UNLOCKING YOUTH POTENTIAL
A PATHWAY TO INCLUSIVE HIRING
NATIONAL INSTITUTE TO UNLOCK POTENTIAL

A FRAMEWORK FOR EQUITY-FOCUSED OPPORTUNITY YOUTH PROGRAMMING
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The National Institute is developing a guiding framework for organizations to implement effective First Chance workforce development programs for Opportunity Youth.

Our focus is Black and Brown youth who have experienced the legal or carceral system, the foster care system, parental incarceration, and/or human trafficking as minors.

These systems and many others create the disparities young people experience by perpetuating white supremacy culture.

Our young people are smart, capable, resilient, and resourceful and they hold the knowledge of how best to support themselves and how to change the system so all youth thrive.
NIUP’s Equity Statement

Our commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion implores us to reimagine all systems that contribute to youth being disconnected and deepen inequities in education and employment.

Currently, racism is inherently embedded in policies that we tend to adopt and implement in our practices and programming to secure funding further perpetuating systems that promote racial inequity, high barriers, and low resources for communities of color, specifically Black, Indigenous, and Hispanic/Latinx communities, to advance social and economic wellbeing.

Our systems must instead center on young people's needs, values, and voices to achieve outcomes and promote opportunities for current and future generations. Acknowledging racial equity and building systems focused on addressing racial disparities in quality employment with livable wages and education with non-traditional pathways to increase positive outcomes for all youth.

We stand firm in our commitment to all youth having access to quality employment and educational opportunities.
Call to Co-Creation

Proposing an equity focused program model in which young people, CBOs, and employers co-create the program to align with local context, meet young people where they are, and connect them with employment.

Asks all partners to enter with a learning mindset and a commitment to let their practices and policies be changed to reduce barriers and advance equity.
National Institute to Unlock Potential
A research, data, and narrative shift guide for organizations supporting Opportunity Youth led by Perservere.

Partnering with First-Chance Employers
Partnering with employers to provide first-chance employment for Opportunity Youth. This initiative is called Unlock Potential and is led by Responsible Business Initiative for Justice (RBIJ).

Growing Capacity for Community-Based Organizations
Providing space for organizations to build and sustain the capacity to support youth, and disrupt the systems that impact them.

Developing Youth Leaders
Utilizing positive youth development strategies that center youth voices to build self-advocacy, confidence, dignity, and joy. This initiative is led by Youth Development and Well-being Consultant, Kia Jarmon.

Racial Equity
Healing → Justice → Well-being → Liberation → Joy

Trust
Love
10 Areas of Practice in an Equity Focused, Collaborative OY Initiative
Collaboration

The **relationships** between partners in the initiative is part of the program that young people experience and requires intentional tending to be successful.
In partnership, build shared practices to help you evaluate decisions in terms of how they move you towards or away from equity.
Principles of Youth Engagement

1. Build psychological **safety**
2. Well-equipped **staff** trained in youth engagement
3. Cultivate authentic **two-way relationships** rooted in mutual respect
4. Establish **norms** and guidelines early and often
5. Remove barriers and offer **supports to participation**
6. Clarity on **role** of young people and informed consent
7. **Prepare** and support youth in multiple ways
8. Consistent opportunities for meaningful **action**
9. Intentional space for **story telling**
10. **Flexibility** and patience
Program Design Process

- Community Strengths and Needs Assessment
- Root Cause Analysis with an Equity Lens
- Research on Effective Strategies
- Youth-Engaged Design Process
Prepare and Equip Staff

Space for staff to explore and shift the organization’s culture around youth

Commitment from to protect time to work in this way

Equip staff to live out changes in practices that reduce barriers and meet youth where they are; turnover-proof

Professional development in Positive Youth Development, Trauma Informed Care, cultural competence, mentorship, Supervising people early in their career, etc.
Recruitment Strategies

• Utilize **multiple** strategies at once
• More **personal** approaches are more effective
• Create a **youth affirming** presence, space, and voice for the program
• Ensure **accessibility** and **visibility** of programming – social media presence, scheduling, providing childcare, food, transportation, hybrid options
• The **Social Determinants of Work** are factors that shape a person’s access to work. All of the social determinants of work are impacted by historical and current racist policies that distribute opportunities and resources unevenly.

• As such, providing wraparound services and supports that address the social determinants of work is critical to **advancing equity**.
Education Supports: Core Elements

1. Preparation & Enrollment Navigation
   - Coaching & info on education path that is a good fit
   - Ensure young person can maintain income while learning
   - Navigating application processes

2. Financial Aid
   - Finding financial aid opportunities that are a good fit
   - Educating young people on financial options & implications
   - Navigating paperwork with young person

3. Academic Supports
   - Tutoring & advising
   - Providing books, technology, other needs
   - Mentorship

4. Support Persistence
   - Ongoing services to maintain stability and as challenges arise
   - Peer supports
   - Stipends while learning
# Employment Supports: Core Elements

## High Quality Career Navigation
- Provide info on high demand jobs and fit for individual youth
- Support the job search, resume, & interview process
- Warm connections or actual placements with employers
- Ongoing youth-centered, expert coaching throughout

## Skills Development & Credentialing
- Soft skills development
- Credentialing or training in hard skills aligned with high-demand industry needs
- Digital literacy & skills to reduce barriers

## Paid Opportunities while Skill Building
- Jobs paying living wage or mortgage-paying wage
- Paying stipends while learning
- Paid training, internship, or apprenticeship programs

## Support Entrepreneurial Pathways
- Business & finance management skills
- Mentorship
- Seed funding and access to capital
- Innovation

## Support Retention
- Ongoing services to maintain stability and as challenges arise
- Supportive supervisors, mentorship relationships
- Company wide case management
- Peer supports
Cycle of Learning and Action

1. **(Re)Define your Program & Policies**
2. **Articulate Evaluation Questions**
3. **Design Methods**
4. **Implement and Collect Data**
5. **Analyze Data**
6. **Report & Learn**
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Unlocking Youth Potential: A Pathway to Inclusive Hiring

Access the Full Framework Report Here