As we entered this crisis, approximately 25 percent of young people were in low paying jobs in industries such as retail, leisure, hospitality, or transportation. Even prior to the shock of COVID-19, over 4.5 million young people nationally were not in school and not in work. Employment participation rates for this young adult population has consistently been the lowest in decades. The impending financial downturn due to the COVID-19 crisis will only make it more difficult for youth and young adults facing structural barriers to employment to find quality jobs and careers.

While national policy makers must develop a comprehensive investment package targeting this emerging workforce, these impacted young people reside in our local communities. Large cities like Los Angeles, New York City, Chicago, Dallas and Miami; mid-size cities like Detroit, Seattle, New Orleans, Cleveland, Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, and rural cities and towns across the country will see a very large percentage of young people out of work, out of school and with dim prospects for future social mobility.

Long term trends in the labor market over the past 40 years have worked against young adults. Young people lost more jobs during and recovered more slowly after the Great Recession. This trend will repeat as a result of the current crisis unless innovative collaborative strategies are put into place to improve employment prospects for young people.

Over the past two decades, some communities have made significant strides in supporting youth and young adult preparation for and connection to employment. Valuable lessons have been learned through this process that can be applied to the daunting task of rebuilding and solidifying the population's connection to employment as a result of the current crisis.

New Ways to Work (New Ways) has played a pivotal role in supporting the creation of cross-sector local partnerships and has successfully supported organizations in working together to increase young people's readiness for careers in emerging industries. We have pioneered and field-tested the All Youth – One System™ model, a comprehensive approach to education, job training and social service supports that equips youth with the tangible tools necessary to be active, engaged, effective members of the workforce and the community.

### **Ensure equity, accessibility and equality in resources and outcomes for all youth**

In a comprehensive and connected local youth system, programs, initiatives, and institutions work together to eliminate the duplication of services, maximize the impacts of multiple funding sources, and implement long-range plans to improve outcomes for the youth they serve.

Communities large and small will need strategies and the expertise of organizations like New Ways and others to help rebuild and strengthen the connections between schools, local government, community-based organizations, employers and those organizations serving youth in foster care, youth with disabilities, the homeless and youth engaged in the juvenile justice system.



To limit the potential of COVID-19's economic devastation, communities will quickly need to:

1. Assess workforce opportunities for the young adult population in today's private sector market (such as the health industry, supermarkets and food supply chain industries) and design systems to prepare and connect them to these opportunities.
2. Quickly develop plans to
  - Reconnect young adults to employment, education and training.
  - Strengthen access to educational opportunities, especially for those at high risk of dropping out of high school or post-secondary institutions.
  - Support effective strategies for foster, probation, LGBTQ and homeless youth as well as youth with disabilities who are most likely to immediately feel the impact of economic downturn and have the least amount of social capital to sustain themselves.
  - Apply the talents and assets of our nation's youth and young adults to facilitate and deliver solutions to the current and new challenges that recovery and the "new normal" present.
3. Develop subsidized employment opportunities through social enterprises and public agencies to participate in the COVID-19 clean-ups, emergency shelters, and food banks.
4. Provide a comprehensive outreach and public education plan to inform young people of all available resources, including stimulus funds, Unemployment Insurance, SNAP assistance and other support during this downturn.
5. Identify and support lead agencies in targeted communities to discover solutions, learn from each other, and develop and coordinate local plans of action.
6. Work with employers to identify evolving employment trends, needs and opportunities, and help develop solutions and pathways to these opportunities for the emerging workforce.

New Ways stands ready to do what we've always done, identify quality solutions, document and share those solutions, bring people together to share successful practice, support the implementation of shared strategies at the local level and disseminate effective strategies to other communities. Together we can ensure local communities build on lessons learned, shorten the time for recovery, and positively impact the lives of thousands of young people.

We'd like to hear your thoughts.

To join the conversation and stay connected, sign up at [www.newwaystowork.org/library](http://www.newwaystowork.org/library)

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