



## **JOBS FOR THE FUTURE**

### **COMMENTS TO THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION REQUEST FOR INFORMATION ON STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR DISCONNECTED YOUTH**

PERFORMANCE PARTNERSHIP RESPONSE

DOCKET ID: 2012-OVAE-0014

July 31, 2012

Secretary Duncan,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information and input into the proposed Performance Partnership Pilots to improve outcomes for disconnected youth. We appreciate the Administration's focus on this important population of youth, and we look forward to working with the U.S. Department of Education and the Administration to encourage the adoption of strategies that are successful in re-engaging these youth and helping them find a path to postsecondary and career success.

Jobs for the Future has worked with the federal government, states, school districts, higher education, and community partnerships for nearly a decade to improve outcomes for off-track and out of school youth (those youth who are two or more years off-track from graduation and those that have already opted out of school). As a result, we have cultivated sets of promising and proven design elements that can increase the number of these young people who succeed in pathways through postsecondary credentials and good careers. We also work with the federal government, states, school districts, community partners and national organizations to advocate for policies that promote the adoption and scaling of program designs that effectively and efficiently help disconnected youth achieve postsecondary and career success.

We are excited to share what we have learned from this work, and we look forward to continuing the conversation throughout the development of the Partnership Pilots and other work building from the White House Council on Community Solutions and interagency working groups on youth topics.

Sincerely,

Jobs for the Future

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**I. EFFECTIVE OR PROMISING PRACTICES AND STRATEGIES**

**What Federal, State, and local programs or community collaborative efforts have improved outcomes for disconnected youth? What is the objective evidence of their success (e.g., evidence from rigorous evaluations using, for instance, random assignment and regression discontinuity design)?**

JFF has supported and studied a number of local and regional programs and community collaborative efforts that have improved outcomes for disconnected youth – including postsecondary outcomes. A number of these programs and collaborative efforts are relatively new, and therefore have limited longitudinal data but very promising early outcomes, which are detailed in this section. The common effective elements among these very promising approaches for Opportunity Youth help inform JFF’s recommendations on design elements and should be encouraged or required in the Performance Partnership Pilots and other efforts designed to reconnect youth to pathways to success. Descriptions of several of these programs and their outcomes are below.

*The examples are divided into two sections because there are two key elements that are critical to capture in the work of collaboratives:*

- 1) Does the collaborative support and implement interventions on the ground that create promising, evidence-based pathways for disconnected youth to and through postsecondary credentials and family-sustaining careers?
- 2) Does the collaborative work successfully together to plan, leverage resources, and create the political/community will to implement, sustain, and scale such pathways?

**Promising Programs: Supported Pathways and Impactful Collaboratives**

- 1) Supported Pathways to and through Postsecondary:

CCTA in the Rio Grand Valley: District-led Re-engagement Success

Launched in 2007 under the leadership of Dr. Daniel King in Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Independent School District in the Rio Grande Valley, the College, Career, and Technology Academy (CCTA) has graduated over 1,000 former dropouts and off-track youth in five years—more than a 75% graduation rate, and approximately half graduate with postsecondary credit through dual enrollment. CCTA engages young people age

18-26 who have either dropped out of school or have reached the end of their senior year lacking high school credits or having failed the state's high-stakes exit exam. The Pharr-San Juan-Alamo school district, where CCTA is located, graduated 1,885 students in 2010-11, nearly double its 966 graduates four years earlier, just before the CCTA program was launched. The school district serves students in an area where 90% of the population is Hispanic and one in three students are economically disadvantaged.

CCTA students—many of whom have been out of school for years—take classes to complete their high school credit requirements and prepare for the state tests; and when they are ready, they seamlessly transition into college courses at nearby South Texas College while finishing up their high school requirements.

Students progress through three “back on track” phases that take them through postsecondary education:

- **Enriched Preparation**, which offers high-quality college-ready instruction with academic and social supports;
- **Postsecondary Bridging**, which builds college-ready skills and provides informed transition counseling; and
- **First Year Supports**, which offers supports in the first year of postsecondary to ensure persistence and success.

Key program elements within the three-phase model:

- **College-going culture**
- **Common Instructional Framework** for accelerating student learning and preparing for college
- **Dual enrollment**, including a College Success class that teaches college navigation and habits for success
- **Transition counseling and other supports** for students from high school through college

#### **College expectations and culture:**

CCTA builds a college-going culture starting at recruitment—through, for example, billboards throughout the community that advertise CCTA as a place for young people who didn't finish high school to "start college today." At intake, students not only chart their path to graduation but also register for the dual enrollment courses they will take at South Texas College once they are eligible. They receive both on-line credit recovery and academically rigorous and engaging instruction, designed to accelerate learning among underperforming students so they can tackle and master college material.

#### **College-ready curriculum and instruction:**

Teachers at CCTA utilize Jobs for the Future's Common Instructional Framework, a set of six evidence-based instructional strategies, used across content areas, which

underpin a coherent college preparatory curriculum. They give all students of all skill levels access to the complex information needed to meet state and college-ready standards, and they are used in every classroom every day.

### **CCTA Replication Network**

Given the graduation and postsecondary successes of CCTA, a replication network has been formed to scale these key program design elements to other sites. Across the replication sites, 925 students are participating in dropout recovery programming that transitions them to college success. School leaders are sharing strategies for effective intake, college-ready instruction, student supports, postsecondary and career counseling, and postsecondary bridging. Hundreds of students are participating in dual enrollment through these programs. The replication network is also bringing efficiencies to the system by better enabling sites to collaborate on planning, resources, and data for serving these off-track and out of school youth.

### **New York City's Transfer Schools**

New York City's transfer schools are small, academically rigorous, diploma-granting high schools for students who have dropped out or who have fallen behind and have far fewer credits than they should for their age. These schools provide a personalized learning environment, rigorous academic coursework with student-centered instruction, and connections to career and college opportunities. Through the city's Learning to Work (LTW) initiative, community-based organizations (CBOs) partner with transfer schools to provide students with youth development support, academic support, and opportunities to develop skills for the workforce and for postsecondary education. Through LTW, students can participate in subsidized internships, college and career counseling, and job placement. Partnering CBOs also provide attendance outreach, individual and group counseling, academic tutoring, and youth development supports.

According to a 2010 evaluation by Metis, the transfer schools within LTW significantly outperform New York City's traditional comprehensive high schools on 6<sup>th</sup> year graduation rate measures. The transfer school 6<sup>th</sup> year graduation rate average is 13% higher than the average for traditional high schools, although the transfer schools serve a population who dropped out and are significantly behind in school. The 3 highest performing transfer schools outpace the traditional high schools' average 6-year graduation rate by 50%, 32%, and 31% respectively. The Metis evaluation looked at individual student data, surveys of LTW participants, and focus groups with LTW graduates over a 3-year period (2005-2008).

The program design incorporates research-based components, including:

- A personalized learning environment
- Rigorous academic standards, student-centered instruction
- Support to meet students' academic and developmental goals, provided by CBOs
- Connections to college and career readiness

- Engaging students through relevant work opportunities and skill-building geared toward the future,
- Technical assistance to strengthen the capacity of program staff and administrators to implement the initiative

**Postsecondary Success Initiative: YouthBuild, NYEC, and The Corps Network Increase College Readiness and College-going for Disconnected Youth**

Through support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Open Society Foundations, JFF has been working since 2008 as a technical assistance partner with national networks, all of whom have companion grants. The focus of this initiative is to substantially increase numbers of former dropouts who complete secondary credential programs (high school and GED alternative programs or schools), enter postsecondary programs and persist to earn a credential or degree. JFF’s focus is to build the capacity of networks to support grantees strengthening their program designs and create products and tools to assist and scale the work within these networks. The grantee group has grown in three and a half years from the original seven (in two networks) to 34 in three national network partners. Also with The Center for Youth and Families at Brandeis University—evaluators of this initiative—JFF designed a common reporting system and the initiative is now able to report first results using a system that currently includes information on 29 programs and 1769 youth. Although credential data is not yet available, results to date include:

- Of those entering programs without a secondary credential (some students enter college bridge programming having already earned this credential), 69% earned a diploma or GED
- 52% of program completers enrolled in college
- 47% tested out of developmental reading or writing
- 67% persisted through at least one semester of postsecondary education

2) Impactful Collaborative Efforts:

Philadelphia’s Project U-Turn: A Model Multi-sector Collaborative

Project U-Turn is a citywide collaborative campaign in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, that focuses public attention on the dropout crisis and designs strategies and leverages investments to resolve it. It is a multi-sector effort that grew out of the Youth Transition Funders Group (YTFG) Strategic Assessment Initiative, which JFF helped to coordinate. Key members of the collaborative steering committee include:

- Cartographic Modeling Lab at the University of Pennsylvania
- Center for Literacy
- Center for Social Organization of Schools at the Johns Hopkins University

- City of Philadelphia, Managing Director's Office and Department of Human Services
- Congreso de Latinos Unidos
- Eastern Pennsylvania Organizing Project
- Nu Sigma Youth Services
- Philadelphia Anti-Drug/Anti-Violence Network
- Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth
- Philadelphia Education Fund
- Philadelphia Juvenile Probation Department
- Philadelphia Reintegration Initiative
- Philadelphia Youth Network (managing partner)
- School District of Philadelphia
- United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania
- William Penn Foundation

In Philadelphia, Project U-Turn has focused on improving graduation rates, but its strategy grounded in community advocacy and organizing, is an achievement in itself. The Project U-Turn collaborative and the intermediary managing the effort, the Philadelphia Youth Network (PYN), have gained commitments from high-level leadership to address a critical challenge, along with grassroots support for reforms that focus not only on increased graduation rates but also an expanded range of youth outcomes, postsecondary success and economic development.

Project U-Turn framed its actions around the 4 strategic priorities of YTFG:

- The collection and dissemination of data on the population of struggling and out-of-school youth
- The development of an expanded set of options for struggling students who are not on track to graduate with their peers (e.g., those who are over-age and lacking significant credits for their grade) and out-of-school youth
- The design of a political strategy for removing policy barriers and creating new incentives to address the dropout crisis
- The mobilization of constituents to act on improving outcomes and options for struggling and out-of-school youth

The collaboration's efforts are producing results:

- Philadelphia’s graduation rate has gradually increased over the 5 years.
- Public and private resources raised to support reengagement and more effective education for these young people have reached \$73 million.
- The number of schools for off-track and out-of-school youth—called Accelerated Schools in Philadelphia—has grown from one to thirteen in five years. These schools have expanded effective options for off-track and out of school youth in Philadelphia.

Five key factors underpin Philadelphia’s success in focusing attention on—and addressing—the city’s dropout crisis:

- A funded, staffed intermediary organization to drive the agenda and coordinate resources
- Actionable data that impel policy and practice changes
- Two levels of partnership: a broad stakeholder group and a smaller strategic planning team
- Structures, such as work plans, that keep partners engaged and mutually accountable
- A committed local funder

Because of important early and ongoing steps taken by the Collaborative, the city’s mayoral and district leaders have embedded Project U-Turn-endorsed strategies for addressing the issues of struggling students and out-of-school youth into their strategic priorities. The inside/outside strategy operating in Philadelphia provides lessons for the field on the promise of a stable and focused partnership in keeping a community focused on an enduring municipal challenge.

**National Fund for Workforce Solutions:  
Regional Collaboratives for Economic Impact**

The National Fund For Workforce Solutions (NFWS) is an excellent example of an initiative that utilizes regional collaboratives and partnerships to achieve the career advancement of low-wage workers (including young adults) and meet the skill needs of high demand regional employers. While not solely focused on youth, the collaboratives serve workers of all ages; and the structure of the collaboratives and the lessons learned about the power of collective community engagement are applicable to programs serving disconnected youth.

The key functions of workforce collaboratives include:

- Identifying high demand industry sectors within regions, the corresponding skill needs of individuals and of employers in those regions, and the capacity of training institutions to meet those needs;

- Organizing multiple stakeholders including employers, education and training institutions, human services providers, public and private institutions and funding in support of common goals;
- Convening industry partnerships of employers in high demand industry sectors to work with education and training providers to ensure that training is relevant to employers' needs;
- Providing or brokering services—through sector-based training and supports—that help jobseekers gain access to career pathways and employers to skilled workers;
- Testing and implementing innovative approaches to the training, workforce preparation, and career support for jobseekers and employees; and
- Sparking improvements in public systems and business employment practices.

The National Fund currently operates in 32 local communities across the country. It is funded by over 430 national and local funders, including numerous public and private partners in the communities where it operates, leveraging public and private resources as well as broad system expertise. The National Fund also received a Social Innovation Fund (SIF) grant in 2010 to expand its assistance to at least 23,000 additional participants over three years—particularly in southern states.

By the end of 2011, partnerships in the NFWS had enrolled 29,654 participants. In that same year, over half (52 percent) of the participants had a high school diploma or less; and ethnic minorities (African-Americans and Latinos) made up the majority of participants. By 2011, among all participants who completed education or training, 64 percent completed occupational skills training, with 18,143 degrees and credentials awarded—sixty-one percent of which were occupational skills certificates, credentials, and licensures with value in the labor market. Overall, this collaborative effort has significantly increased credential attainment, employment and earnings for its participants, and helped to increase the competitiveness of employers in the 32 regions where it operates.

*NOTE: The programs listed in response to these questions are just a few select examples of successes with the disconnected youth populations. Other models such as Year Up, YouthBuild USA, and others have also made significant progress on outcomes for this population and should be considered. Common successful elements across all of these models and examples are discussed in the response to the next question.*



**What program designs have great promise of improving educational, employment, or other key outcomes for disconnected youth? What is the best evidence to support these program designs (e.g., correlational or longitudinal outcomes analyses)?**

Although disconnected youth are a heterogeneous population of young people, there appear to be common elements across successful and promising programs that serve specific segments of the disconnected youth population. These elements, discussed below, are critical to strong program designs that improve outcomes for disconnected youth.

JFF believes that the program design elements listed in this section are the elements that should be incorporated into Performance Partnership Pilots to ensure that disconnected youth can be successfully re-engaged on pathways to postsecondary and career success.

While flexibility is important, in order for federal, state, and local funds to be used as efficiently and impactfully as possible, Performance Partnership Pilots should include a framework for program design priorities to ensure the implementation of best practices and improved outcomes

### **Evidence-based Program Design Elements**

- **Pathways to postsecondary credentials with clear on-ramps for students from multiple entry points**
- **Acceleration, not just remediation**
- **Navigation and supports for postsecondary success**
- **Strong community partnerships**
- **Data-based decision making and course-correction**

### **Pathways to Postsecondary Credentials with Clear On-ramps for Students from Multiple Entry Points**

Clearly articulated pathways to postsecondary credentials should be made available to all youth, regardless of where students fall along the education spectrum. Particularly for those who are disconnected, academic and career pathways should align and in some cases integrate clearly sequenced secondary and postsecondary education and training coursework, along with strong supportive services, in ways that: increase the postsecondary credential attainment of the students; and in the case of those in career

pathway initiatives, increase the skills and credential attainment of the students, as recognized by high demand employers.

Every on-ramp must set a clear, up-front expectation for postsecondary success, while also re-engaging disconnected youth from their current context or entry point. This might take place through a youth development or other community-based organization (CBO), an alternative education setting, the workforce investment system, adult basic education, a social service agency, or another school setting within a school district—depending on where the youth is identified and re-engaged.

### **Acceleration, Not Just Remediation**

Accelerated, rigorous learning options are a critical element for getting disconnected youth back on track to graduation and through postsecondary success, because it allows them to make up for lost time and keep momentum towards a credential, rather than languishing in solely remedial or non-credit course work. This design element includes a rigorous curriculum aimed at postsecondary preparation and credential attainment; dual enrollment opportunities for re-engaged and recovered secondary school students; and contextualized learning opportunities. Students can earn postsecondary credits at the same time as they complete their secondary curriculum and gain academic and career skills with value in the labor market. Postsecondary completion is the expected outcome of the accelerated learning, regardless of the program.

### **Navigation and Supports for Postsecondary Success**

Programs for disconnected and off-track youth must include the academic, career, and social supports that can help youth make up for lost time and persist through pathways to postsecondary credential attainment, resulting in good careers.

The kinds of navigation tools, structures, supports and opportunities that are needed by disconnected and off-track youth include:

- Supportive services including tutoring, mentoring, and financial aid, academic, career, and personal counseling,
- Outreach and special attention at points of transition, including counseling by an advisor, counselor or coach who supports students' entry into and progress through the pathway, including during the first year of postsecondary education and training,
- Academic and career navigation services that include:
  - Student assistance in identifying upfront a clearly articulated sequence of coursework that will lead to a postsecondary credential and a family sustaining career,
  - College knowledge courses,
  - Postsecondary and career navigation supports informed by current or real-time labor market information, and

- Information on postsecondary education and training options.
- Expanded learning opportunities including work-based, community-based and other outside of school experiences that add relevance to academic learning, particularly those tied to in-demand occupations in high growth industries. These experiences, when tied back to academic coursework, can lead to significantly improved postsecondary and employment outcomes.

### **Strong Community Partnerships**

Collaboration between key state and community stakeholders is essential to fully leverage public and private sector expertise and resources in support of comprehensive pathways for disconnected and off-track youth.

**Effective partnerships for improving secondary and postsecondary education and career outcomes for disconnected youth include:**

- **Secondary and postsecondary education institutions;**
- **Intermediary organizations focused on youth and community outcomes;**
- **Community based, youth-serving and philanthropic organizations;**
- **Federal, State, and local youth programs (e.g., Workforce Investment Act programs, Juvenile Justice, Housing, Child Welfare, Health, Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment, Childcare);**
- **Elected officials, business and civic leaders; and**
- **Other experts in the field of youth development, education, and employment**

Particularly in this time of tight budgets, partnerships can help **expand and sustain options for disconnected youth** to re-engage and succeed in pathways to postsecondary education and training, and on to careers. These collaborative efforts can also provide students with the **academic, career, and social supports** they need to stay in school and make successful transitions to postsecondary education, credentials and careers. This includes **making connections to credentials and careers that will have value in the labor market**—to increase their career and economic outcomes and support economic growth in the community or region.

It is also critical that **formal articulation agreements** be established along education and training pathways, with counseling, navigation, and supports provided particularly at points of transition to ensure persistence, program completion, credential attainment and employment (as appropriate).

The most successful collaboratives that JFF has worked with all have a **strong backbone organization** that is staffed specifically for the purposes of creating and implementing pathways and supports, and building community support and political will to sustain these high quality options (e.g. Philadelphia Youth Network for Project U-Turn; the Pharr San Juan Alamo school district for CCTA)

### **Data-Based Decision Making and Course-Correction**

Effective collaboratives collect, analyze, and use data consistently across systems and in time to identify students in need of interventions (e.g. Early Warning Indicator Systems in secondary schools); plan interventions, partner offerings, and pathways; track interim and final outcomes for students across partner entities; inform best bet postsecondary programs of study or career pathways for programs and students; and make changes in programming/supports based on outcomes and student needs.

### **BACK ON TRACK THROUGH POSTSECONDARY MODEL**

One particularly promising model is the Back on Track through Postsecondary model, which incorporates three overlapping phases to re-engage and accelerate off-track and disconnected youth to college and career readiness, provide a supported transition to postsecondary education and training, and ensure that they complete first critical year of postsecondary education. This model has excellent early results (postsecondary enrollment and persistence) with formerly disconnected youth—both those who earn a GED and those who earn a high school diploma. The results are also seen both for students who were 2 or more years over-age or under-credited for high school graduation (“off-track” youth) and those who were out of school.

The model draws on lessons learned in JFF's work with innovative diploma and GED-granting programs, districts, intermediaries, and networks that support many of them, and a decade of JFF's work developing and scaling up early college high schools for low-income, first-generation college goers.

The three phases are:

1. **Enriched preparation** integrates high quality college-ready instruction with strong academic and social supports.
2. **Postsecondary Bridging** builds college-ready skills and provides informed transition counseling.
3. **First-Year Support** offers appropriate supports in first year to ensure postsecondary persistence and success.

Many of the programs mentioned above (e.g. the Postsecondary Success Initiative, many of New York City's transfer schools, CCTA) are implementing the components of the Back on Track model with great early results, as documented earlier in our response.

## II. PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

**Which State, local, non-profit and business partners have been involved in the successful initiatives addressing the needs of disconnected youth that you may have described in response to one or more of the questions in this RFI? Which partners should be involved in the future?**

While the exact partners for each community initiative should be tailored to the desired outcomes of the collaborative effort, there are several critical partners that can be seen across collaborative effective in producing secondary, postsecondary, and career success for disconnected youth. The role of each partner should be clearly identified and intentionally aligned to the outcomes the collaborative hopes to achieve and the needs of youth in the community. [See Section I for list of key partners.]

**What role did or what role could philanthropic organizations play in supporting these types of initiatives you may have described in response to one or more of the questions in the RFI?**

Philanthropic organizations can:

- Provide seed funding for an initiative
- Serve as a tipping point for an initiative, particularly when several organizations pool funds and provide a framework to help communities adopt proven program across multiple sites
  - (e.g. Youth Transition Funders Group (YTFG) funding supported 5 cities in making significant collective action strides in disconnected youth initiatives)
- Leverage and sustain strategies by incorporating a particular community initiative's focus into the philanthropy's own goals, funding choices, communications and activities.
- Support the data analysis and strategic planning phase of the effort to increase options for off-track/out-of-school youth.
- Support the work of an intermediary to provide the "glue" that brings together the sectors critical to improving outcomes
  - (e.g. William Penn Foundation in Philadelphia's Project U-Turn)
- Support codification and replication of successful models
  - (e.g. Open Society Foundation's funding helped form a replication network based on CCTA in the Rio Grande Valley)

**Which Federal programs should be involved in performance partnership pilots for disconnected youth?**

**Programs that have typically been leveraged within effective community collaborative strategies, or could be leveraged, include, but are not limited to:**

Workforce Investment Act-Youth and Adult Formula Funds, Adult Education, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Community and Development Block Grant, Social Services Block Grant, Community Services Block Grant, AmeriCorps, Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education funds, Title I and II of ESEA (including School Improvement Grants), High School Graduation Initiative, Higher Education Opportunity Act, and other discretionary education funds such as Race to the Top, Investing in Innovation, and Promise Neighborhoods.

While we recognize that this pilot only proposes to include discretionary funding streams, it should be noted that several mandatory funding streams are typically leveraged as part of successful community collaboratives serving disconnected youth. For example, TANF is pivotal in supporting low-income students and families as they persist in education and work; and student aid programs, particularly Pell grants, are critical to paying for eligible postsecondary education programs.

State and local partner agencies should also play a pivotal role in strategically thinking across systems and incent positive behavior for increased education options – such as ADA funding following students and funding for specific schools designed for this population.

**Provisions for waiver**

A number of policy barriers hinder the spread of promising pathways to postsecondary credentials for disconnected youth. Key among these are: fragmented data systems, restrictive eligibility, restrictions on the use of funds, and misaligned reporting requirements. These barriers make it difficult to blend funding streams strategically or to identify and serve disconnected youth in ways that support postsecondary attainment for this population of young people.

Youth who are disconnected are, by definition, outside the country’s organized systems for education and training. At the same time, many of these young people are eligible for a variety of services offered by different agencies and through different funding streams. Entrepreneurial *Back on Track* programs are notable for the way they blend various sources of funding to create seamless, supported pathways for young people on the journey to productive adulthood.

Far more educators would replicate what works if eligibility criteria, uses of funds, and reporting/accountability requirements were aligned and simplified across programs and

agencies. Similarly, federal policies should persist in encouraging connections between K-12 and higher education data, as well as across state agencies. Performance Partnership Pilots can advance these important goals.

Provisions that should be potentially eligible for waiver are:

- **Application processes:** multiple federal applications are more cumbersome and require more time and money
- **Eligibility criteria:** disconnected youth are found across multiple systems, and multiple funding streams are needed to address their academic, social, and work needs
- **Intake/enrollment processes/paperwork:** streamline intake for youth to encourage reconnection
- **Data management:** allow data systems to talk to each other as much as possible, while preserving privacy, in order to allow for outcome measurement and appropriate student enrollment
- **Reporting requirements:** allow communities to align disparate reporting requirements across systems to aim towards common goals—*but maintain a focus on serving the most at-risk students without creaming.*

### Additional recommendations on flexibility

#### Flexibility for many, waivers for some

JFF believes that there should be a difference between flexibility to blend or braid funding versus waivers from Federal requirements on uses of funds and reporting/accountability requirements. While flexibility to more easily leverage funds should be available for a broader number interested partnerships, waivers from Federal law in this context should be carefully reviewed under clear cross-agency rules, and provided to partnerships with the program designs, accountability provisions, and partnership structures that reflect evidence-based promise or effectiveness in improving outcomes for disconnected youth.

#### Technical assistance resources

Pilot flexibility should allow participants to use a portion of their blended funding for technical assistance to maximize outcomes. Serving disconnected youth in high quality programs and pathways is complex work. If federal funds are not available for these sites, then interagency efforts should identify outside funds that will be targeted for technical assistance—which is critical to ensuring communities' success.



**Clarity and consistency across agencies**

In order for communities to truly be able to benefit from this pilot proposal, there must be clarity regarding the rules for flexibility and waivers and that such flexibility will be evenly and consistently applied across the Federal agencies involved. Confusion or inconsistencies could serve as a disincentive to apply for participation in the pilots, particularly given limited resources and time in local communities.

**Provide preference for existing, highly effective collaboratives**

Because the work of building effective community coalitions and improving outcomes for disconnected youth are complex, we believe that communities that have shown a prior commitment to serving this population, and a willingness to come together in a productive manner to develop effective pathways and solutions, should receive preference in this competition.

**Provide preference for pilots that align state and local policies in addition to federal policies**

In order for collaboratives to truly improve outcomes, state and local policymakers should be aware of the work of the collaborative and supportive of its goals. To the extent possible, state and local policies should be aligned to the goals of the partnerships' work, and preference should be given to communities that have shown a commitment to leveraging state and local funds in addition to federal funds, as well as policies that encourage the success and sustainability of the initiative.

### III. OUTCOMES, DATA, AND EVALUATION DESIGN

**What are the key outcomes that pilots should measure, and what indicators should be used to track intermediate and long-term success for youth?**

Postsecondary credentials are more important than ever in today's economy, with pay and job opportunities increasingly dependent on the education and skill levels of America's workers.

Effective community collaboratives succeed in increasing secondary, postsecondary, and employment outcomes for disconnected youth. *The final outcomes that Performance Partnership Pilots are held to should focus on postsecondary credential attainment and career success; however interim measures are critical to keeping communities engaged and showing participants' progress along academic and career pathways.*

**Performance Partnership Pilot outcomes and interim measures should include:**

**Final outcomes:**

- Postsecondary credential attainment (industry-recognized credentials; certificates; 2- and 4- year degrees),
- Further postsecondary educational attainment (e.g. Master's degree, additional credential work, etc.), and
- Employment outcomes (e.g. employment secured, salary/wage information at entrance to employment) should be the ultimate outcomes measured for these pilots.

**Interim measures:** Pilots should put a premium on participants reaching milestones along pathways towards a credential and employment, particularly milestones that are associated with increased likelihood of credential completion. Programs that are successful in re-engaging students towards postsecondary credentials with value in the labor market often show interim progress on:

- High school credit accumulation and persistence
- College preparatory course credit accumulation in secondary school (e.g. dual enrollment, or developmental education courses taken prior to first year of postsecondary education)
- Cohort 4-, 5-, and 6-year high school graduation rates
- Enrollment in postsecondary education\*
- Persistence and credit accumulation in the first year in postsecondary education and persistence into year 2\*
- Passing grade of C or above in gateway math, English course in first year
- Enrollment in a program of study within the first year
- Stackable credentials earned in postsecondary education and training

\*Programs that are promising but newly implemented often show increases in postsecondary enrollment and persistence, even if postsecondary credential data is not yet available.

*NOTE: Programs should be compared to other programs serving similar populations.*

**What existing data collection mechanisms can be harnessed to track indicators, outcomes, and participant characteristics?**

- State Longitudinal Data Systems are developing further as a result of ARRA and other Federal, State, and outside resources, increasing state capacity to track outcomes for students across education and training systems.
- States will need to fully implement the parts of these systems that track postsecondary enrollment, persistence, and credit accumulation, as well as employment outcomes. All of these components are necessary in order to adequately see the impact of programs across a period of time. These longitudinal, cross-system data systems are particularly important for understanding outcomes for populations like disconnected youth, who are re-engaged through a variety of agencies and organizations, depending on where the youth find an on-ramp back to education and training.
- CBOs often track data as trusted partners. Districts and higher education institutions can work with CBOs to share and align data collection and reporting

to increase capacity for analysis and collective communications and action. This should be encouraged/reinforced through FERPA policy, while still protecting individual student information.

**What evaluation designs should be used to demonstrate improved outcomes or improved cost-effectiveness of Performance Partnership Pilots?**

- While randomized control trial evaluations are a gold standard in evaluations, the cost associated with such evaluations can sometimes be prohibitive, particularly in communities serving large numbers of disconnected youth.
- Evaluation designs should include quasi-experimental designs as well as randomized control trials.
- Evaluation designs should also include a variety of treatment options, rather than simply treatment / no-treatment so that the field can advance learning about effective practices from the programs implemented.

**How do the Federal government, States, and local entities ensure that the flexibility provided through the pilots does not have any adverse effect on the most vulnerable populations?**

- Interim and final outcomes measures, specifically reported for disconnected youth and the most vulnerable populations, as well as more formal evaluations, should inform whether flexibility continues to be provided to the entities after a certain period of time.
- Required program design features can also help shape the collaborative strategies to improve outcomes so that they are effective in serving the most vulnerable populations.
- Giving credit for interim measures is important in creating the incentive to serve the most vulnerable populations.

## V. ALTERNATIVE PILOT DESIGNS

### **JFF recommends a hybrid model for the design of the pilots.**

We believe that the formula grant model will not provide sufficient incentives to local communities to collaborate on complex new efforts. It is challenging to pull a percentage of formula funding away from established uses, and ask community partners to design and collaborate on a coherent strategy. The flexibility to combine resources and align reporting requirements may not be adequate incentive, limiting the number of applications and potential projects.

A hybrid pilot model combines the positive aspects of competitive grants with an additional incentive for local partners to combine some amount of formula funding that they identify and align locally (i.e., with additional points awarded to proposals that specify how they would accomplish the blending of formula funds).