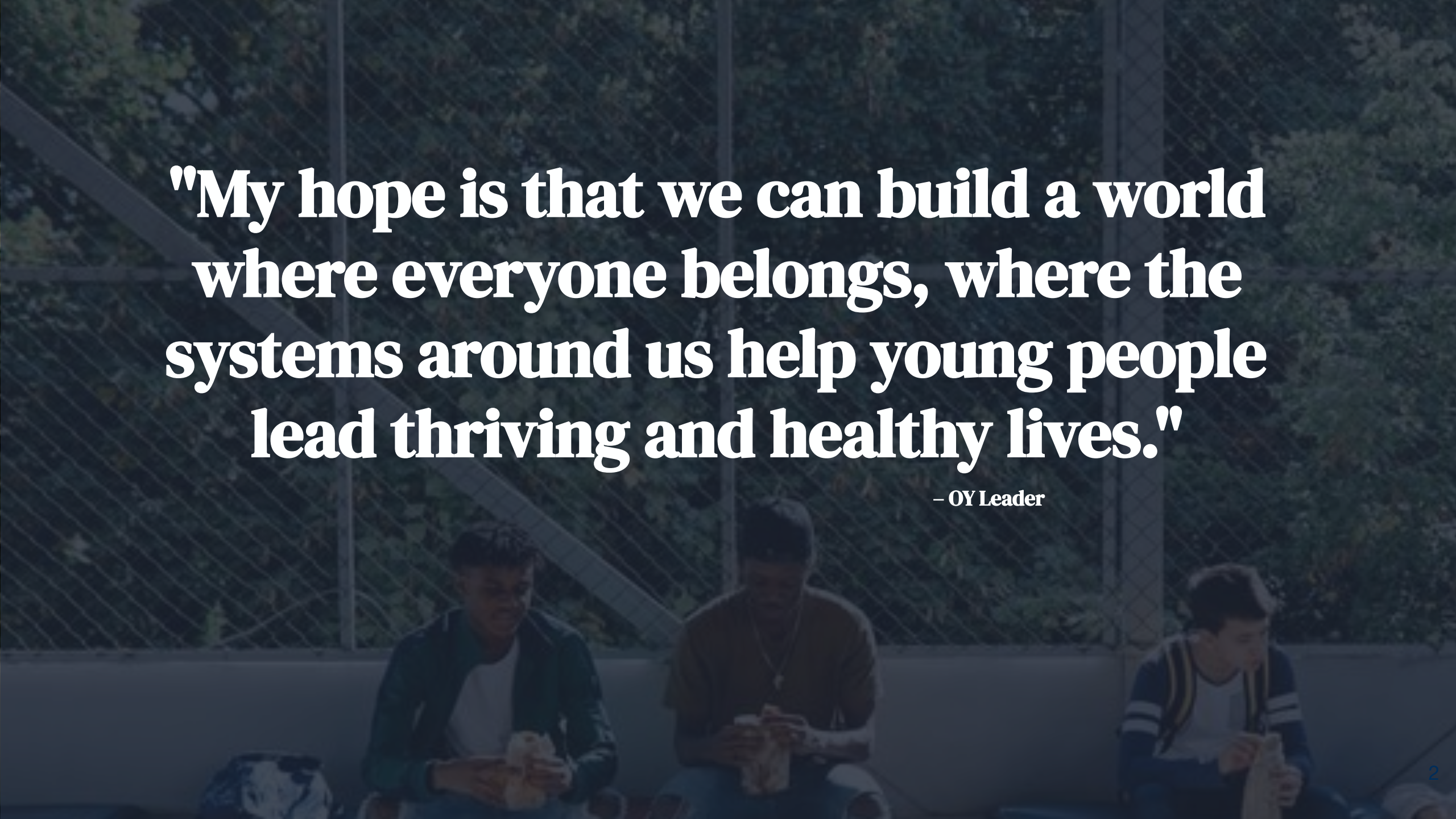


Expanding Opportunities for Young People in New Orleans: Evolution and Impact

CONRAD N.

/dilton

FOUNDATION



**"My hope is that we can build a world
where everyone belongs, where the
systems around us help young people
lead thriving and healthy lives."**

– OY Leader

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The New Orleans Opportunity Youth Storytelling Initiative, funded by the **Conrad N. Hilton Foundation**, gathered stories, data, and research to highlight the growth and impact of New Orleans' youth support network since 2011.



METHODOLOGY

1

Conduct Stakeholder Interviews and Qualitative Research

A



CNHF Internal
Interviews

Selected CNHF OY
initiative staff

B



Qualitative
Interviews

29 interviews
completed with OY
ecosystem leaders

C



Quantitative
Research

A review of key
research and data
reports evaluated

2

Synthesize Interviews and Research

3

Develop Opportunity Youth (OY) Presentation

4

Ongoing Feedback and Refinement (e.g., Frameworks Narrative and Direct Input from Leaders)

EVOLUTION OF THE OPPORTUNITY YOUTH ECOSYSTEM

This overview explores the evolution of New Orleans' youth support network, highlighting key milestones, lessons learned, and future aspirations for both the initiative and the city's young people.



Over the past 14 years, New Orleans' youth support network has grown from a series of coordinated efforts into a fully integrated system of resources and opportunities.

From **Coordination...**

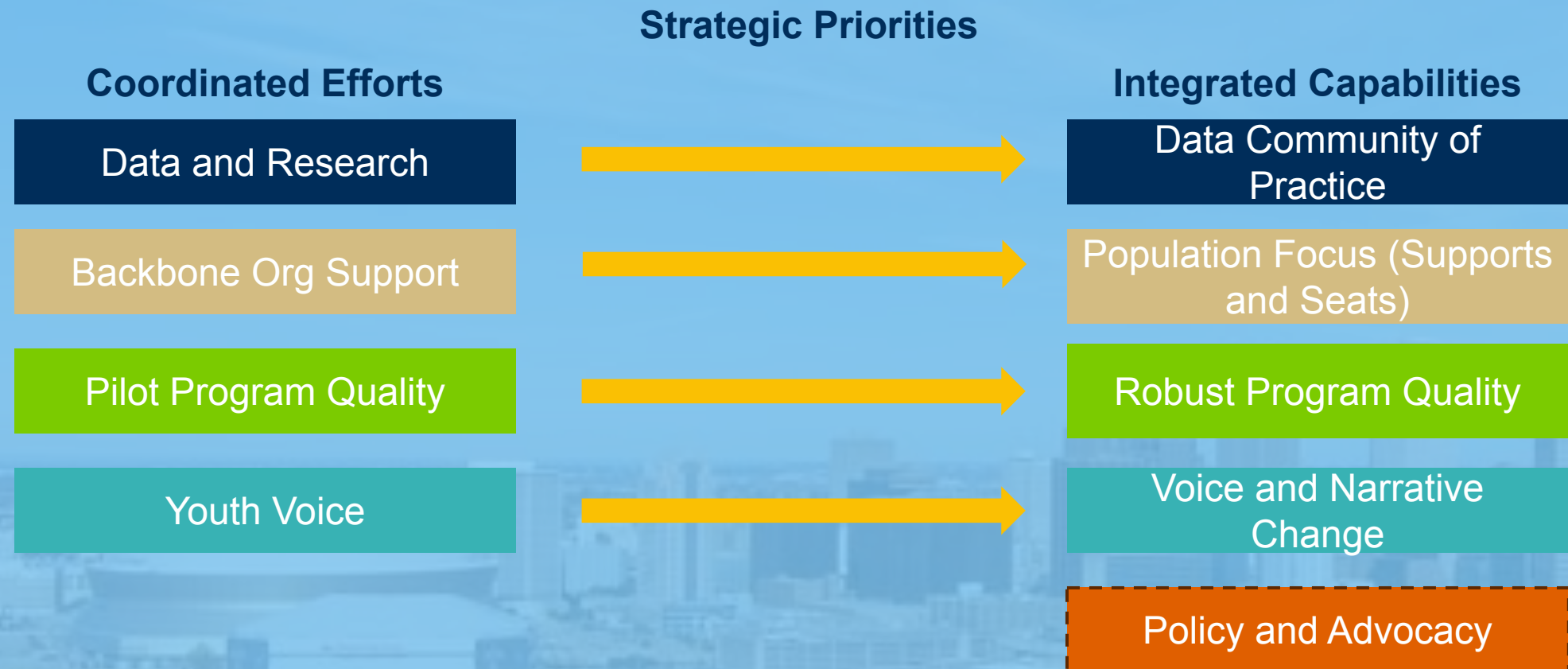
...to Integrated Capabilities



That evolution was made possible by unrelenting strategic effort, continuous improvement, and big bets to support Opportunity Youth (OY) leaders, young people, and the **organizations** that serve them.

During that time, strategic priorities evolved to drive positive, collective impact

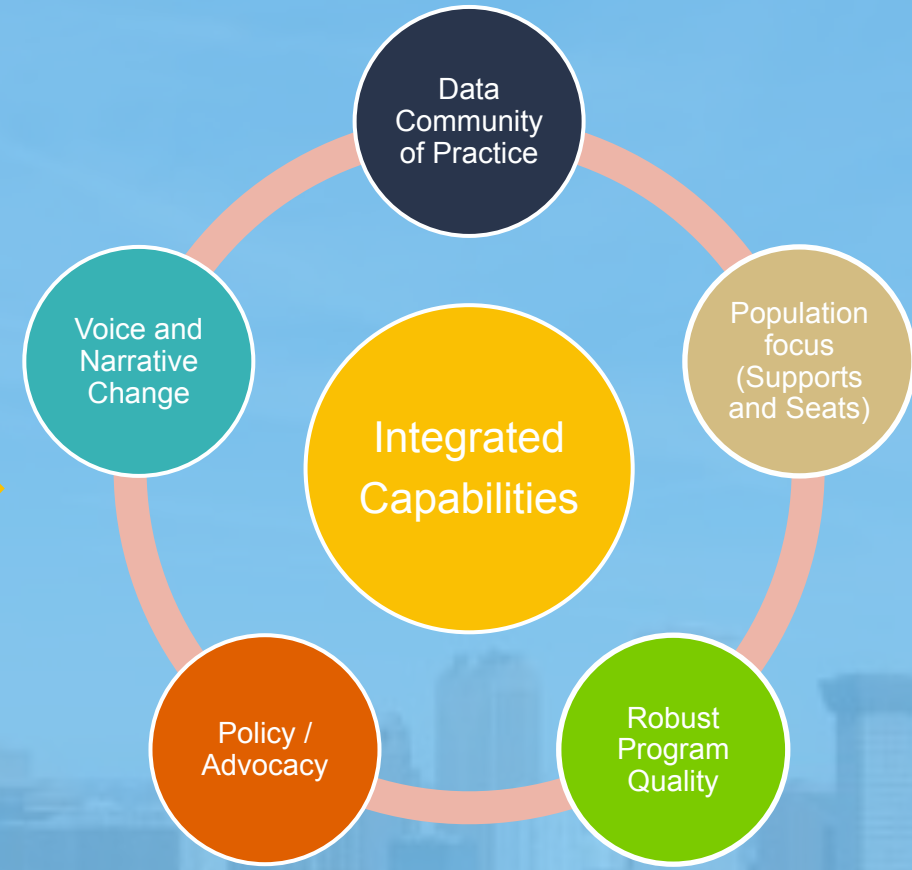
In 2015, YouthShift NOLA launched with a foundational set of priorities aimed at fostering collective impact for young people. Over the next 10yrs, the NOLA OY ecosystem expanded upon these priorities, developing integrated capabilities to drive positive outcomes.



The diagrams below are an alternative illustration of those key strategic priorities.



2015 New Orleans YouthShift Priorities,
which sets the stage of the OY ecosystem

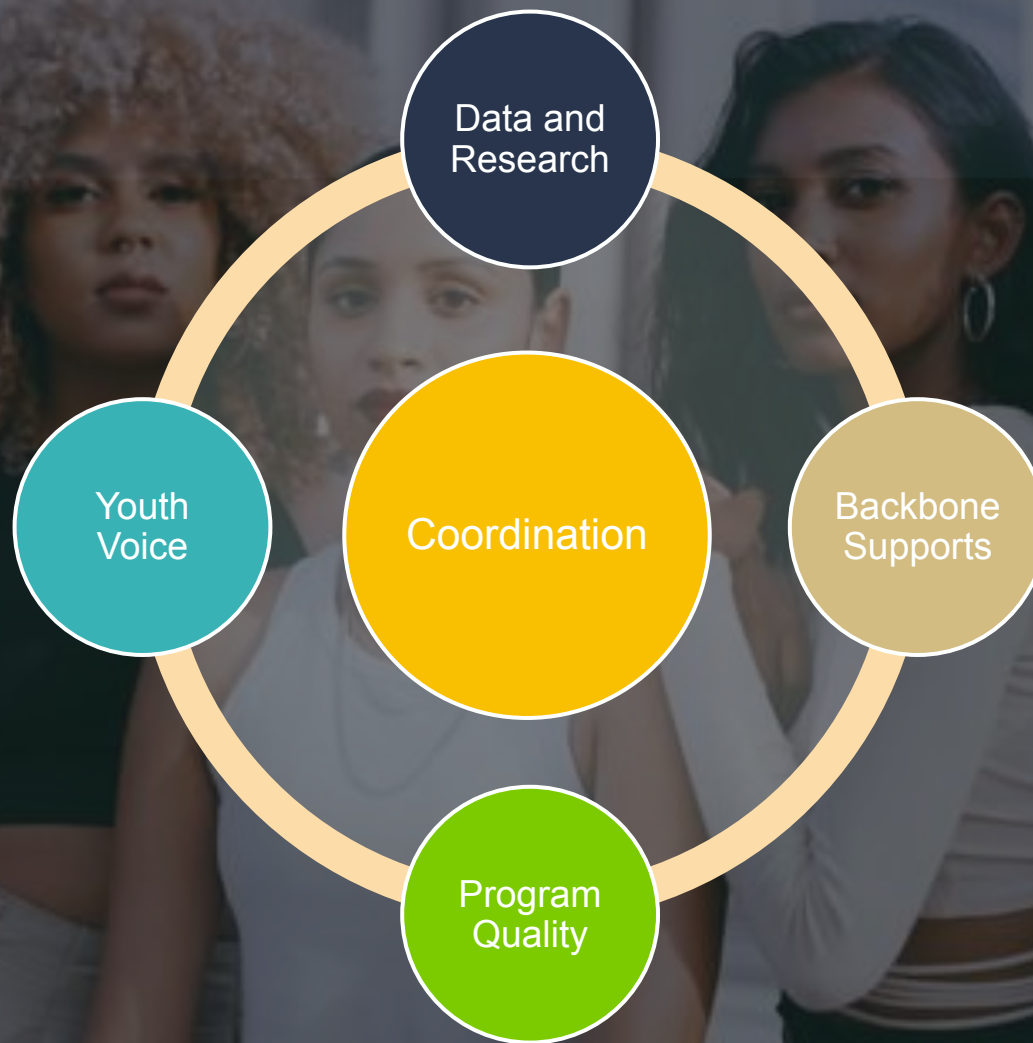


Current OY Ecosystem Priorities
(2020 – 2025)



CHAPTER 1

Coordinating Efforts: A Rallying Call for Better Outcomes for Young People (2011-2019)



In Dec 2010, the White House Council for Community Solutions drew attention to the promise of 6.7M disconnected youth

National and local funders and champions built on White House momentum to bring support to New Orleans Youth.

Several funders played a critical role to galvanize support in NOLA



Baptist Community Ministries (BCM)

JPMORGAN
CHASE & CO.

JPMorgan Chase



Aspen Institute, OYIF



WK Kellogg Foundation

...And achieve early-stage milestones

Aspen launched the Opportunity Youth Incentive fund (OYIF) and Forum for Community Solutions and in June 2013 provided \$500k to communities², in which Partnership for Youth Development (PYD) in NOLA was recipient

BCM and Partnership for Youth Development in New Orleans established YouthShift, a collaboration of **200 youth-serving orgs** which adopted a whole-child, collective-impact approach to improve the academic, social, and behavioral outcomes for New Orleanians ages birth to 25 with assistance from the Forum for Youth Investment (FYI)

Source:

¹The White House Council for Community Solution, Final Report, Community Solutions for Opportunity Youth, June 2012

²Aspen Institute, Press Release, July 2012

³YouthShift, A Call for Connection, December 2015

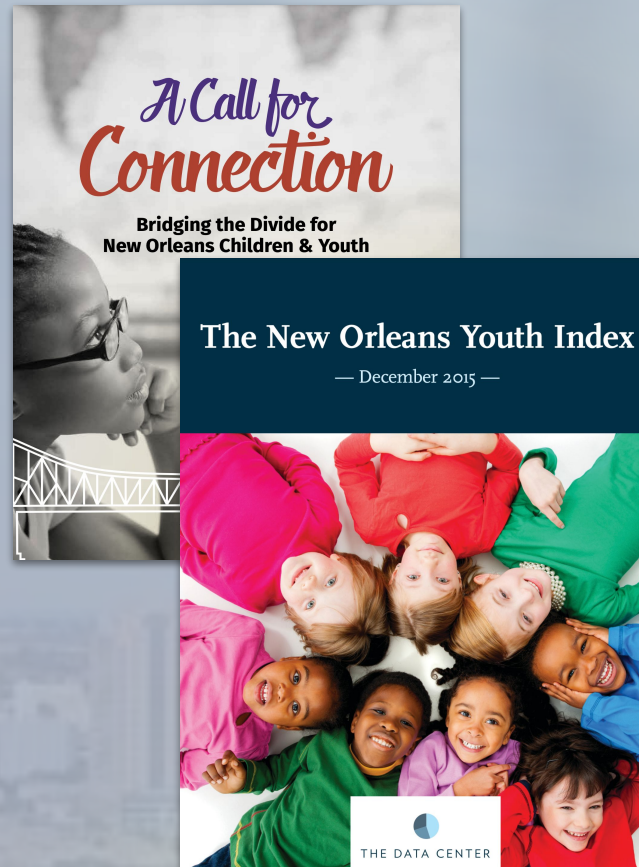
The Aspen Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund (OYIF) launched in 2013 and was rebranded as the Opportunity Youth Forum in 2016.

Building on momentum, youth-serving orgs leverage data to forge a collective path forward

In 2015, seminal reports from BCM and the Data Center on Youth in New Orleans bring together the region around key data and a “why” narrative, highlighting YouthShift’s five priorities for collective impact for Youth-serving organizations.

Key data points, as mentioned by YouthShift in 2015:

- One in three of the 78,000 youth live in poverty in NOLA
- Births to teen mothers and infant death rates higher than national averages
- 18 percent of 16-24 year olds didn’t work or go to school



YouthShift’s Five Priorities for Collective Impact

- Data Collection
- Program Quality (YPQI)
- Integrated Policy Agenda
- Backbone org Supports
- Youth Voice

Source:

¹ A Call for Connection: Bridging the Divide for New Orleans Children and Youth,

Staggering data surrounding black boys and young men became a rallying call for better outcomes

On the heels of the 10th anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, the City of New Orleans wrestled with a “tale of two cities” in which economic recovery was not equitable for all New Orleanians, specifically for African Americans.



EMPLOYABILITY

In June 2013, a compelling Data Center report acknowledged 52% of Black Boys and Young Men of Color in New Orleans were out of the labor force and unemployed.¹



EDUCATION

The share of African American men with an associate’s degree or higher was only 15% in 2009-11, the same as it was in 1980.



JUSTICE

The 2010 Census showed that while African Americans made up 53% of New Orleans males, African Americans made up 84% of incarcerated male adults in New Orleans, impacting employability.



In 2014, Mayor Mitch Landrieu announced a comprehensive economic opportunity strategy to connect young men to job opportunities associated with the city’s growing sectors²

Source:

¹Lindy Boggs National Center for Community Literacy at Loyola University and the Data Center, Recognizing the Underutilized Economic Potential of Black Men in New Orleans, pg. 8-11, 13-14

EMPLOY is funded as a central hub to coordinate and strengthen orgs that support young people in New Orleans

In 2014, Aspens OYIF funds PYD and Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives (Cowen) to establish EMPLOY - Employment and Mobility Pathways Linked for Opportunity Youth (EMPLOY)¹.



Cowen and EMPLOY's Priorities

Data and Research	Baseline OY Data
Backbone Supports	OY Pathways and Programs
Program Quality	NOLA-YPQI Pilot
Youth Voice	EMPLOY Youth Council

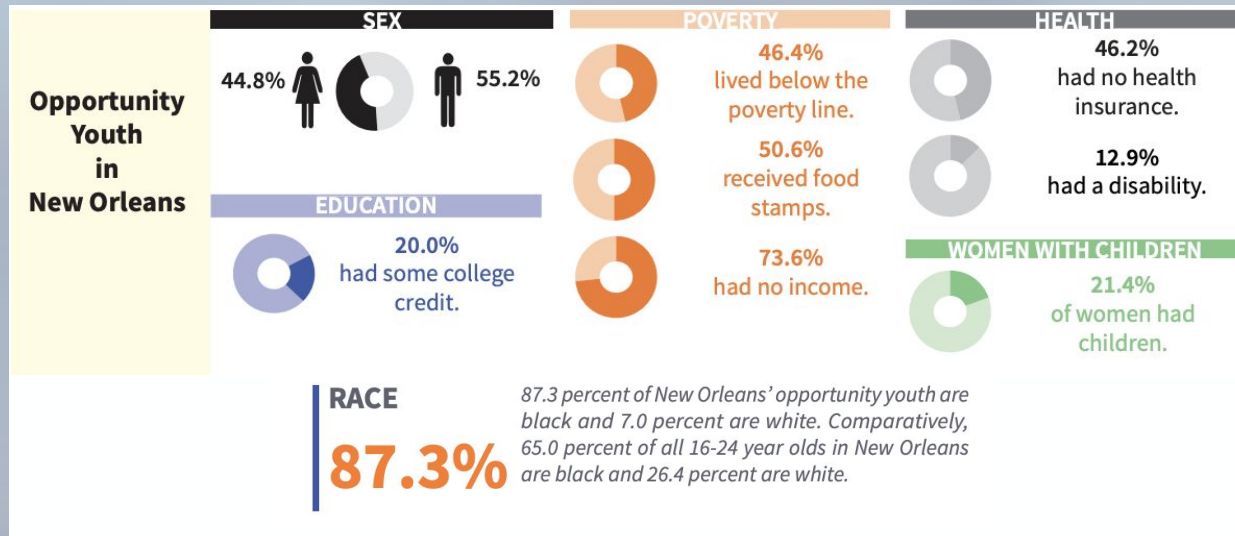
Source:
¹Aspen institute Re-Invests in Innovative Community Collaboratives to Engage “Opportunity Youth”
²Designing for Success: Lessons Learned in Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund Sites



EMPLOY reports 6,820 youth are estimated to be out-of-work and school in New Orleans in 2016

In 2015, the Cowen Institute and EMPLOY release a report, *No Longer Invisible: Opportunity Youth in New Orleans*, that provides foundational data of OY in the city.

In 2016, New Orleans had an estimated 6,820 opportunity youth¹



A SHARED DATA COLLABORATIVE

Moreover, BCM, Aspen and others support EMPLOY and partners through the Opportunity Youth Data Sharing Collaborative to begin work on shared data using Efforts to Outcomes.

Efforts to Outcomes (ETO), a national platform for social service organizations to manage and track client data, was used as a common tool for OY-serving organizations in New Orleans to understand its collective impact.

Reflection from Interviews: OY-serving organizations were initially hesitant to centralize data. Not all OY-serving organizations were being funded. Organizational leaders believed centralizing data would be more punitive and comparative in nature, and impact current and future business development.



After three year pilot, ~500 young people ages 16-24 participated in EMPLOY's Opportunity Works program

In 2016, Jobs for the Future received a grant from the Corporation for National and Community Service's SIF program to implement Back On Track in seven cities across the U.S., including New Orleans, LA.

Program Description

- Opportunity Works was a 3-year effort led by **Jobs for the Future** to support Opportunity Youth in accessing postsecondary and career pathways
- New Orleans Back on Track approach focused on postsecondary and career bridging
- Opportunity Works allowed for increased capacity to provide a “no-wrong-door” approach across the four major organizations supporting the Back on Track model.



New Orleans Back on Track Program Core Components¹



Provided transition coordinators and High School Equivalency completion, work readiness, basic soft skills, and financial counseling



Provided post-secondary bridging and industry-based credentialing, including credit and non-credit coursework



Cowen's Earn and Learn program provided an opportunity for paid work experience and on-the-job training linked to postsecondary education



Taught an early college liberal arts writing and reading seminar at Earn and Learn and YEP

Cowen Institute at Tulane University - Backbone Organization



In 2017, the NOLA-YPQI pilot engaged 31 orgs to improve program quality, a 2x increase from the year prior

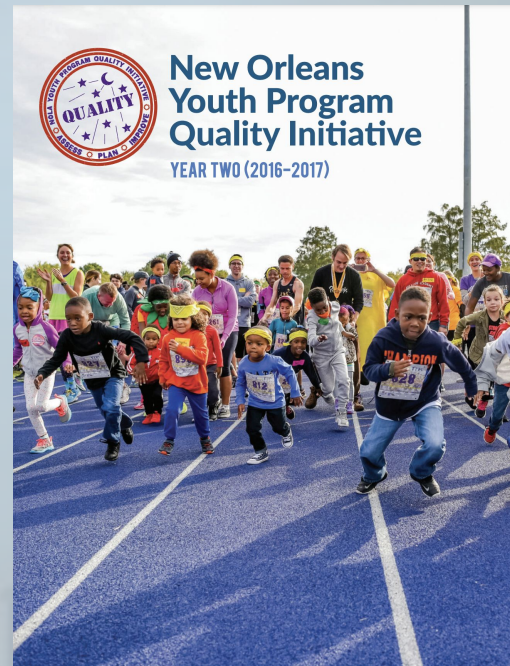
The NOLA Youth Program Quality Initiative (YPQI) was launched in 2015 to establish a system that would raise the bar for quality in out-of-school-time programs in New Orleans and produce better developmental outcomes for children and youth for years to come.

What is YPQI?

YPQI is based on the David P. Weikart Center for Program Quality's youth program quality intervention, which has been adopted by more than 4,000 programs in 41 states.

This model assists program staff in

- 1) assessing the quality of their programs,
- 2) planning for improvement, and
- 3) participating in coaching and professional development experiences that help them institute measurable quality improvements



Source: NOLA-YPQI Pilot

YPQI ANNUAL GROWTH

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS	YEAR ONE 2015-16	YEAR TWO 2016-17
Organizations participating	15	31
Youth served by participating organizations each week	2,850	5,000+
Program quality assessments completed	82	138
Trainers certified to deliver Youth Work Methods training	5	17
External assessors completing assessments for organizations	5	8
Staff attending Youth Work Methods trainings	146	271
Person hours of training	2,352	6,657
Funders for the pilot activities	2	4

Source:

¹New Orleans Youth Alliance Offerings - <https://noya.org/offerings>

²New Orleans Youth Program Quality Initiative

The EMPLOY collaborative and partner orgs supporting young people continued to drive meaningful progress.



Selected Key Wins



From 2012 to 2017, **fundors and OY-leaders built momentum** as a result of federal, national, and local funder investment, the collaboration of 200 youth serving orgs, and city funding and narrative to prioritize Youth and OY.



OY developed a shared case management system among orgs using Efforts to Outcomes (ETO) to collect OY data and career pathways progression



EMPLOY and partners led a three-year Social Innovation funded demonstration pilot, Opportunity Works, which **served over 500 opportunity youth as they transitioned from high- school and HiSet programming to post-secondary and employment**



The collaborative created **new advancement pathways for opportunity youth with local employers** and established new employer/training provider partnerships

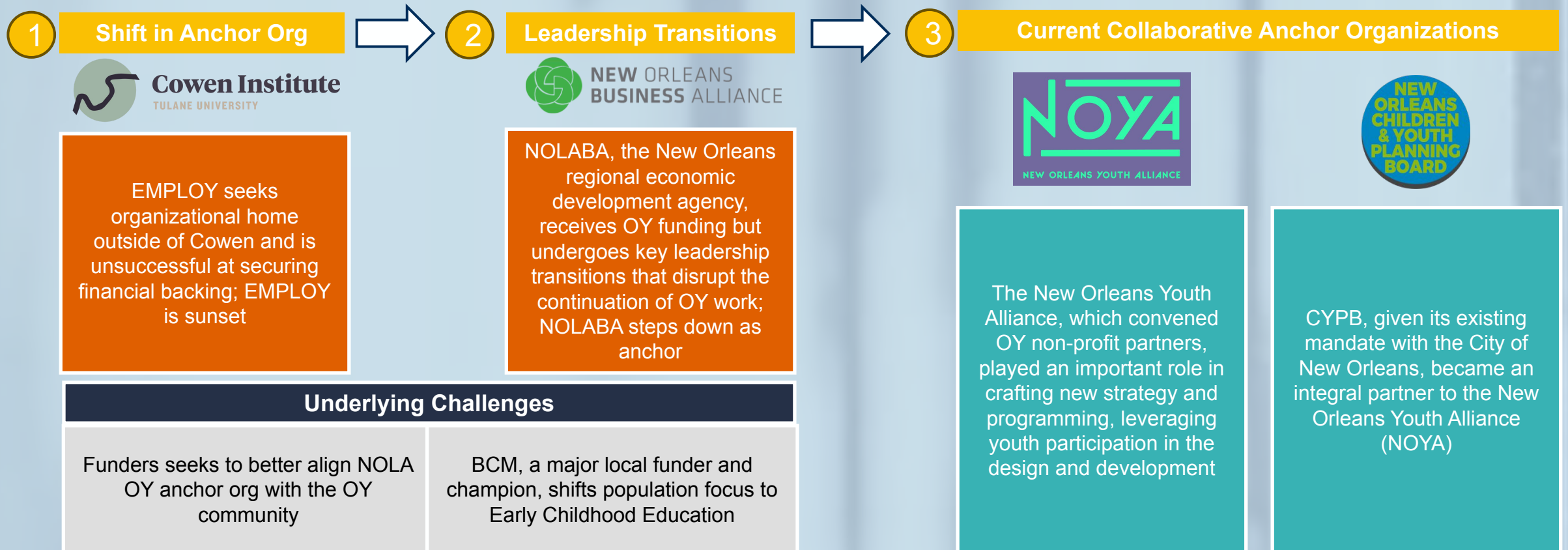


Innovative Programming - YEP and Bard College created new programs with Delgado



However, major challenges begin to emerge that slowed the momentum and priorities of NOLA OY movement

In 2018, funders asked several leading stakeholders to apply and lead a newly formed OY collaborative in New Orleans. NOLABA and NOYA were selected until a full transition of responsibilities to NOYA and the New Orleans Children and Youth Planning Board





2020 marked a pivotal moment for the evolution of New Orleans' youth support network

Four major lessons emerged that would serve as the foundation for the next phase of strategic focus for the New Orleans Opportunity Youth Ecosystem

Four Early Lessons Learned

Lesson 1

National and local philanthropic collaboration is essential to understanding proximate needs

Lesson 2

Data collection and collaboration happen at the speed of trust; sustainable funding is integral

Lesson 3

Funding champions and leadership transitions have outsized impacts on progress

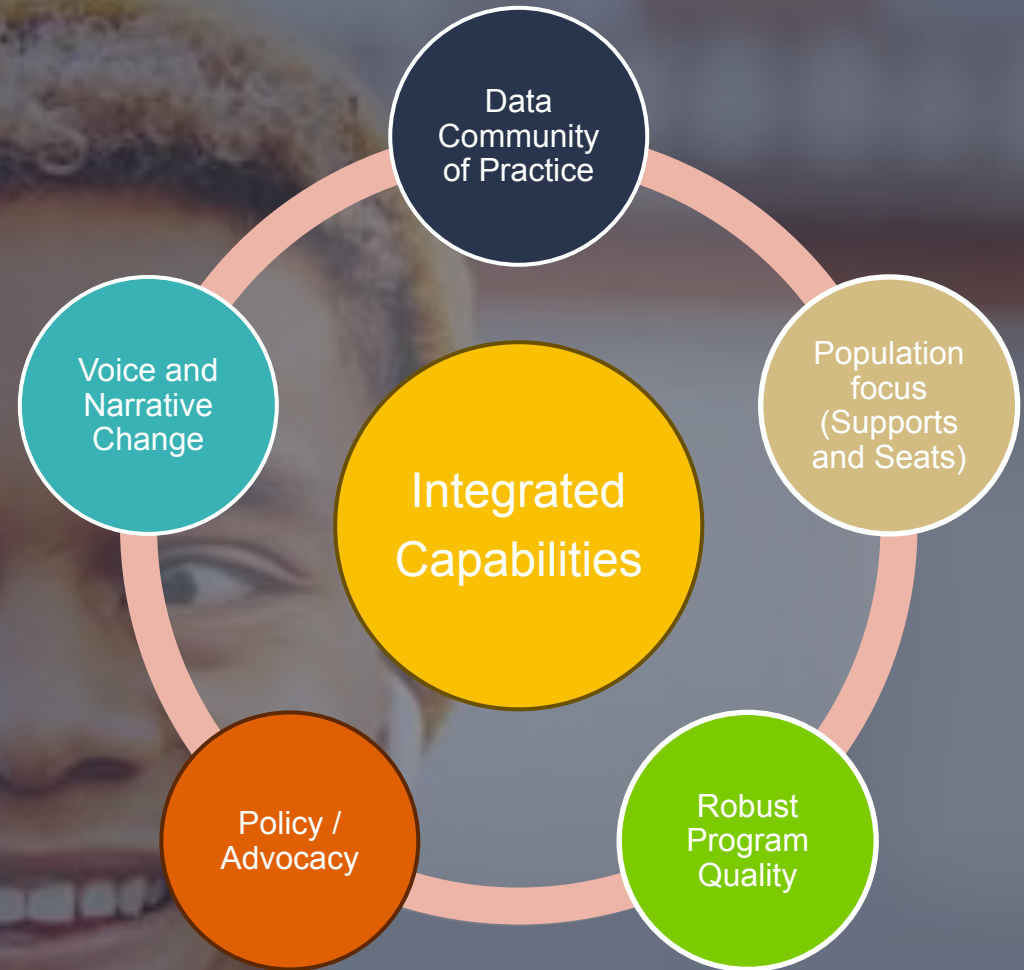
Lesson 4

Youth-serving organizations must sit at the center of the OY evolution and require support and scaffolding

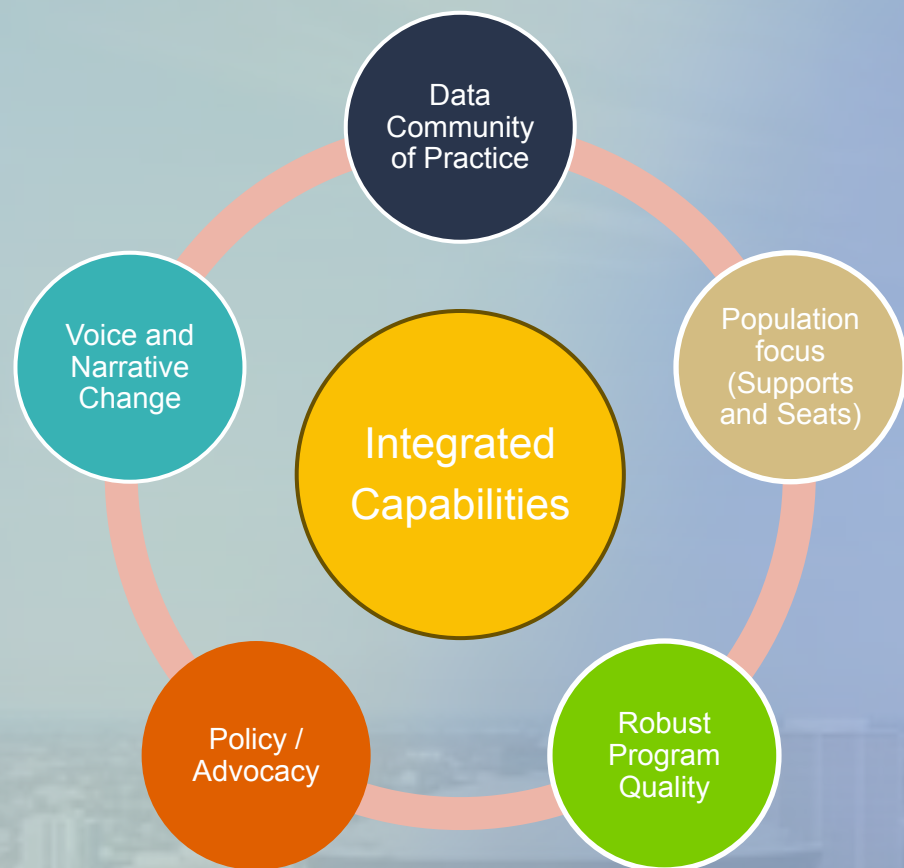
CHAPTER 2

Integrated Capabilities: Making Big Bets and Delivering Key Wins

(2020-2025)



The youth support network took bold steps to enhance its capabilities for long-term impact from 2020 to 2025



Current OY Ecosystem Priorities

Data Community of Practice
Population Focus (Supports and Seats)
Robust Program Quality
Youth Voice and Narrative Change
Policy and Advocacy

Big Bets and Key Wins

Data Sharing
Distributed backbone support orgs
Scaling Program Quality
Building power and narratives (Frameworks, and LEDE)
Youth Master Plan, Ride New Orleans, and State Power Building



Six New Orleans orgs set 10 common metrics to create a shared dashboard for collective impact

New Orleans CYPB took lessons from OY Data Sharing Collaborative* (OYDSC) for Data CoP and chose to prioritize customization of ETO (by org), 1:1 technical assistance, and orgs sharing learnings of ETO within Data CoP; common/shared metrics were identified in fall 2024

Common Metrics for New Orleans OY Partners

Partners

Identity Metrics

- Demographics
- Barriers
- Justice System Avoidance
- Financial Capacity

Education + Employment

- Employment / Job Retention
- Program Completion
- Earned Certifications

Purpose + Well-being

- Self Efficacy
- Social Emotional Learning and Well-being
- Youth Engagement



*The data collaborative, led by NOLA CYPB, provides technical resources for OY serving organizations to collect data using Efforts to Outcomes platform.

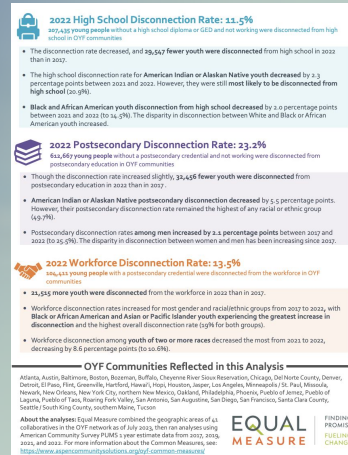
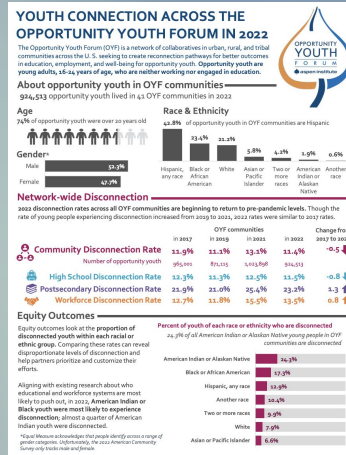


Youth Data Hub efforts are underway with the City of New Orleans and will include opportunity youth and youth-program more broadly.

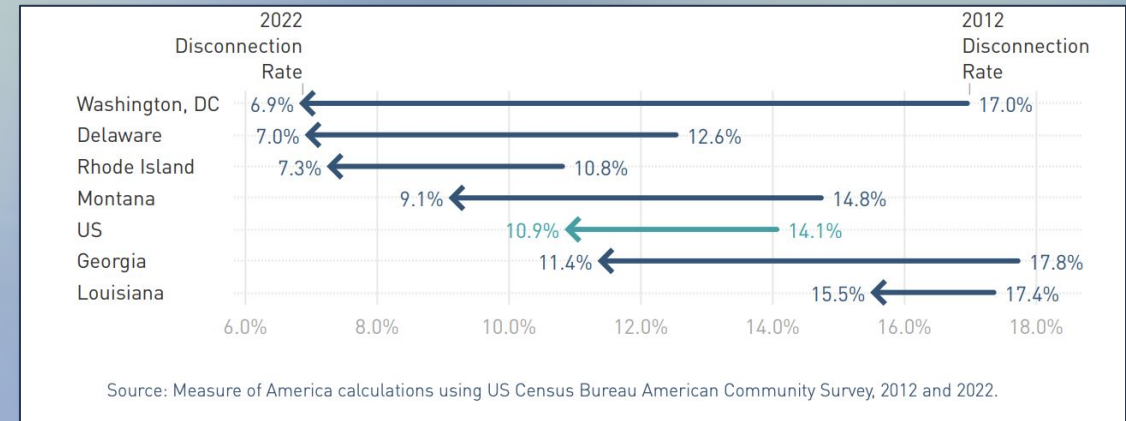


Aspen's Common Measures and MOA's Youth Disconnection reports give national context to local data

Aspen's OYF Common Measures 2021 report



Significant Change in Youth Disconnection by State, 2012 - 2022



Aspen's Common Measures sets out to establish youth outcomes

- OYF Common Measures tracks youth outcomes across OYF communities using the American Community Survey to track disconnection rates: community, high school, postsecondary, and workforce
- In 2022, New Orleans had 5,122 (12.2%) community disconnection youth, compared to the OYF network average of 11.4% and national disconnection rate of 10.9%.

Source:

- Aspen Institute Re-Invests in Innovative Community Collaboratives to Engage "Opportunity Youth"
- Designing for Success: Lessons Learned in Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund Sites

MOA's 2022 National Youth Disconnection Rates

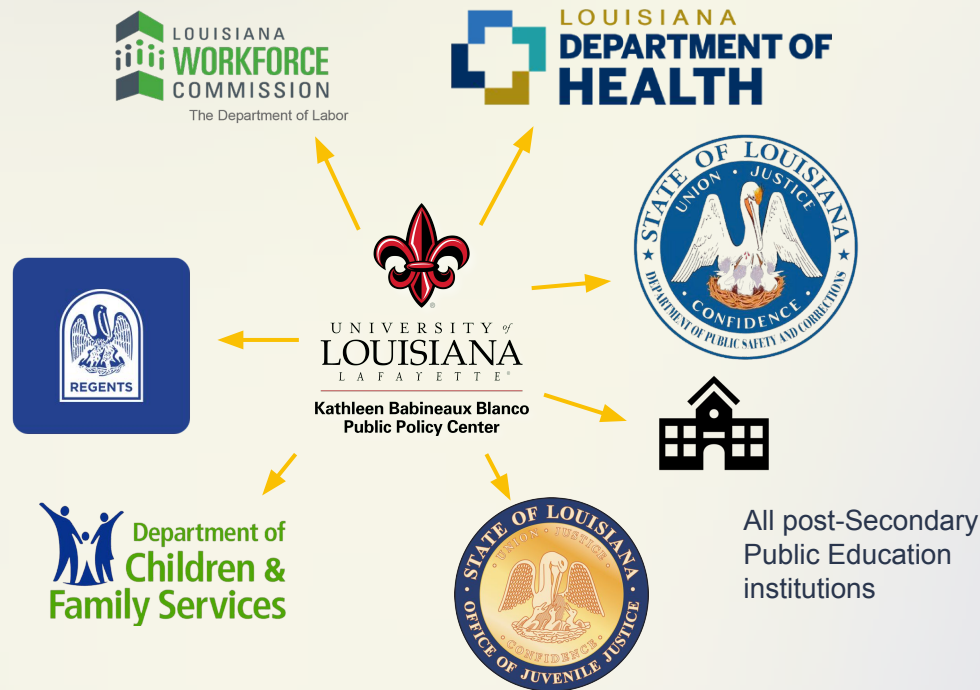
- Measure of America (MOA) newly published report on Youth Disconnection shows Louisiana with the highest rate of youth disconnection (15.5%), while the national average is 10.9%.
- The total decline in youth disconnection from 2012 to 2022 in Louisiana (1.9%) lagged the U.S (3.2%)
- The New Orleans metro – Metairie, LA region ranked 80th with 5,122 disconnected youth (~12.2% of all youth)



Furthermore, LA FIRST was signed into law in 2023 and funded to establish a new longitudinal data system

The Louisiana Foundational Integrated Research System for Transformation (La FIRST) will sit under the authority of the Board of Regents and be housed at the Kathleen Babineaux Blanco Public Policy Center at the University of Louisiana – Lafayette (ULL).

Entities Participating in LA FIRST Data Share^{*}



Note:
^{*} ULL is currently in the process of entering into data-sharing agreements with all the agencies named in the law.

As stated in the legislation, LA FIRST shall develop and annually publish the following reports:

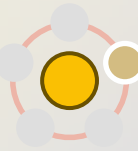
- Launch Louisiana report with an in-depth analysis of the elementary-and-secondary-school-to-college or –career transition
- Louisiana Employment Outcomes with linkages between workforce, credit, and noncredit, and post-secondary training and education
- Causes and Consequences of Criminal and Delinquent Acts reports with analysis of the criminal justice system leveraging linkages between education, employment, adult corrections, and juvenile justice.

The data provides the OY ecosystem an ability to track outcomes and conduct studies to analyze pathways of OY across the state.

Source:

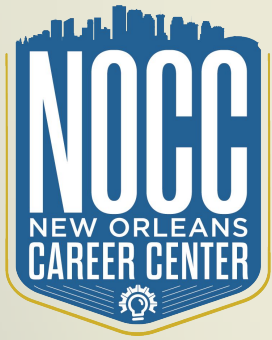
¹[Louisiana State Legislature RS 17:318.2](#)

The youth support network established new, effective backbone supports to help young people stay connected and thrive



The fundamental shift in the New Orleans OY ecosystem is the distribution of support to a set of organizations that provides leadership on pathways connection, organizational development, program quality, advocacy and education, and population support

Backbone OY Support Organizations



Detailed descriptions to follow



Mayor's Office
of Youth & Families



The NOCC credentials adult trainees and is expanding into new areas to provide industry-informed training with trainee-informed support

New Orleans Career Center (NOCC) equips the city's young people with the technical skills, the career prep, and the professional networks to succeed in high-wage, high-demand industries.

Workforce Development and Training Programs

NOCC is an anchor organization in the OY ecosystem. Hands-on technical training and employer engagement combine with extensive support and resources to maximize trainees' skills and opportunities.

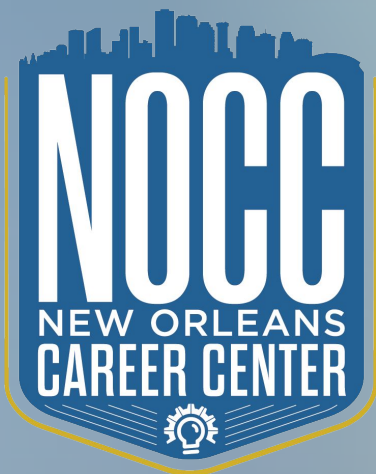
NOCC has expanded training for OY to include industry-based credentials in Building Trades - NCCER core training across trades, plus specializations in electrical, welding, and HVAC Healthcare - EMT, Medical Assisting, Patient Access Associate, Pharmacy Tech

Impact of Collaboration and Partnerships

NOCC's highly interconnected network of diverse partners — from Clover and United Way to Ochsner Health and LCMC Health, Broadmoor Construction and All-Star Electric — helps ensure training meets both trainee and employer needs. These interwoven connections lead to better preparation and more job opportunities for trainees.

Opportunities

- Employer engagement
- Alignment with economic demand - NOCC trains for jobs that exist, highlighting the need for stronger and more sustainable partnerships
- Navigating the complexities of federal and state funding, particularly SNAP Education and Training funds
- Lack of community awareness about available training pathways and funding
- Accessibility of data to external parties



At the Re-Engagement Center, 18 multi-sector partners convene to reduce disconnection rates 7% by 2026 among youth ages 16-24



The Re-Engagement Center (REC) is a free resource center for New Orleans youth ages 16-24 connecting youth to post-secondary opportunities and/or careers.



- The **New Orleans Youth Alliance (NOYA)** is a healing-centered youth development intermediary for the Greater New Orleans area that works to cultivate a system of high-quality, well-resourced youth development orgs.
- The REC, an initiative of NOYA, is a collaboration of multi-sector partners that includes workforce development programs, city agencies, employer providers, and higher education institutions
- One major goal of the Re-Engagement Center is to drive disconnection rates down 7% by 2026



In 2023, the New Orleans Children's Bureau developed a new model to meet mental health needs for youth



The New Orleans Children's Bureau of New Orleans supports more than 3,000 children and their families annually, promoting growth and resilience through prevention, advocacy, education, and intervention

The New Orleans Children's Bureau of New Orleans CMHWs Program

- Community Mental Health Workers (CMHWs) are a new peer-support model to meet the mental health needs for workforce program participants ages 18-24
- CMHWs complete a minimum of 5 weeks of training, including a 2-week state-approved Peer Support Specialist training module that expands upon the role of peers on mental health and substance abuse treatment teams.
- They are then matched with one or more youth workforce provider agencies alongside a mental health clinician
- CMHWs are permanent, salaried, and full-time employees



Services that CMHWs provide to peers include:

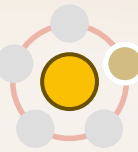
- Mental health education
- Outreach to program participants
- Connections to care
- Support to young people already receiving clinical services
- Nonjudgmental support with an emphasis on empowerment
- Emotional support during and between Children's Bureau trauma therapy sessions
- Collaboration and advocacy with other treatment providers and case managers
- Support in overcoming barriers to accessing mental health care



Source:

¹The Center for Law and Social Policy

Along with these support systems, workforce training CBOs are empowering hundreds of young people with the skills and resources to thrive



New Orleans OY-serving CBOs are essential, as they are on the frontline with OY, developing supportive partnerships, and working collaboratively with backbone organizations and community to achieve meaningful impact

Success of Community-Based Workforce Programs...

CBOs provide comprehensive on-the-job training experience, address individual barriers, and educational pathways for careers and college.

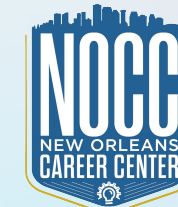
These organizations serve hundreds of OY each year.

...and programmatic partners support CBOs:

- Education institutions (e.g., Delgado Community College)
- Mental Health services (e.g., Children's Bureau)
- Professional training and advancement through SNAP benefits
- Justice-involved population support and development
- Employers



Center for
Employment
Opportunities





New Orleans youth-serving orgs collectively received \$7.38M in SNAP E&T funding from 2022-2024, averaging \$2.46M annually to support OY programming

- Louisiana's SNAP E&T initiative provides skills training and work experience for SNAP recipients.
- A number of OY-serving nonprofit orgs are successfully leveraging SNAP E&T reimbursements to create sustainable, braided funding models that complement philanthropic grant dollars
- Despite modest year-over-year decreases, orgs have collectively maintained strong funding levels with a total of ~\$7.38M from 2022-2024, \$2.46M annually

SNAP E&T Funding Trends Across Organizations (2022-2024)



Source: NOCC, Cafe Hope, Cafe Reconcile, Operation Restoration, YEP, Liberty Kitchen, Cowen Institute — SNAP E&T Funding Data and Context (2022–2024), provided to author via email communications, 2024.

In Year 9, the NOLA-YPQI Network consisted of 46 partners, serving approx. 40K young people in NOLA



40,000 young people throughout New Orleans are receiving quality service and program standards, aligned to evidence-based national best practices in Positive Youth Development

Reaching a Milestone:

In YR8 NOLA YPQI Network **bested National Averages** in all four assessment domains for the first time ever. Here are reflections on its success:

- These accomplishments have taken nearly a decade to realize, so this work is not quick
- This work requires deep integration into the youth-serving ecosystem.

Leadership and Innovation - FFYI

- PQA is an assessment tool used through Weikert and is designed for after school K-12
- FFYI/Weikart is only this year exploring the use of this tool with youth workforce orgs; NOLA has implemented for a decade



Source:

¹New Orleans Youth Alliance, Instagram

Partners celebrate victories for its Youth Master Plan, a plan adopted by the New Orleans OYF



Its development, implementation, and administration are supported in partnership by the New Orleans Children & Youth Planning Board (CYPB), the New Orleans Youth Alliance (NOYA), and the Office of Youth and Families (OYF).



The Youth Master Plan is a comprehensive roadmap from 2020 - 2030 for creating and sustaining a positive, youth-development focused, results-oriented New Orleans that works for all our young people.

The Youth Master Plan brings together young people, parents, educators, community leaders and other key stakeholders to develop, implement, and monitor a **ten-year, multisector plan** for improving outcomes for our children and youth across Orleans Parish.

Youth Master Plan Wins June 2023



Key Wins examples:

- Ensuring Sufficient Services for New Parents (free home-nurse visits)
- Non-punitive, supportive school cultures (COST model)
- Affordable, Youth-Friendly Transportation
- Caregiver Support Network



Advocacy efforts at the City of New Orleans led to free transit for youth; \$2.5m in pilot funding

The Opportunity Pass Pilot Program is making free transit passes available to Orleans Parish residents ages 16 to 24. Program started September 3, 2024 and was initially scheduled to end August 31, 2025, but efforts are underway to continue it for another year to better utilize the funding received, with planned program enhancements including the addition of paper passes.

The City Council allocated \$2.5m in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding to RTA for a pilot program, Opportunity Pass, to offer free transit fares for youth up to 24 years old

PROGRAM GOALS

- **Remove financial barriers** to travel
- **Grow ridership** for RTA transit
- **Educate the next generation**
- **Collect data** to improve transit for young adults.
- **Create the skills and confidence** for lifelong public transit ridership.

What does bulk enrollment and implementation look like?

- **The New Orleans Public Library** is administering signups at library locations.
- **Ride New Orleans** is managing the program, conducting outreach, performing impact assessments, and offering group enrollment workshops with transit literacy training at youth-serving organizations.
 - Available to Orleans Parish youth aged 16-24
 - Youth-developed program: transit ambassadors created all materials and processes, with youth focus groups providing program feedback
- **NOLA CYPB** is assisting with program development and outreach and overseeing impact assessment and reporting in collaboration with RIDE.
- **The Regional Transit Authority** is distributing passes and sharing usage data for program evaluation.



Major state policy win established the Louisiana OY Task Force with LOYAL members as leads



2024 OY Day at the Capitol followed the successful passage of Senate Resolution 47 (SR47), which establishes the Louisiana Opportunity Youth Task Force.

2024 OY Day at the Capital - LOYAL

The Task Force will study:

- Ways of improving the lives of Opportunity Youth
- Propose recommendations
- Offer proposals for legislation, if necessary and appropriate.

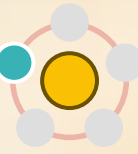
The Task Force will consist of leaders

- Two members of LOYAL
- Lived experts of Louisiana OY population (current or past)
- Louisiana Workforce Commission
- Louisiana Department of Education
- Louisiana Community and Technical College System
- Department of Health, Department of Children and Family Services
- The Commissioner of Higher Education,



The state-level OY Taskforce will likely have final recommendations that direct LA First on specific OY reports/studies that should be continually run to track OY outcomes statewide.

Frameworks trains orgs supporting young people on creating narrative shifts that drive systemic change



Frameworks provides research-based framing strategies and communication best practices to effectively engage audiences and generate support for systemic change.

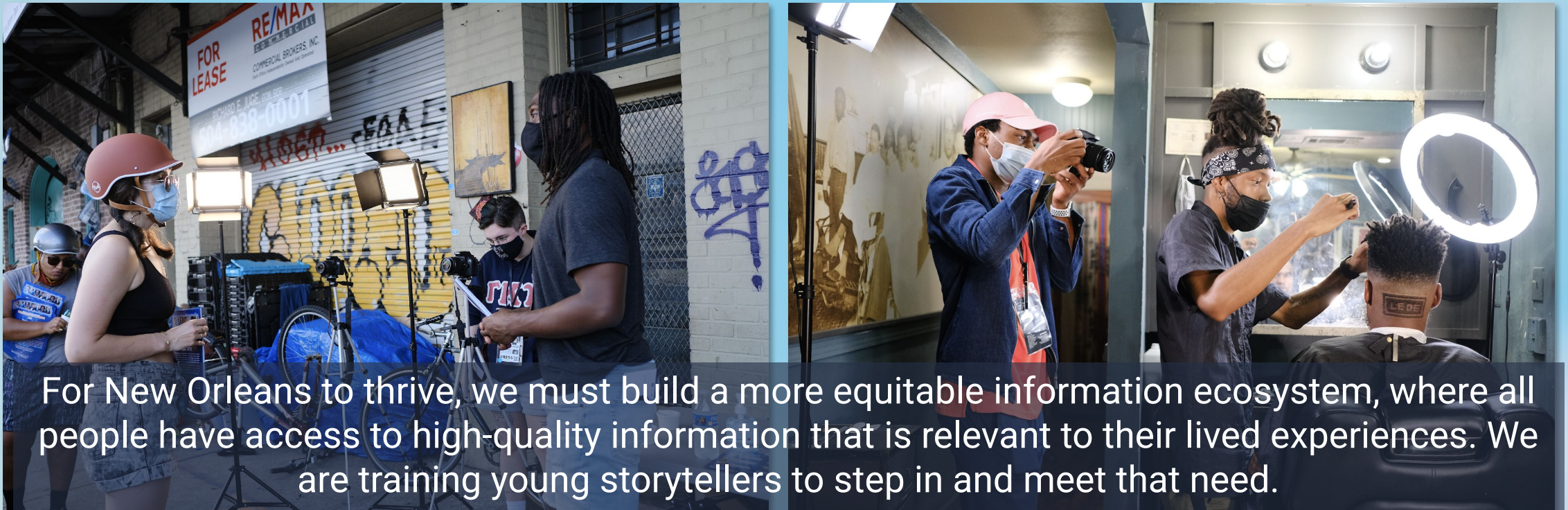


Frameworks emphasizes the need to move beyond labels like "Opportunity Youth" and instead provide context that highlights the challenges these young people face while emphasizing their potential.

LEDE is empowering New Orleans youth to tell their community's stories through journalism



LEDE equips creative professionals from underrepresented communities, age 18-25, with skills, tools and resources to transform the local information ecosystem.

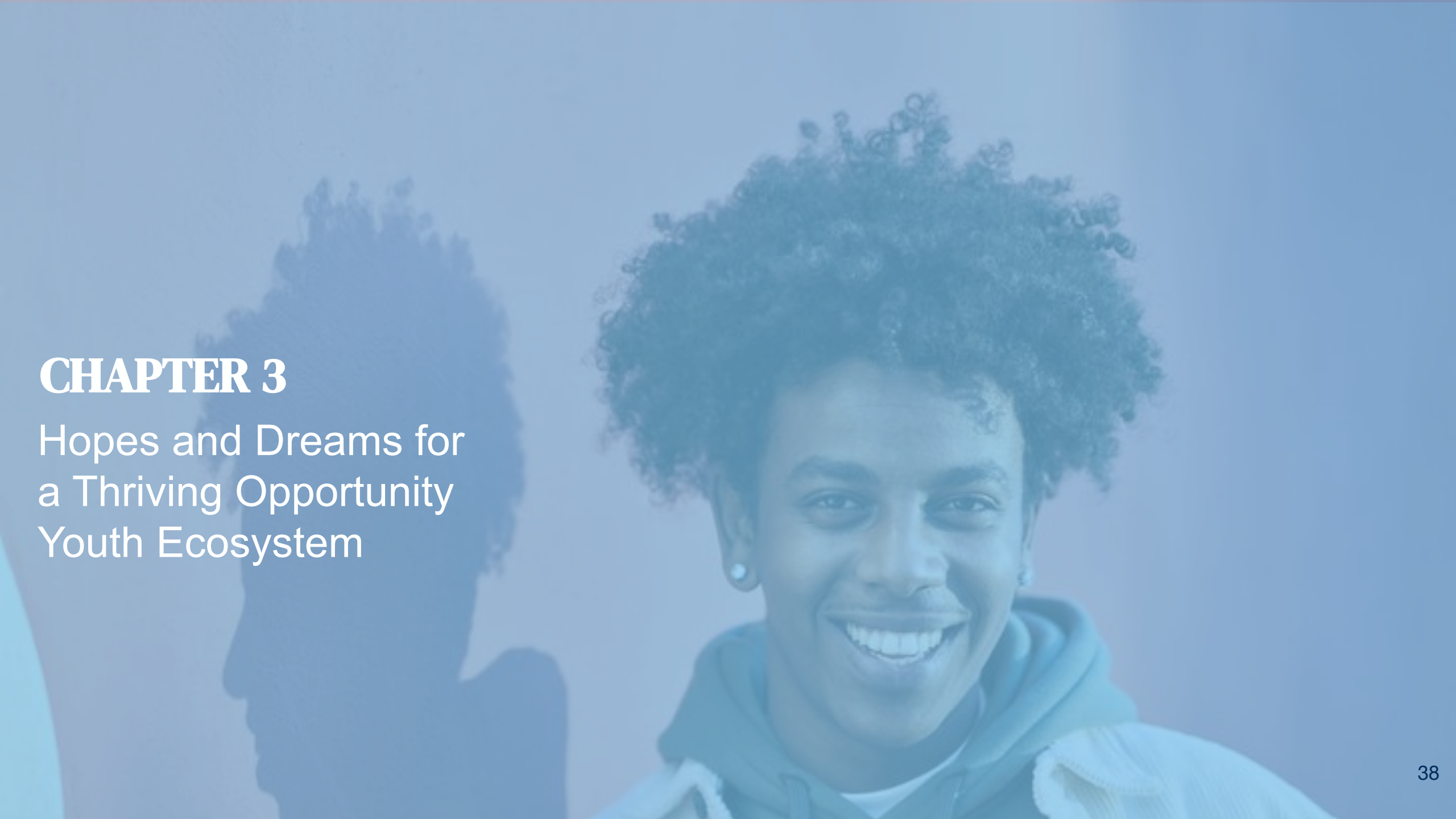




In summary, partners supporting young people achieve significant wins for the ecosystem through integrated capabilities.

Significant Wins in Strengthening Capabilities

Data Collaborative Impact	New Orleans Career Center	NOLA-YPQI Network	Policy and Advocacy	Youth Voice
This collaborative has allowed peer organizations to unite, exchange knowledge, and share wins, leading to better data-driven decisions and more effective programming	The New Orleans Career Center was launched to prepare high school and adult trainees for employment in high-wage, high demand industry sectors.	Young people throughout New Orleans are receiving higher quality service and program standards than ever before	This includes the establishment of the Youth Master Plan and efforts to improve transportation access for Opportunity Youth . Additionally, OY leaders formed the Louisiana Opportunity Youth Alliance (LOYAL) to focus on narrative change and advocacy.	Young people are owning their voices in their stories through LEDE, and Frameworks is supporting narrative change throughout the ecosystem



CHAPTER 3

Hopes and Dreams for a Thriving Opportunity Youth Ecosystem

Throughout interviews, leaders shared their hopes and dreams for the future of the youth of New Orleans and their communities

“

Quotes from
OY leaders”

“My hope is that **young people can find and access community better.** Healing work is connected to community connection and social connection.”

Youth Empowerment
and Building
Connections

“We need to make sure that in the OY space, we create the ways that let the youth identify and create their value. Troubled youth are the product of steady disinvestments. **Successful youth live in worlds that value connection;** this knowledge is crucial to future investments.”

Creating Value and
Overcoming
Disinvestment

“I want to **see young people have the freedom and autonomy to navigate the world on their own terms,** exploring their interests without feeling constrained.”

Autonomy and
Exploration

“**There’s too much focus on individual change as opposed to systemic change.** A young person could do everything right but still enter a system of inequity.”

Systemic Change
and Equity

Key lessons and funding strategies were observed from grantees as CNHF and funders look toward the future

Key Lessons and Funding Strategies based on Stakeholder Interviews

Lesson	Explanation	Funding Insights
Importance of a Place-Based Commitment	Sustainable impact requires long-term, place-based commitment from funders, paired with flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances.	Funders should consider multi-year funding commitments, especially in regions of major disasters / emergencies, and remain open to adjusting strategies as needs evolve.
The Power of Collaboration Over Competition	Shifting from a competitive mindset to one of collaboration has led to significant wins within the OY ecosystem.	Encouraging and funding collaborative initiatives rather than siloed projects can lead to more holistic solutions.
Need for Systemic Change with Individual Program Success	Individual program success should work in parallel to addressing systemic barriers, such as structural inequities, lack of access to resources, and fragmented services.	Investments should focus not only on programmatic interventions but also on driving systemic change. This could include policy advocacy, cross-sector partnerships, and initiatives aimed at addressing the root causes of youth disconnection.
Data as a Tool for Strategic Decision-Making	Reliable data is essential for understanding the long-term impact of programs and making informed decisions. However, several interviewees pointed out the challenges in data collection and sharing across organizations.	Funders could invest in initiatives that build the data capacity of local organizations and foster a culture of data-driven decision-making.

Key lessons and funding strategies were observed from grantees as CNHF and funders look toward the future

Key Lessons and Funding Strategies based on Stakeholder Interviews

Lesson	Descriptions	Funding Insights
Addressing Immediate Needs While Planning for the Long-Term	Immediate barriers, such as transportation and housing, must be addressed alongside long-term goals like career development and education, so Opportunity Youth cannot fully engage with longer-term opportunities.	Funders could support programs that offer holistic services, combining short-term relief with pathways to sustainable futures.
Importance of Listening to Youth Voices	Effective programs are those that listen to and incorporate the voices of Opportunity Youth. Interviewees mentioned that when youth are involved in designing and evaluating programs, the initiatives are more likely to succeed.	Encouraging youth participation in program design and decision-making processes ensures that investments align with their actual needs and aspirations. The Foundation could fund initiatives that prioritize youth leadership and co-creation.
Resilience and Adaptability in the Face of Challenges	The need for emergency funds, mental health support, and flexible programming to address vulnerabilities in OY ecosystem became evident with COVID-19 pandemic	Building resilience into the funding strategy is crucial. The Foundation should consider creating emergency funds, supporting mental health initiatives, and allowing grantees flexibility in how they use funds to adapt to crises.

So, what does the path forward look like for the ever-evolving youth ecosystem of New Orleans?



1. **Data:** Build quality data in the OY Data Community of Practice, advocate for relevant studies through LA FIRST, and continue for advocacy of the City of New Orleans Youth Data Hub
2. **Population Focus:** Focus efforts on finding a home for the ReEngagement Center, continue to grow the impact of the New Orleans Career Center, and identify public dollars for the wrap around services and mental health
3. **Policy:** Maintain LOYAL momentum at the state level, ensure new administration keeps and names OY Champion, engage new Mayor, continue Office of Youth and Families
4. **Narrative Change:** Share and push narrative change within OY ecosystem, tell a cohesive NOLA OY story
5. **Program Quality:** Continue to provide resources, technical support and training in ensuring program quality

