Career Pathways Framework

An Approach to Addressing Youth Violence

December 2013

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

WHY A CAREER PATHWAYS FRAMEWORK T0 ADDRESS
YOUTH VIOLENCE?

The Career Pathways Framework ("*the Framework*") is designed to support comprehensive resource development and capacity building of programming that will put the 40,000 young people ages 10–24 living in five Boston neighborhoods with high rates of violent crime on a path to positive youth development and meaningful employment.

The Framework was created by the Youth Violence Prevention Funder Learning Collaborative (*"the Collaborative"*), which brings together over 100 private and public sector funders, experts, and stakeholders to learn, share, and act in order to align funding to address gaps and barriers that prevent youth violence in South End/Lower Roxbury, Dudley Square, Grove Hall, Bowdoin/Geneva, and Morton & Norfolk Streets, five Boston neighborhoods that experience 80 percent of violent crimes in the city.

While understanding there are various worthwhile strategies to support these young people, this Framework focuses on a career pathways strategy that incorporates a public health approach, which includes a systematic process for identifying and describing a problem, developing and evaluating interventions to prevent the problem, and implementing those interventions in communities. Existing tools, such as the Achieve, Connect, Thrive (ACT) Skills Framework, Survey of Academic Youth Outcomes (SAYO) Evaluation System, the Program in Education, Afterschool, and Resiliency (PEAR), as well as the importance of wrap-around services such as trauma-informed practices and family supports have also have been factored into the Framework's development.

The Collaborative has embraced a career pathways approach as a youth violence prevention strategy for three primary reasons:

1. Responds to youth's stated needs: Young people from the Collaborative's focus neighborhoods have identified an increase in well-paying and meaningful jobs that lead to career advancement as a priority need for reducing youth violence. An existing evidence base further validates the positive impact of employment on youth behavior and attitudes.

2. Aligns diverse funding streams and youth-serving organizations around shared youth outcomes: The Career Pathways Framework proposes a unified approach that can be used by multiple stakeholders, including public and private funders, to support out of school and youth employment programs and build a robust pipeline for youth employment.

3. Builds on an existing strength in the City of Boston: There exists a strong network of programs and funders focused on creating career pathways for youth with a diverse range of experiences and needs. The Collaborative's approach will capitalize on the previous successes of the meaningful employment sector in Boston and add resources and capacity to link supportive services and strengthen programs so that more young people will benefit.

Based on proven practices that have been researched and identified by leading practitioners, the Framework is designed to provide practical applications for funders to use in their grantmaking with out-of-school and early employment programs. Specifically, this Framework responds to a need in the community for one comprehensive document that will help us work towards better and more consistent outcomes for young people, using employment as the entry point.

This Framework is intended to:

- Create **common definitions, language, and practices around six integrated levers** that will enable funders and providers to build consistent supportive services for youth across all programs.
- Provide guidance for **practical ways to a) resource and b) provide services** in each of six key levers.
- Foster collaboration within and among organizations, programs, and funders to **reduce costs and duplication.**
- Build **a common vision and priorities for funders and programs to advocate together** for youth in their programs.
- **Integrate community resources** together and **affirm the importance of all youth-serving organizations** in the Framework's implementation and success.

| Develop common language for funders and nonprofits | Funders and programs commit to align around the Framework | Foster collaboration based on common program practices, outcomes, and measures | **Build a city-wide career pathway for all youth** |
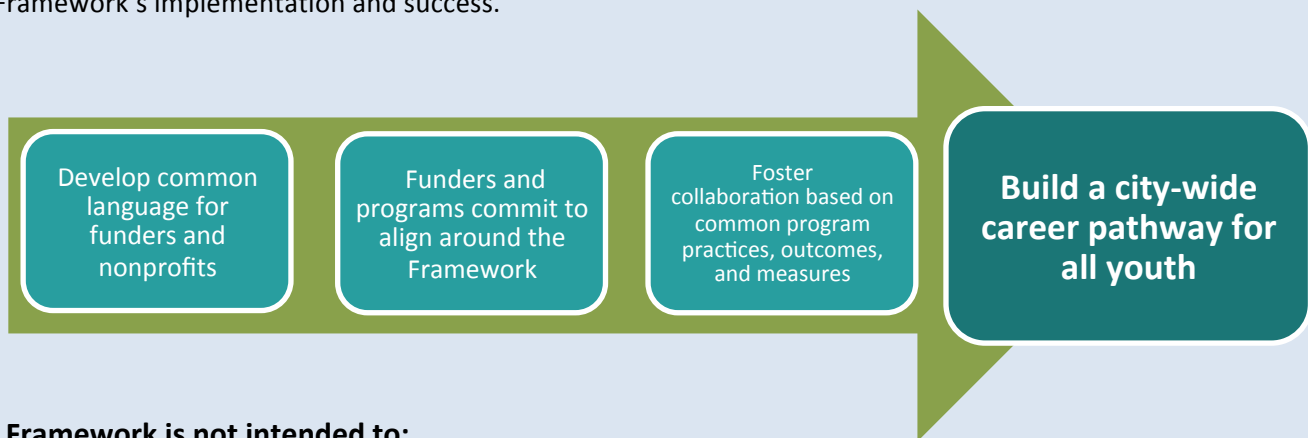
This Framework is not intended to:

- Advocate a "one size fits all" approach or prescribe that all youth serving programs provide employment opportunities, meet all family supports needs directly, etc.
- Claim it is the only answer to youth violence, but instead is part of a broader solution.
- Be a static document; as the environment changes, so must the Framework.

This document represents work to date in an ongoing process to support programs and funders to build career pathways for youth. Participate in YVPFC events or email yvpfc@rootcause.org to stay informed of future versions of this document and the development of additional tools.
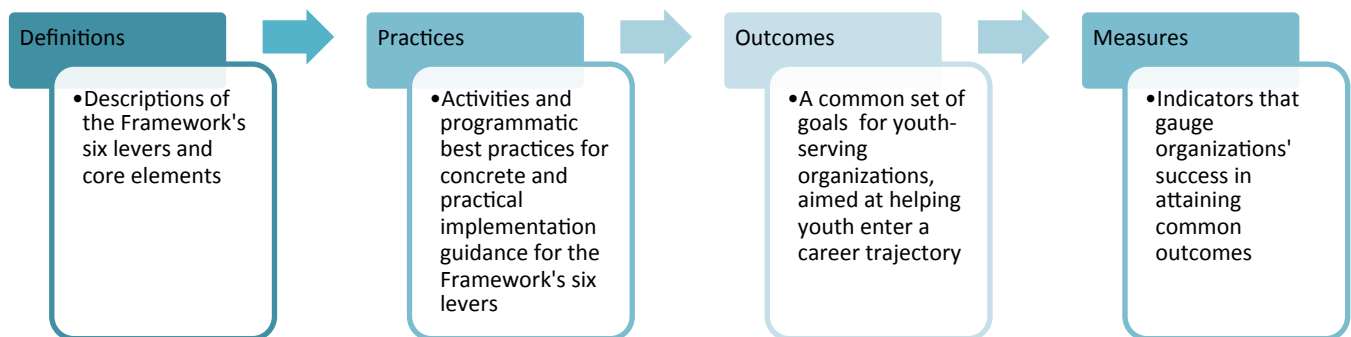
HOW CAN THE CAREER PATHWAYS FRAMEWORK BE USED?

Funders may use the Career Pathways Framework to inform their funding by integrating it into their core practices. For out-of-school funders, this includes added attention to career preparedness in their applications and grant renewal process for a broad range of programs. For those funders focused on workforce development, the goal is to adopt the full Career Pathways Framework into their selection process as well as ongoing grantee support. The Framework also holds value for in-school programs to build links with out-of-school learning as well as in their school operations.
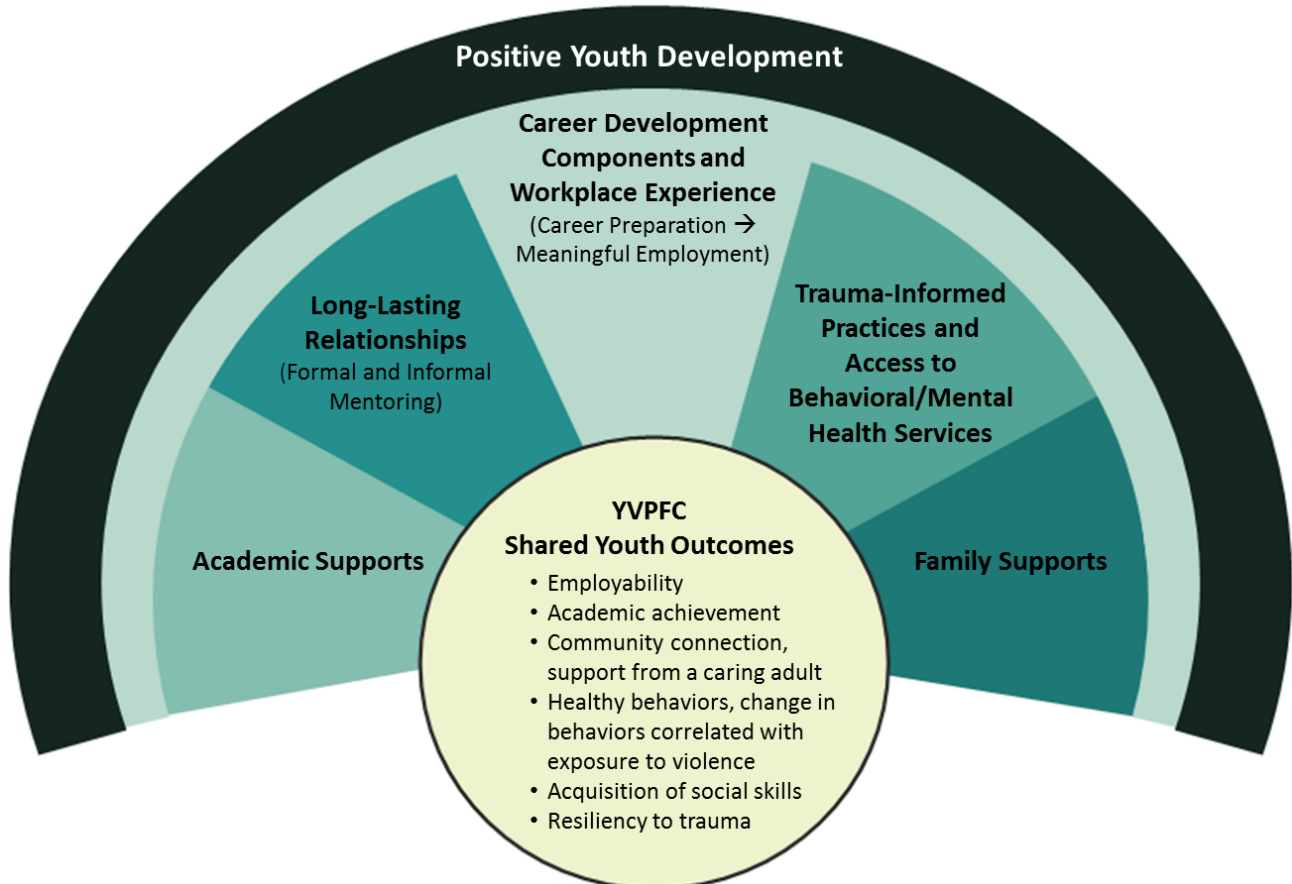
The expectation is not that organizations will be able to "do it all." The Framework provides a way for funders to help programs build a core culture that allows a range of program types including after-school, summer, recreational, arts, sports, academic, schools, as well as those specifically with an employment focus, to provide consistency to enhance their operations to serve youth and be a resource for their families.

WHAT IS IN THE CAREER PATHWAYS FRAMEWORK?

With positive youth development as the anchor for all programs, the Framework provides **definitions, practices, measures, and outcomes** for supporting youth in five key areas.

Definitions	Practices	Outcomes	Measures
• Descriptions of the Framework's six levers and core elements	• Activities and programmatic best practices for concrete and practical implementation guidance for the Framework's six levers	• A common set of goals for youth-serving organizations, aimed at helping youth enter a career trajectory	• Indicators that gauge organizations' success in attaining common outcomes

The diagram below illustrates the key levers of the Career Pathways Framework. When integrated into the design and implementation of out-of-school and employment programs, the Career Pathways Framework will support positive outcomes for youth to move onto a career pathway.

Positive Youth Development

Career Development Components and Workplace Experience (Career Preparation → Meaningful Employment)

Long-Lasting Relationships (Formal and Informal Mentoring)

Trauma-Informed Practices and Access to Behavioral/Mental Health Services

Academic Supports

Family Supports

YVPFC
Shared Youth Outcomes
- Employability
- Academic achievement
- Community connection, support from a caring adult
- Healthy behaviors, change in behaviors correlated with exposure to violence
- Acquisition of social skills
- Resiliency to trauma

Creating a Career Pathway

The Career Pathways Framework defines *career pathway* as: a set of activities that lead young people to academic persistence and a sequenced and thought-out path of work-readiness and meaningful employment, all aimed at getting them prepared to enter a career trajectory.

Integrating Positive Youth Development (PYD)

At the center of the Career Pathways Framework is a focus on a positive youth development (PYD) approach to working with youth across age groups, risk levels, and program types.

The positive youth development model mirrors a public health approach, which is a guiding principle of the Collaborative. Many of the principles that comprise youth development strategies, such as prevention, specific population focus, and mobilization of affected communities, also guide public health activities.[i]

Meeting Youth Where They Are

For hard-to-reach or disconnected youth, the promise of a paycheck is a hook to motivate them into educational persistence that will lead to a lifetime of meaningful employment. Meaningful employment begins long before a job application, and early preparation of young people is key. Therefore, the Career Pathways Framework provides specific guidance based on the age of participants:

- Out-of-school learning programs for youth ages 10 to 14 to begin job preparedness by integrating career exploration and soft skill development
- Employment programs for youth 15 to 24 with a focus on career exploration, soft skill development, and meaningful employment

Sensitivity to Exposure to Violence

The Career Pathways Framework is designed to support youth living in the neighborhoods with the highest levels of violent crime in Boston. Within these neighborhoods, the Collaborative recognizes that programs must be tailored to consider, among other important factors, varied levels of exposure to violence.

Understanding different youth populations means that appropriately designed programs will vary in intensity, duration, cost, and services offered according to the needs the young person faces. While no young person fits neatly into any one category, below is an overview of three different youth risk levels.

Level One: Youth Placed at Risk	Level Two: Higher Risk Youth	Level Three: Proven Risk Youth
Indirect exposure to violence	Elements of Level One and:	Element of Levels One and Two, and:
Lives in high impact neighborhood	Direct exposure to violence or trauma	Perpetrator and/or victim of violence
Low socio-economic status/ poverty	Abused sexually, physically, or emotionally	Likely involved in gang activity
Diagnosed with learning or developmental disability	Dropped out or at risk of dropping out; poor school attendance	
Parental substance abuse or criminality	Has alcohol or substance abuse issues	
	Likely court-involved and/or involved in criminal activity	
	Pregnant or parenting	
	Foster, homeless, or lack stable housing	
	Out of school and unemployed	

CAREER PATHWAYS FRAMEWORK: DEFINITIONS OF THE SIX LEVERS

| LEVER	DEFINITION	
Positive Youth Development (PYD)	**The PYD approach** recognizes that empowered young people need support, guidance, and opportunities during adolescence to develop self-assurance in four key areas: competence (being able to do something well), usefulness (having something to contribute), belonging (being a part of a community and having relationships with caring adults), and power (having control over one's future).	
Career Development and Workplace Experience	**Career development** encompasses the employment-focused support and programming that set up youth to successfully obtain, succeed in, and build on meaningful employment opportunities. Career development begins years before employment through career preparation, and then moves on to a meaningful employment experience.	
	Career preparation (ages 10–24): Soft skill development and career exploration. **Soft skills** are personal attributes that enhance an individual's interactions, job performance, and career prospects. Also known as interpersonal skills, life skills, or people skills, they include proficiencies such as communication skills, professional appearance, conflict resolution and negotiation, personal effectiveness, creative problem solving, strategic thinking, and team building. **Career exploration** activities are experiences that help young people to (a) identify how their interests, values, and skills relate to careers of interest; (b) describe the skills and activities associated with those careers; and (c) identify the post-secondary training, two-year, four-year, or graduate degree programs needed to successfully pursue those careers.	**Meaningful employment** (ages 14–24) describes paid work experiences with quality supervision, a well-defined learning plan, and connections to supportive services (particularly positive youth development and mentoring activities).
Trauma-Informed Practices	**Trauma-informed practices** reflect an approach in which all components of the organization incorporate a thorough understanding of the prevalence and impact of trauma, the role that trauma plays, and the complex and varied paths in which people recover and heal from trauma. A trauma-informed approach is designed to avoid re-traumatizing those who seek assistance, to focus on "safety first" and a commitment to "do no harm," and to facilitate participation and meaningful involvement of consumers and families, and trauma survivors, in the planning of services and programs. It also requires, to the extent possible, closely knit collaborative relationships with other public sector service systems.[ii] *(See endnotes for a definition of trauma)*	
Long-Lasting Relationships	**A long-lasting relationship** is a relationship over a prolonged period of time between two or more people where an older, caring, more experienced individual provides help to the younger person as that person goes through life. Long-lasting relationships with a caring adult provide support, guidance, and opportunities that young people need. Long-lasting relationships may be forged between youth and staff members, teachers, mentors, or other notable figures in a young person's life.	
	Formal mentoring is a structured youth development program, such as Big Brothers Big Sisters, where a caring adult mentor works one on one with a young person or with a small group of no more than four young people to provide support, guidance and a positive role model. Mentors are usually volunteers, and these programs have highly structured operations. Formal mentoring programs have clearly outlined goals for the mentoring and dedicated times for matches to meet and build a relationship with set time duration for meetings and the length of the overall match.	**Informal mentoring** occurs in the context of a youth development program where paid staff or volunteers work with youth, one on one or with groups or peers, in dedicated ways to provide long-lasting support, guidance, and a positive role model over an extended period of time. It is a natural approach for the staff person, and the informal or intentional nature is part of the context of the program and overall strategy to engage and develop the young people in the program. Informal/intentional mentoring describes program outcomes and operations as mentoring but usually does not describe staff as mentors themselves.
Family Supports	**Family supports** refer to the capacity of programs to engage families at multiple levels, including into program delivery and leadership. Family supports also refer to linking participant families to appropriate referrals and helping them advocate for themselves to agencies and organizations that address the needs, services, and resources that families and youth require to achieve physical, emotional, and financial stability.	
Academic Supports	**Academic supports** refer to the capacity of organizations to support the desire, action, and ability of a student to succeed within the education system from beginning through completion.[27] This encompasses grade promotion, high school and higher education graduation, and/or completion of vocational training or certification programs. For Opportunity Youth, ages 16 to 24, who are not in school or employed, this refers to the ability to reengage individuals in an educational and/or work program that puts them on a career path.	

CAREER PATHWAYS FRAMEWORK:
ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES FOR THE SIX LEVERS

Consistency in organizational practice is the cornerstone of the Framework because it brings with it an external predictability for youth across programs—the kind of reliable foundation on which positive working relationships are built and youth progress.

As a young person matures, his or her interests, experiences, needs, and family circumstances vary. Young people change schools and have the opportunity to be involved with a range of out of school and employment programs throughout their development. While the focus and design of programs vary greatly, the career pathways framework provides a guide for six levers:

- Positive Youth Development Approach
- Career Development and Workplace Experience: Career Preparation and Meaningful Employment
- Trauma-Informed Practices
- Long-Lasting Relationships: Formal and Informal Mentoring
- Family Supports
- Academic Supports

Implemented together across years and program experiences for any one young person, these levers support organizational practices that will provide quality and consistency responding to the specific needs of youth who have had the highest exposure to violence.
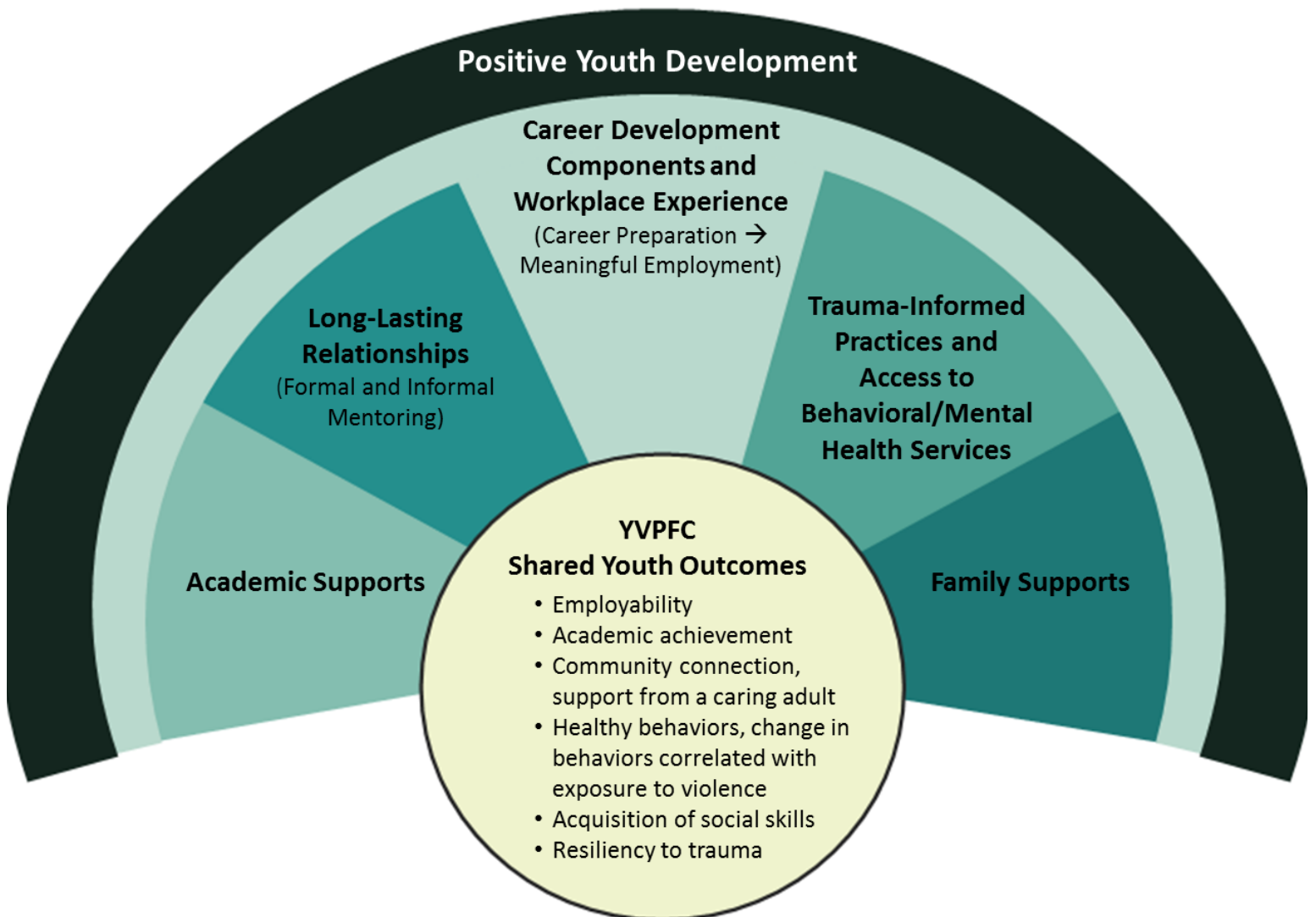
Career preparation is essential in forming aspirations and making informed choices about careers.[iii] This Framework defines career preparation with two main areas: soft skill development and career exploration.

Without these advance supports, a job placement or employment experience may not be a successful or positive one for a young person. Employers and youth service providers emphasize that in order to be successful, young people need to walk through the employer's door with a basic set of skills, often referred to as soft skills or 21st century skills, including such things as handling feedback well or knowing the importance of arriving on time.

Career exploration is an essential element of career preparation because it allows young people to envision themselves as members of the workforce on their own terms and with a wide exposure to the possible ways they can contribute. In turn, they can see a first job experience as a building block in a career pathway.

Definitions

Career development encompasses the employment-focused support and programming that set up youth to successfully obtain, succeed in, and build on meaningful employment opportunities. Career development begins years before employment through career preparation and then moves on to a meaningful employment experience.

Career preparation (ages 10–24): Soft skill development and career exploration.

Soft skills are personal attributes that enhance an individual's interactions, job performance, and career prospects. Also known as interpersonal skills, life skills, or people skills, they include proficiencies such as communication skills, professional appearance, conflict resolution and negotiation, personal effectiveness, creative problem solving, strategic thinking, and team building.

Career exploration activities are experiences that help young people to (a) identify how their interests, values, and skills relate to careers of interest; (b) describe the skills and activities associated with those careers; and (c) identify the post-secondary training, two-year, four-year, or graduate degree programs needed to successfully pursue those careers.

Practices to enhance soft skills

1. **Best practices and essentials for job success** – Staff provide youth participants with an introduction to the world of work, including information on:[iv,v]
   - Skills and interests need for job success
   - Job search skills and the job search process
   - Application components (online applications, resumes, cover letters, references)
   - Online identity management on social media outlets (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)*
   - Professional communication (telephone calls, voicemails, and emails)
   - Interview preparation and best practices
   - Personal documents required by employers

2. **Soft skill development** – Staff provide youth participants with activities and instruction to develop some of the following soft skills through structured program activities (workshops, trainings, internships, etc.):[vi,vii,viii]
   - Professional appearance & communication, attendance & punctuality*, perseverance *, enthusiasm & attitude*, teamwork*, networking, problem solving & critical thinking*, professionalism

Please note that not all the skills or attributes listed here are required in working with younger youth, aged 10 to 14. Skills that are relevant to the younger youth population are marked with a blue asterisk.

Practices to further career exploration

1. **Exposure to career options** – Organizations/agencies offer opportunities and/or referrals for youth to gain exposure to career fields in a variety of ways, including one or more of the following:[ix]
   - Field trips and company visits
   - Presentations by and opportunities to interact with people in different professions and careers
   - Job shadowing, in which young people accompany an adult to work
   - Internships, paid or unpaid opportunities to work in a workplace
   - Career fairs, events that bring together multiple professionals to interact with youth
   - In-school or after-school programs with curriculum linked to skills for particular career fields
   - Career academies focused specifically on equipping students with workforce skills in their areas of interest

2. **Career assessments** – Staff provide career assessments to help identify students' school and post-school preferences and interests, and use youth's career interests to identify and recruit employer partners for job shadowing, site visits, career speakers, and informational interviews.[x]

3. **Coaching for employer partners** – Partner employers and career representatives receive guidance on hosting youth for job shadow days, conducting site visits, presenting as career speakers, and participating in informational interviews.[xi]

4. **Structured learning opportunities** – Staff provide youth with structured assignments, such as evaluations, to complete during career exploration opportunities to maximize learning.[xii]

CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND WORKPLACE EXPERIENCE:
Meaningful Employment (Ages 14–24)

Meaningful employment opportunities help young people gain essential employability and occupational skills, while promoting a taste for earning income, increasing youth's desire to remain connected to the labor market, and affirming the importance of academic persistence to succeed in the workforce.[xiii] For all young people and particularly those high and proven risk youth, meaningful employment also reduces the risks of social isolation (staying at home), hanging out on the street, and being exposed to and participating in violent and delinquent behavior.[xiv] Meaningful employment and the accompanying paycheck is often the "hook" that brings a hard-to-reach young person in the door, opening up the opportunity to provide other supports.

Definitions

Career development encompasses the employment-focused support and programming that set up youth to successfully obtain, succeed in, and build on meaningful employment opportunities. Career development begins years before employment through career preparation and then moves on to a meaningful employment experience.

Meaningful employment describes paid work experiences with quality supervision, a well-defined learning plan, and connections to supportive services (particularly positive youth development and mentoring activities).

Meaningful Employment Practices

1. **Quality supervisor and work site screening** – Potential work sites complete a rigorous application process to evaluate the quality and level of supervision and assess the availability of wrap-around services, workshops, and training for youth.

2. **Dynamic youth–employer matching** – Organizations/agencies assess the characteristics of a work setting, community, and the specific needs of youth applicants to intelligently match youth to work sites for the best possible outcomes. Organizations/agencies also consider safety of locations based on youth applicant's individual affiliations in the community.

3. **Safety net** – Staff build relationships with youth applicants in order to provide a safety net for youth who are not successful in their first job. This is critically important to ensure that the highest-risk youth continue to have employment opportunities.

4. **Learning plan, wrap-around services, and skill building** – Organizations/agencies develop a learning plan with each youth applicant that furthers one or more of the following workplace and life skills:
   - Youth development competencies
   - Vocational/work-based learning and skills/job readiness
   - Social element/life skills/coaching/mentoring
   - Long-term employment opportunities
   - Problem solving
   - Financial literacy

5. **Outreach to disconnected youth** – Staff conduct targeted or customized outreach to disconnected youth, whether defined as court-involved youth, youth in foster care, homeless youth, high school dropouts, or other.

6. **Paid work** – Youth receive wages or a stipend for their participation in the employment program. This is key in helping youth to see their value to themselves and to the employer.

TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICES LEVER

Trauma is often caused by a combination of circumstances (such as living in an unsafe environment or chronic discrimination) and events (such as abuse or gun violence). The young people living in the high-crime neighborhoods where the Collaborative is focused are almost certainly coming to any youth programming site with previous exposure to traumatic circumstances or events. This means that trauma-informed practices should be a foundational element of youth services, especially in these neighborhoods.

For victims of trauma, traumatic reenactment or repetition is one of the most dangerous and daunting aspects of trauma. Further, when their trauma is not treated and healed, people will likely continue to repeat or reenact their traumatic experience in some way or another. Trauma-informed programs and services operate with an understanding and sensitivity to the vulnerabilities of trauma victims in order to avoid aggravating those vulnerabilities, ultimately increasing the chances of producing positive outcomes for children's wellbeing.[xv]

Definitions

Trauma-informed practices reflect an approach in which all components of the organization incorporate a thorough understanding of the prevalence and impact of trauma, the role that trauma plays, and the complex and varied paths in which people recover and heal from trauma. A trauma-informed approach is designed to avoid re-traumatizing those who seek assistance, to focus on "safety first" and a commitment to "do no harm," and to facilitate participation and meaningful involvement of consumers and families, and trauma survivors, in the planning of services and programs. It also requires, to the extent possible, closely knit collaborative relationships with other public sector service systems.

Individual trauma, as defined by the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration, results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and physical, social, emotional, or spiritual wellbeing.

Trauma-Informed Practices

1. **Staff training** – Staff are trained on the prevalence, types, symptoms, and short- and long-term effects of trauma. Ongoing professional development opportunities occur as determined by staff needs assessments.[xvi,xvii]

2. **Proactive identification of trauma-affected youth** – Program staff watch for the warning signs and symptoms of childhood trauma in the youth engaged by the organization.[xviii]

3. **Safe environment** – Organization/agency provides a safe and comfortable environment where children can talk by allowing children to retell their experiences and responding appropriately to children's disclosures.[xix]

4. **Established referral procedures** – Organization's/agency's policies describe how, when, and where to refer families for mental health supports. Staff actively facilitates families' access to trauma-informed mental health services by building strong, trusting relationships with families to help ensure that they follow through on referrals.[xx]

5. **Established emergency response procedures** – Organizations/agencies have an established plan of action for immediate and longer-term response to an incident in which young people in their program are the victims and/or perpetrators of a violent act. This includes working with families and all program participants.

6. **Community partnerships** – Organizations/agencies develop and maintain ongoing partnerships with state human service and community-based agencies to facilitate access to resources.[xxi]

- Access exists to trauma-informed services for prevention, early intervention, treatment, and crisis intervention.
- Mental health services are linguistically appropriate and culturally competent.

7. **Staff access to clinical consultations** – Staff has regular opportunities for assistance from behavioral health providers in responding appropriately and confidentially to families.[xxii]

8. **Clear and consistent expectations for participants** – Staff communicate the programs' expectations for youth in clear, concise, and positive ways, and goals for achievement of participants affected by traumatic experiences are consistent with the rest of the group.[xxiii]

9. **Supports for staff wellbeing** – Organizations/agencies proactively address the potential for secondary traumatic stress and high staff burnout.[xxiv]
   - Administrative staff and leadership understand the risk of secondary traumatic stress (STS) for staff members.
   - This awareness is communicated to staff members to help staff realize that reactions are normal for professionals who work with traumatized families.
   - Plan and implement a set of policies and strategies designed to prevent and address the effects of STS on staff and the agency (provide ongoing education about STS, promote self-care and wellbeing of staff through policies, ensure staff members receive adequate pay, benefits, vacation, and personal leave, etc.).[xxv]

LONG-LASTING RELATIONSHIPS LEVER: Formal & Informal Mentoring

On a foundational level, long-lasting relationships are vital because they show a young person that there is someone who cares about them, which significantly improves youth outcomes.

Developing long-lasting relationships through either a structured mentoring program or with youth workers, teachers or job supervisors can improve youth's school attendance; increase youth's chances of going on to higher education, and improve attitudes towards school. Mentors promote self-esteem, social connections, and relationships that help prevent substance abuse and other negative behaviors. Moreover, long-lasting relationships help mitigate the negative effects of trauma, decrease the chance of additional traumatic events occurring, and increase youth's resiliency in the face of future challenges.[xxvi]

Definitions

A long-lasting relationship is a relationship over a prolonged period of time between two or more people where an older, caring, more experienced individual provides help to the younger person as that person goes through life. Long-lasting relationships with a caring adult provide support, guidance, and opportunities that young people need. Long-lasting relationships may be forged through formal or informal mentoring between youth and staff members, teachers, mentors, or other notable figures in a young person's life.

Formal mentoring is a structured youth development program, such as Big Brothers Big Sisters, where a caring adult mentor works one on one with a young person or with a small group of no more than four young people to provide support, guidance, and a positive role model. Mentors are usually volunteers, and these programs have highly structured operations. Formal mentoring programs have clearly outlined goals for the mentoring and dedicated times for matches to meet and build a relationship with set time duration for meetings and the length of the overall match.

Formal Mentoring Practices

1. **A positive developmental perspective** – Mentors and staff members understand and practice the positive youth development approach.[xxvii]

2. **Thoughtful recruiting and screening** – Potential mentors are screened for time, commitment, and personal qualities; potential mentors receive realistic descriptions of program's aims and expected outcomes.[xxviii,xxix,xxx,xxxi]
   - Many young people, particularly those defined as at-risk, often have limited access to trusted, positive adult role models with whom they can establish supportive relationships. Research demonstrates that having a meaningful and substantial relationship with an adult is a key protective factor against youth violence. Mentoring programs can provide youth with that caring adult in their lives.

3. **Thorough training and matching** – Staff give attention to the compatibility of the mentor–mentee match; mentors receive thorough training in a number of relevant areas, including cultural competence.[xxxii,xxxiii,xxxiv,xxxv,xxxvi]

4. **Supportive relationships** – Mentors show commitment and follow-through; mentors keep things fun for mentees; matches are long-lasting; there is frequent and direct communication between mentors and mentees.[xxxvii,xxxviii]

5. **Ongoing monitoring and support** – Staff provide ongoing support for mentors with advice, problem-solving help, and training opportunities; there is ongoing monitoring of matches.[xxxix,xl,xli,xlii]

Though youth workers and work site supervisors do not work in a formal mentoring system and are not called official mentors, they have the opportunity to build strong relationships with youth, serve as role models, and produce many of the positive youth outcomes created through formal mentoring. They are often the first line relationship in stabilizing a hard-to-reach youth and building the opportunity to provide that young person with other supports. This includes helping mitigate the negative effects of trauma, decreasing the chance of additional traumatic events occurring, and increasing youth's resiliency in the face of future challenges.

Definition

> **Informal mentoring** occurs in the context of a youth development program where paid staff or volunteers work with youth, one on one or with groups or peers, in dedicated ways to provide long-lasting support, guidance, and a positive role model over an extended period of time. It is a natural approach for the staff person, and the informal or intentional nature is part of the context of the program and overall strategy to engage and develop the young people in the program. Informal/intentional mentoring describes program outcomes and operations as mentoring, but usually does not describe staff as mentors themselves.

Informal Mentoring Practices

1. **A positive developmental perspective** – Adult staff members and volunteers understand and practice the positive youth development approach.

2. **Comprehensive and regular training** – Staff and volunteers receive training on a variety of topics, including (1) how to employ a positive youth development approach, (2) how to set boundaries with youth, (3) how to supervise young workers, and (4) time management techniques to allow time for relationship-building.

3. **Supportive relationships** – Staff and volunteers show commitment and follow-through; staff and volunteers maintain a positive environment for youth; there is frequent and direct communication between staff and youth.

4. **Ongoing monitoring and support** – Supervisors of staff provide ongoing support for staff and volunteers with advice, problem-solving help, and training opportunities. There is ongoing evaluation of staff and their relationships with youth.

FAMILY SUPPORTS LEVER

Before they can focus on academic or career success, the young people living in the Collaborative's focus areas often need to address needs related to dependents, family members, and friends. While youth-serving programs will not be able to address all of those needs in-house, it is essential that programs are able to engage families in the program as partners and leaders to best facilitate young people's access to the resources they require. Central to this is building the trusting relationships and follow-up that make referrals successful. It is not enough to direct a young person to a trusted outside resource; it is important to provide support for effectively taking advantage of that service. This works best when services are a partnership that includes young people and their families as advocates for themselves and their needs.

Definition

> **Family supports** refer to the capacity of programs to engage families at multiple levels, including in program delivery and leadership. Family supports also refer to linking participant families to appropriate referrals and helping them advocate for themselves to agencies and organizations that address the needs, services, and resources that families and youth require to achieve physical, emotional, and financial stability.

Family Supports Practices

1. **Knowledge of community resources** – Organizations/agencies develop and maintain an ongoing, vetted list of organizations/government agencies that can support families' needs, which may include the following areas:[xliii,xliv]

   - Emergency food, housing, and clothing
   - Permanent housing
   - Health care (mental, dental, vision, general, substance abuse treatment)
   - Child care
   - Employment
   - Legal services
   - Public benefits and insurance
   - Immigration
   - Professional development and financial literacy
   - Ex-offender services, re-entry support
   - Veterans' services
   - Education
     - School-based (K–12): school selection, special education, ESL, academic subject tutoring, MCAS support
     - After-school and summer programs
     - Higher education: college preparation, scholarships, application assistance
     - Adult and alternative education: continuing education courses, certification programs, GED courses, ESL programs

2. **Community partnerships and connections** – Staff establish connections with organizations that have demonstrated success working with the populations that the youth/employment program engages, and are:
   - Culturally and language competent[xlv]
   - Accessible by public transportation
   - Operating on flexible hours
   - Using a positive youth development approach[xlvi]

3. **Ongoing outreach and resource developments** – Staff regularly update and conduct outreach to potential service providers and/or know how to access current information about services.

4. **Flex or "what if" funds** – Organizations/agencies have funds ready to support youth and families meet ad hoc needs that have become barriers to participation (e.g., transportation, utilities, basic needs), or establish connections with community resources that can meet participants' financial needs.

5. **Family involvement** – Programs solicit ideas and feedback from families and offer opportunities and encourage families to participate in program activities when appropriate. Whenever possible, families are engaged in decision-making processes about program activities and leadership.

ACADEMIC SUPPORTS LEVER

Academic success is closely linked to positive life outcomes, and for youth-serving organizations looking to connect youth to career pathways, promoting academic persistence must be a core program element. Though not all programs can provide academically based activities, they can help youth see the interconnectedness between academic and career success, help youth and families understand their educational options, and help participants navigate the school system.

Definition

> **Academic supports** refer to the capacity of organizations to support the desire, action, and ability of a student to succeed within the education system from beginning through completion.[27] This encompasses grade promotion, high school and higher education graduation, and/or completion of vocational training or certification programs. For Opportunity Youth, ages 16 to 24, who are not in school or employed, this refers to the ability to reengage individuals in an educational and/or work program that puts them on a career path.

Academic Supports Practices

1. **Guidance regarding school procedures and options** – Program staff work with youth and families to establish a clear understanding of the requirements necessary for participants to advance to the next academic level and support appropriate actions, including knowledge and support for:
   - K–12 school selection supports and/or referral services[xlvii]
     i. School selection lottery system in Boston Public Schools
     ii. Taking selective school entrance exams for Boston Public Schools and independent schools
     iii. Applying to a variety of school and program options, including charter, independent, and residential schools; specialized/therapeutic learning programs; schools that cater to teen parents; schools that cater to students who have dropped out and want to re-enter the education system; schools with remote learning options
   - K–12 guidance and referrals for school success, including knowledge of:
     i. Course requirements for grade promotion and graduation
     ii. Specialized learning plan options, ESL programs, alternative education programs, and Advanced Placement classes and preparation
     iii. Summer school schedules and enrollment procedures
     iv. School disciplinary policies and grievance procedures

2. **Supports for academic development** – Staff incorporate practices that directly support academic development:
   - Supervise regularly scheduled homework "clubs"
   - Conduct one-on-one and group tutoring
   - Build academic/critical thinking skills into regular activities
   - Develop reading buddies and other opportunities for peers to engage in academic exploration together
   - Create activities that promote academic skill development, interest, and curiosity, including chess clubs, science clubs, gardening clubs, etc.
   - Support, organize, and/or link participants to establish academic challenges, opportunities, and competitions, such as spelling bees, math leagues, science fairs, etc.
   - Provide opportunities for youth to explore academic subjects using diverse learning modalities, including rhythmic, spatial, linguistic, mathematical, and kinesthetic.[xlviii]
   - Provide healthy snacks, and supplemental meals if necessary

3. **College preparedness** – Program staff support awareness, understanding, and connections to higher education opportunities for older youth participants.
   - College awareness
   - Application support
   - SAT/ACT preparation
   - Gap year programs
   - Scholarship research/applications
   - Financial aid

POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT LEVER

The positive youth development (PYD) approach helps youth gain the knowledge and skills needed to become healthy, productive adults by building on youth's strengths and recognizing their unique contributions.[xlix] The transition to adulthood is challenging for all youth, but the youth living in the Collaborative's focus area face the additional stressors of poverty, violence, and racism. To address these challenges, a positive youth development approach must be a core element of all youth-serving organizations, particularly those organizations that aim to serve youth in risk levels two (high risk) or three (proven risk).

This lever is placed in a cross-cutting vertical position in the Framework in order to demonstrate that it is a foundational element that can be incorporated in all programs and in the work of the other five Framework levers. The organizational practices listed here are meant to inform the programmatic practices and recommendations listed under the other levers of the Career Pathways Framework.

Definition

> **The positive youth development (PYD) approach** recognizes that empowered young people need support, guidance, and opportunities during adolescence to develop self-assurance in four key areas: competence (being able to do something well), usefulness (having something to contribute), belonging (being a part of a community and having relationships with caring adults), and power (having control over one's future).

Positive Youth Development Practices

1. **Safety** – Young people feel physically and emotionally secure.
2. **Supportive relationships** – Young people experience guidance, emotional and practical support; adults and peers know who they are and what's important to them.
3. **Meaningful youth involvement** – Young people are involved in meaningful roles with responsibility, have input into decision-making, have opportunities for leadership, and feel a sense of belonging.
4. **Skill building** – Young people have challenging and interesting learning experiences that help them build a wide array of skills, and experience a sense of growth and progress.
5. **Community involvement** – Young people have an understanding of the greater community, and a sense of being able to make an impact in their community. There is coordination and synergy with family, school, and community efforts.
6. **Appropriate structure** – Young people experience clear and consistent rules and expectations, continuity and predictability, clear boundaries, and age-appropriate monitoring.
7. **Positive social norms** – Young people experience rules of behavior, expectations, values and morals, and obligations for service.
8. **Cultural competence** – Staff is aware and respectful of the values, beliefs, traditions, customs, and parenting styles of the audience being served.

ABOUT THE YOUTH VIOLENCE PREVENTION FUNDER LEARNING COLLABORATIVE

The Youth Violence Prevention Funder Learning Collaborative is a network of businesses, foundations, government agency funders, and key experts formed to share knowledge, identify funding gaps, and promote dialogue to help funders and businesses coordinate and strategically align their efforts to increase their impact on youth violence in Boston.

The Collaborative takes a public health approach to youth violence prevention and is focusing its initial efforts to ensure adequate funding support to five communities along the Blue Hill Avenue corridor: South End/Lower Roxbury, Dudley Square, Grove Hall, Bowdoin/Geneva, and Morton & Norfolk Streets. The Collaborative is a signature initiative of the State Street Foundation.

ADDITIONAL COLLABORATIVE KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTS AVAILABLE TO SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CAREER PATHWAYS FRAMEWORK

Funder Resource Guide for Supporting Trauma-Informed Practices for Children and Youth: A guide to support funders in improving mental health service referrals for young people and the development of trauma-sensitive practices.

Meaningful Youth Employment Investment Guide: A guide to inform and motivate public and private funders to align investments in meaningful youth employment through both collective and individual action. The Guide reflects a systems-level approach for connecting Boston youth from targeted neighborhoods with summer and year-round employment. The Investment Guide complements the Collaborative's **Meaningful Employment Initiative for Youth Violence Prevention**, a yearly initiative to provide meaningful employment opportunities for youth ages 14–24 in Boston neighborhoods with high levels of violence.

Positive Youth Development Program Quality Assessment: This self-assessment tool provides a way for programs and funders to benchmark themselves against positive youth development best practices, generate conversations internally and with funder/program partners, and support capacity-building strategies to build positive youth development practices.

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