

Developing Supportive Educational and Career Pathways for Young People

Lessons From the Learn and Earn to Achieve Potential (LEAP) Initiative

ABOUT THE LEARN AND EARN TO ACHIEVE POTENTIAL (LEAP)[™] INITIATIVE

LEAP is a multistate initiative that is increasing employment and educational opportunities for young people ages 14–25 who have been involved in public systems, experienced homelessness or are parents. Launched by the Corporation for National and Community Service’s Social Innovation Fund and the Annie E. Casey Foundation in 2015, this effort involves 10 local partnerships working across eight states, several national organizations — including Job’s for America’s Graduates, JFF and School & Main Institute — and a growing network of funders, employers, government organizations, workforce development entities, child welfare and justice agencies, postsecondary institutions and K–12 schools and districts.

WHAT ARE SUPPORTIVE EDUCATIONAL AND CAREER PATHWAYS?

Young people striving to get an education and develop careers often face challenges on the road to adulthood. This is especially true for young people of color, young people who have been involved with the justice or child welfare systems and young parents.

Supportive educational and career pathways help young people tap into their talents and reach their full potential. These learning and employment experiences enable youth and young adults to obtain a high school diploma or equivalency, earn industry-valued credentials and begin developing careers that align with their interests — all while accessing services and support that enable them to overcome the unique challenges they are facing and meet basic needs.

THE CORE ELEMENTS OF A SUPPORTIVE PATHWAY — LESSONS FROM LEAP

Since 2015, LEAP partners across the country have been adapting and expanding supportive educational and career pathways for youth and young adults.

Drawing on lessons from their work and findings from a national evaluation, members of the LEAP network identified the core elements of these pathways and corresponding activities to help guide public systems, institutions and nonprofit organizations looking to undertake or expand similar approaches.

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CORE ELEMENTS OF SUPPORTIVE EDUCATIONAL AND CAREER PATHWAYS	ACTIVITIES
Equity-Centered and Inclusive Environments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Foster a sense of belonging and connection by amplifying young peoples' stories and experiences. ■ Develop clear processes, including organizational audits, to identify and address inequitable practices and policies that create barriers to success and cause disparities for youth of color. ■ Create an organizational culture that prioritizes equity and values all racial and ethnic backgrounds and young people's diverse lived experiences. ■ Disaggregate data by race, gender, system involvement and parenting status to ensure continuous improvement and more equitable partnerships, access, resources and outcomes.
Flexible Learning Experiences Tailored to Young Peoples' Needs and Responsive to the Labor Market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provide high-quality learning experiences — including networking and work-based learning opportunities, as well as exposure to local employers and careers — that equip young people with the technical, academic and employment skills and competencies they will need for career and postsecondary success. ■ Promote flexibility—through individual and group programming, schedules that accommodate work and parenting responsibilities, remote and in-person services and options that allow young people to pause participation to attend to unforeseen circumstances. ■ Offer guidance, financial resources and ongoing support as young people pursue their postsecondary and career goals, especially during key transition periods — for example, the 12 months following completion of their high school diploma or equivalency, and the first year in college or a job.
Youth-Centered Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Fully integrate young people into design and decision-making processes so they can identify barriers, priorities and needed system improvements and, ultimately, advocate for the policy and practice changes they want to see. ■ Help young people strengthen their leadership skills and step into formal leadership roles.
Support in Meeting Basic Needs and Navigating Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Help young people access resources, including housing, mental health, child care, transportation and technology. ■ Provide youth with opportunities to earn income, reduce debt and build financial assets. ■ Coordinate service and support provision with local partners — through personal referrals, for example — and help young people navigate public systems.
Empowering Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Build and sustain meaningful and culturally affirming youth-adult relationships that help young people build confidence and become self-sufficient. ■ Implement youth development strategies and practices that account for trauma and help young people heal. ■ Foster avenues for strong peer-to-peer connection and support, particularly for young parents.
Formalized Structures for Collaboration and Shared Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Develop a shared agenda among partners that prioritizes equity, reduces systemic barriers and expands high-quality learning and work opportunities. ■ Establish formal referral and data-sharing agreements. ■ Share resources — human, monetary and material — and ensure long-term financial commitments from key stakeholders. ■ Secure a commitment from all partners to collect and share data that can be used to improve program and service delivery. ■ Engage partners across sectors, including employers, health care practitioners, housing agencies and educational institutions.