

Expanding Sector Employment Opportunities for young adults in Baltimore

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I. Introduction

The Baltimore Workforce Funders Collaborative (BWFC) has supported a network of industry sector partnerships that to varying degrees have included young adults in their programs. With increased attention being paid to disconnected youth,¹ BWFC is in a position to help its partnerships become more intentional about the programs and opportunities it makes available to young adults. Working with Jobs for the Future, BWFC has an opportunity to develop a strategy to connect young adults to sector programs. This would build on a history of implementing innovative youth programs in Baltimore, such the city's nationally recognized Youth Opportunity Baltimore program,² which was part of a U.S. Department of Labor demonstration from 2000 to 2006, as well as emerging efforts to spark more collaboration among opportunity youth organizations through the Aspen Institute's Opportunity Youth Investment Fund (OYIF).

These opportunities emerge at a time when Baltimore is refocusing on issues raised in response to the death of Freddie Gray while in police custody. The uprising that followed was as much about policing tactics as it was a response to the conditions that affect Baltimore's low-income African American neighborhoods and limit their opportunities. Among the litany of disparities is the unacceptable fact that far too many students graduate from or drop out of public schools without the basic academic skills needed to secure family supporting jobs. The shrinking pool of accessible entry-level jobs makes it even harder for young adults from Sandtown-Winchester and other disinvested neighborhoods to gain the early work experience needed to build long-term labor market attachment.

Industry workforce partnerships, or sector partnerships, offer a means of helping young people access careers in targeted occupations. BWFC provides financial and technical support to industry workforce partnerships that deliver training and education, industry-recognized credentials, wrap-around support and job placement services. Although each sectoral workforce initiative is unique in its design, the evidence-based approach includes the following strategic elements:

- A focus on high-demand occupations that can lead to family-sustaining careers within a target industry sector of importance to the region;
- Significant engagement of employers as partners in the design, implementation and support of the work;
- Comprehensive services that are designed to meet a range of academic and personal support needs of low-wage job seekers and employees; and
- A systems approach that seeks to achieve lasting change of benefit to workers, industries and communities.

Although there is growing interest in sector-focused youth employment strategies, the application in Baltimore faces challenges because of the high number of youth who do not meet basic entry-level requirements to participate in training and secure work. The ability of sector training programs to absorb more young adults will also depend on whether they can identify capable partners who can provide the types of services and supports that are most effective with opportunity youth. This in turn will require considerable capacity building of workforce development and youth serving organizations to effectively blend youth employment and positive youth development practices and adapt to the rigor of the sector model.

The long-term prospect of connecting more Baltimore youth to sector programs and viable means of livelihood ultimately rests on the political will to fully support and hold Baltimore Public Schools (City Schools) accountable for the educational and employability outcomes of its students. While efforts to address longstanding challenges to the K-12 system are ongoing, alternative programs to equip students with basic skills and a high school credential must be strengthened.

This report seeks to provide BWFC and other stakeholders with information that will inform the development of a sector strategy for opportunity youth as well as contribute to deeper deliberations that are needed to help Baltimore take full advantage of the opportunities before it. The primary approach to this assessment was to:

- Understand the extent to which existing sector partnerships work with young adults
- Identify opportunities for these organizations to expand services to a younger age group
- Capture lessons from Youth Opportunity (YO!) Baltimore that can inform emerging opportunity youth partnerships.

Eighteen individuals representing 16 organizations were interviewed for this report. In addition to representatives of the Annie E. Casey Foundation and Jobs for the Future, interviewees includes representatives of the Mayor's Office of Employment Development/Youth Services, the two YO! Baltimore centers, and 11 local sector partnerships and workforce providers. (A full list of key informants is included as an Appendix.) Although a best practices scan was not a part of the commissioned work, this report includes examples of practices and strategies that may inform Baltimore's opportunity youth work. These examples are interspersed throughout the report to augment findings. Similarly, the work did not include a formal literature review, but references that may be useful to those wanting more detail are provided in endnotes.

The report is organized in seven sections.

- **Section 2 provides an overview of the sector partnerships funded by BWFC and highlights factors affecting their work with young adults.**
- **Section 3 examines issues affecting an expanded opportunity youth agenda in Baltimore and draws on interviews as well as research and lessons from the national field.**
- **Section 4 reports the interviewees' impressions about employers' attitudes about hiring opportunity youth.**
- **Section 5 examines opportunities and limitations to expanding the sector model in the Baltimore region and proposes greater alignment of sector strategies with other job creation approaches.**
- **Section 6 briefly reviews lessons from Youth Opportunity Baltimore as well as factors that affect program implementation.**
- **Section 7 offers recommendations.**

II. Baltimore's Sector Partnerships and Youth

This section provides a brief overview of the sector partnerships that were included in this assessment. Seven of these partnerships are supported by the Baltimore Workforce Funders Collaboration, which uses pooled and aligned funding from BWFC members and federal Social Innovation Funds provided to BWFC through the National Fund for Workforce Solutions. The partnerships include:

- **Baltimore Alliance for Careers in Healthcare (BACH)**
- **BioTechnical Institute of Maryland (BTI)**
- **Baltimore Center for Green Careers - Civic Works**
- **Jane Addams Resource Corporation (JARC)**
- **JumpStart - Job Opportunities Task Force (JOTF)**
- **Maritime Transportation and Logistics Program - Maryland New Directions**
- **Next Course Food Services Partnership - St. Vincent de Paul**

Several other organizations that administer health sector partnerships but are not directly funded through BWFC were also examined, including Sinai Hospital/Vocational Services Program (Sinai/VSP) and University of Maryland Medical Center, which collaborate on the Healthcare Career Alliance, and the Caroline Center. Humanim, which runs a high school internship program with hospitals, was also included. Although it is not a sector program in the traditional sense, the organization has strong partnerships with several area hospitals and may offer access to a pool of participants for other healthcare sector partnerships.

This study did not include non-profit youth development or youth employment organizations. However, interviews were conducted with representatives of the Mayor's Office of Employment Development's Youth Services division, which operates YO! Baltimore. YO! Baltimore provides basic skill services, job readiness training, life skills training, counseling and other services to out-of-school and in-school youth through two centers, YO! Eastside Center/HEBCAC and YO! Westside Community Center, both of which were also interviewed. YO! Baltimore also supports a small number of occupational skills training slots within workforce training providers.

The table on the following page shows the targeted sectors, entry-level occupations, eligible ages, and required credentials and education levels for the programs administered by BWFC-supported and other sector partnerships.

Programs Interviewed	Targeted Sector	Entry-Level Occupations	Minimum Eligible Age	Diploma or GED Required	Required Grade-Level Equivalent
BACH	Healthcare	Patient Transport, Food Services, Environmental Services, Medical Records, Secretary	18	Yes	8th grade reading & math
BCGC/Civic Works	Green Jobs	Brownfields Remediation, Weatherization	18	No	9th grade reading & math
BTI	Biotechnology	Lab Technician	18 by end of training	Yes	11th grade reading and math
Caroline Center	Healthcare	CNA, GNA and Pharmacy Technician	20	Yes	CNA: 5th/6th grade reading and math
Humanim	Hospitals	Entry-level care/ non-care hospital jobs	16	No	n/a
JARC	Manufacturing	CNC Machinist, Welding	18	Yes	9th grade level by end of phase 1 training
JOTF/ JumpStart	Construction	Carpentry, Electrical, & Plumbing (apprenticeships)	18	Yes	8th/9th grade math or construction math
Maryland New Directions	Maritime TLD	Forklift, Warehouse Operations	21	Yes	8th grade reading & math
Sinai/VSP & UMD Medical Center	Healthcare	Food Services, Patient Transport, Environmental Services	18-21	Yes	9th grade reading & math
Next Course/ SVDP	Hospitality	Food Services	18 by end of training	Yes	6th grade reading & math

The general sentiment among sector partnerships interviewed for this assessment is that they are open to exploring ways to enroll more youth, with a few caveats...young adults may require instructional methodologies and supports that are specific to their developmental stage and life experiences.

Targeted Sectors

Five of the programs examined are involved in the healthcare sector – BACH, Caroline Center, Humanim, Sinai Hospital/VSP and UMD Medical Center. The degree of collaboration and partnership across them varies. BACH serves as an industry-led workforce intermediary and convenes healthcare employers, raises funds and brokers services from other providers. BACH is home to a regional healthcare industry partnership funded through the state of Maryland’s EARN program. BACH provides a portion of that funding to training partners, including the Caroline Center, Saint Vincent de Paul and the Center for Urban Families. BACH also provides funds to hospitals and care providers to support front-line worker coaches. Both the University of Maryland Medical Center and Sinai Hospital are members of BACH. Separately, both employers participate in the Healthcare Career

Alliance. Sinai/VSP, the hospital’s workforce development and social enterprise arm, does not work with BACH. Humanim is also engaged with multiple hospitals and care providers, including smaller hospitals that tend to hire from its programs. Because it provides Pharmacy Technician training, Caroline Center also has strong connections to drug store pharmacies.

Two of the programs interviewed work in building trades and construction – JOTF’s JumpStart and Civic Works’ Baltimore Center for Green Jobs. They target different types and sizes of employers, projects and occupations within this sector. Other sectors included in this assessment are biotechnology, hospitality (food services), manufacturing and maritime transportation, logistics and distribution (TLD). The manufacturing initiative is being led by the Jane Addams Resource Corporation, which began replicating its successful Chicago-based Careers in Manufacturing program in Baltimore in Spring 2015. Although JARC does not have prior experience in Baltimore, its work with young adults in Chicago informs this study.

Ages Served

Only Humanim and the Sinai/UMD’s Healthcare Careers Alliance offer programs that are exclusively focused on youth. The other sector programs admit young adults, but they do not actively recruit them. Most programs accept youth as young as 18 years, or they must be 18 by the end of the training program or at placement. The exceptions are the Caroline Center and Maryland New Directions, which require participants to be at least 20 and 21 years old, respectively. The sector programs working in traditionally male-dominated sectors – construction, manufacturing, TLD – tend to serve older participants.

Less than 15 percent of JOTF’s participants and 10 percent of JARC’s are between the ages of 18 and 24. The average age in both of these programs is closer to 30. In the case of Maryland New Directions, the average age of clients is 45. Approximately 8 percent of its participants are between the ages of 25 and 29 years and 10 percent are 24 years and under.

In addition to their primary training programs, BACH and BTI both have 6-week summer programs for rising high school seniors. Participants receive intensive skills training and are placed in paid work experience in area hospitals. The programs are underwritten by MOED. BACH offers 50 slots and BTI has 20. In the case of the BACH Fellows program, participants must be enrolled in high school Career and Technical Education CTE programs. The work experience is designed to reinforce the CTE curricula. In 2015, MOED reduced its support to five weeks, but BACH convinced City Schools to underwrite the sixth week. BACH, MOED and City Schools have extended the program for 25 Fellows through the 2015-2016 school year.

Education Levels

With the exception of Civic Works' Baltimore Center for Green Careers program, all of the programs examined require a high school diploma or GED. This is largely in response to employers' criteria or due to liability concerns. In the case of JOTF's JumpStart, a diploma or GED is required because it is a prerequisite of apprenticeship programs, not necessarily because employers require it. However, JumpStart is willing to admit a promising candidate who is in the process of earning a GED and expects to complete it by the end of JOTF's training program.

There is considerable variation in the grade-level proficiency required to participate in training – from 5th grade reading and math levels required for the Caroline Center's CNA and GNA programs to 11th grade reading and math levels for BTI's Lab Tech program. The majority of programs require a 8th or 9th grade proficiency level.

Other Eligibility Criteria

All programs require a clean drug test at the start of the training program. None reported allowing participants to enroll in life skills or job readiness training and using this period to stop using drugs before entering occupational skills training—a strategy that could help many of Baltimore's disconnected youth. Programs vary in terms of their willingness to accept participants who have a criminal record. There is more flexibility on the part of JARC (manufacturing), JOTF (construction) and St. Vincent de Paul (food services), whereas hospitals and labs offer virtually no leeway in this area. Maryland New Directions' TLD program requires security clearance for jobs at the port and accepts participants who have not had any criminal charges in the last seven years. However, the organization helps those who have recent charges apply to have their records expunged. Maryland New Directions also enrolls those who are waiting for expungement into a two-week job readiness training programs and helps them find other employment if needed.

Additional Sector Activity

Several of the organizations included in this assessment administer other sector or job training programs besides the BWFC-funded activity. They should be considered as part of a broader opportunity youth strategy – either directly or as feeders to sector programs. They include:

- Civic Works' YouthBuild program, which has no minimum credential or literacy/numeracy requirement and serves young adults ages 17-24;³
- Humanim's culinary/hospitality partnership with Moveable Feast and its deconstruction social enterprise, Details;

- A Sinai/VSP program that provides training to 12th graders or young adults who have disabilities and places them in social enterprises it operates;
- St. Vincent de Paul's early care and child care training, which accepts participants ages 14-24 years (and could complement local two-generation strategies for low-skilled young mothers);
- University of Maryland Medical Center's Career Development Services, which offers a program for people with disabilities and another for high achieving math and science students.

Interest in Serving More Young Adults

The general sentiment among sector partnerships interviewed for this assessment is that they are open to exploring ways to enroll more youth, with a few caveats. In addition to obvious concerns about young adults meeting basic skills and high school diploma/GED prerequisites, sector partnerships recognized that young adults may require instructional methodologies and supports that are specific to their developmental stage and life experiences. To adapt to a younger student profile, programs that primarily have served adult learners may need to determine what youth-oriented services and supports they could realistically provide internally and what they should look to others to provide. In either case, they will need to develop new partnerships with youth-serving organizations and work closely with employers to achieve buy-in to expanding this pool of workers. These and other factors affecting sector strategies for opportunity youth are discussed in Section 3.

III. Working with Opportunity Youth

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and funder-driven youth employment initiatives offer important mechanisms to improve education and training opportunities for youth and young adults, including aligning this work with industry sector and career pathway strategies. While the inclusion of youth in sector strategies is laudable, it will require more than simply adapting adult strategies to serve this population. Several considerations will affect the work in Baltimore and help frame the findings and recommendations in this report.

- Opportunity youth tend to be best served by programs that embed positive youth development (PYD) strategies in workforce programs. PYD involves ensuring that young adults build strong, trusting relationships with caring adults, such as mentors, counselors, teachers, employers and other community members. PYD also emphasizes building academic, leadership, self-esteem and civic engagement skills. When coupled with youth employment, considerable emphasis is placed on career exploration and building job readiness skills. While some youth development elements are similar to case management and coaching functions, they have a distinct rubric and set of practices. In a number of other locations, there are examples of opportunity youth programs employing PYD and, conversely, youth development organizations implementing job training and youth entrepreneurship components. YouthBuild is a prime example of a program that embeds PYD into an occupation-specific skills training model.
- Although Baltimore has a number of high performing sector partnerships that accept participants as young as 18 years, sector partnerships generally are relatively disconnected from youth employment networks. Similarly, most youth employment organizations are not implementing sectoral employment projects. Of 40 organizations responding to a January 2014 Aspen Institute survey of opportunity youth organizations in Baltimore, only 12 reported working with specific industry sectors (though it is not clear that these are formal sector partnerships). A separate memorandum from the Aspen Institute documenting findings from a 2013 site visit to Baltimore noted the importance of grounding the youth employment work in the six industry sectors identified by the Opportunity Collaborative.^{4,5} However, it does not appear that more recent efforts to organize an opportunity youth collaborative (The Connect) are yet capitalizing significantly on these sector opportunities or actively working to expand the uptake of sector programs among youth organizations.
- Many sector strategies focus on middle-skilled jobs, the access to which is dependent on earning postsecondary credentials. This presents challenges for Baltimore stakeholders because of the high number of jobseekers who are not academically ready to pursue this level of training. Given the employer-driven nature of sector programs and their focus on higher skilled jobseekers and incumbent workers who face fewer barriers, strong case-making will be needed to achieve support for the level of academic and social supports required by many disconnected youth.

The organizations interviewed for this report are quite interested in exploring how they can include more young adults in their programs, but they are mindful of the challenges associated with working with them. Almost all respondents referenced the lack of maturity and stick-to-itiveness exhibited by many young adults. Others cited the absence of career preparation in the schools, a lack of youth-specific job readiness programs, and the disconnection between youth development and youth employment. Respondents also pointed to Baltimore's low basic skill

levels and gaps in the youth employment systems as factors affecting success. These and other considerations affecting Baltimore's opportunity youth and sector strategies are discussed in more detail below.

Academic Challenges

Almost all of the programs studied require that participants hold a high school diploma or GED and function at a 9th grade level to enroll in training. Many respondents were quick to acknowledge difficulty finding young adults who meet these requirements. The problems are particularly pronounced for African American males. According to the Schott Foundation, the estimated black male high school graduation rate in Baltimore City in 2011-2012 was 38 percent.⁶ Contrary to many urban school districts where the gap between black and white graduation rates is stark, the Schott Foundation additionally found that the graduation rate for white males was only 41 percent. This underscores how pervasive overall academic underachievement is in Baltimore. American Community Survey estimates for 2011-2013 show that 85 percent of Baltimore's young people ages 18-24 who are not in school and not working are African American, despite African Americans comprising 64 percent of the total population.⁷ An African American youth who is disconnected from school or work at the ages of 16 and 19 years is far more likely to remain disconnected at ages 20-24 than any other racial/ethnic demographic.⁸

The more challenging problem facing any youth employment initiative is Baltimore's basic skills gap. The average grade-level proficiency for YO! Baltimore participants is 7th grade for reading and 5th grade for math. Many of the organizations interviewed for this assessment reported screening scores of candidates before finding a few who could meet grade-level requirements. One organization reported that 80% of the applicants to its sector training program tested below the 9th grade level. Interviewees cautioned that progress for those starting at very low levels requires considerable patience. Bruno and Pistorino cited the time and resources involved in helping youth who test below the sixth-grade level earn a GED. They identified several effective approaches, including improved assessment and instructional tools, contextualized learning, training staff to recognize literacy issues, segmenting classes by skill level, hiring tutors and providing intensive case management during the GED training.⁹

Concern was also expressed about changes to the General Educational Development exam (GED). According to a recent report by CLASP, efforts to align the GED with college and career readiness standards (including the Common Core) pose challenges for low-income and low-skilled individuals.¹⁰ Several key informants for this report anecdotally noted a decline in the pass rate of test-takers in Baltimore since changes to the GED were implemented. Additionally, as demonstrated by MDRC, GED earners tend to have worse employment and postsecondary education outcomes than high school graduates, particularly since these programs are often disconnected from community-based supports and career/college advancement strategies.¹¹ Alternative high school equivalency tests that are less costly and more accessible have been developed, but Maryland has not approved their use. These factors underscore the need to consider alternative ways to help youth obtain a diploma instead of a GED, including credit recovery and alternative schools, and connecting youth to other training programs.

A number of such programs around the country are showing promise. I-BEST and other models offer effective approaches for using contextualized learning to accelerate the development of basic skills leading to a GED and entry-level occupational skills. New York's LaGuardia Community College offers a GED bridge program to students 19 years and older who test as low as the 7th-grade level. Instruction is contextualized for careers in health and business as

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well as general college matriculation. Jobs for the Future's Accelerating Opportunity (AO) initiative is aimed at streamlining the pathway to technical careers for jobseekers who test at the 6th-12th-grade levels and lack a high school diploma or GED.¹² The strategy involves enrolling participants in credit-bearing career and technical education courses in community colleges while they pursue a high school credential and improve basic skills, presumably reducing developmental education requirements in the process. The program was developed for adults and may be better suited for older young adults. The model includes a coaching/navigation component that could be modified for youth and younger adults. Some respondents expressed concerns about: (a) the ability of community colleges to deliver the level of case management and

support services typically required by disconnected youth; (b) the suitability of an on-campus classroom setting for young dropouts – at least initially – and whether in-neighborhood satellite classes might be more effective (and more accessible); and (c) whether these institutions can incorporate youth development practices into curricula.

In Chicago, JARC uses volunteers to provide free basic skills training and GED preparation to program participants and community residents (although instruction is not contextualized to the manufacturing curricula). In other models, employers have partnered with local school districts to provide workplace-based contextualized learning and support services for youth who are at-risk of dropping out of school. In the case of Southwire in Carrollton, Georgia, for example, students complete their high school education while receiving contextualized classroom training and stipend-supported occupational skills training in the workplace.

For those young people who successfully graduate from Baltimore public high schools and aspire to postsecondary education, the odds are high that they are academically under-prepared to meet college entrance requirements. These students often become trapped in repetitive cycles of developmental education classes – earning no academic credit while exhausting both their financial aid resources and their resolve to earn a credential. Several respondents expressed concerns about this pattern and pointed to the need for both City Schools and Baltimore City Community College (BCCC) to address this. Others questioned the accuracy and/or applicability of the Accuplacer test as the dominant assessment tool. BACH, for example, is working with its community college partners to use competency-based learning and work experience as substitutes for developmental education requirements. BTI, JARC and JumpStart offer bridge courses that help students improve math and literacy skills before entering their primary occupational training. Organizations in other cities have administered tests in-house during the training phase and worked closely with students to review scores and understand the implications and costs associated with meeting excessive developmental education requirements. The objective is to provide information, basic skills training, tutoring and other academic services to encourage students to upgrade their math and literacy skills on the front end in order to reduce the number of developmental education classes they would be required to take prior to college admission.

Recruitment and Referral Networks

Respondents identified the lack of effective recruitment strategies and integrated referral networks as being a huge problems. Several organizations acknowledged not having adequate resources to be more strategic in their recruitment. Many programs rely on word of mouth, which means having to process walk-ins who might otherwise have been screened out and referred elsewhere. Resource constraints also affect the extent to which providers can collaborate with each other and establish screening and referral protocols. One provider reported processing 300 individuals to fill 14 slots, while others are interviewing 100 or more for 20-30 slots. Considerable staff resources are diverted to this task, usually at the expense of case management, coaching and other program elements.

Referral organizations do not have detailed information about programs, eligibility and other factors, and few provide enough information to participants to help them make informed decisions or understand what will be expected of them in training. Training providers tend to have referral relationships with a small number of organizations, but there are still gaps in the capacity to address the range of barriers participants face. Nor are data systems integrated in a way that screening and assessment records follow the participant or allows training providers to know if a participant is receiving services elsewhere. Some organizations have more sophisticated referral partnerships than others, but they are based largely on personal relationships and are not institutionalized. The general sentiment is that referral networks will need to be expanded and strengthened to help sector partnerships absorb more young adults into their programs. It is not clear what entity has the capacity to fulfill the function of building and managing an effective and collaborative system-wide referral network.

To help improve recruitment and referral activities in Boston, for example, the Boston Opportunity Youth Collaborative (BOYC) uses the one-stop model to attract youth, assess their interests and skill levels, and connect them to resources and training. It uses a shared data system so that any of its partners can access and obtain current information about youth who have entered through the one-stops and other platforms. Because BOYC involves 80 partners from city and state agencies, the school system, postsecondary institutions and community-based organizations there is much better alignment of services. This further streamlines referrals and improves tracking.

Career Exploration and Career Pathway Information

Several interviewees questioned whether sufficient information is available to youth and staff who work with youth to help them make informed career decisions. In some instances, it is the lack of available information about entry-level jobs for jobseekers that do not have a diploma or GED. In other cases, is it a lack of detailed information about specific career pathways within and across entry-level tiers and into middle-skilled jobs. Although several Baltimore organizations have compiled some of this information (such as the Opportunity Collaborative's Talent Development Pipeline study and the Abell Foundation's mapping of credentials by sector), this information is not widely accessible to youth and advisors in a user-friendly format.

Health sector providers noted that it is difficult to move people along career pathways that involve lateral promotions across institutions because required competencies, credentials and job titles vary among hospitals. Year Up Boston addressed a similar concern by working closely with financial services employers to standardize jobs descriptions, competencies and job progression information within firms and across the industry. This information was used to inform the design of the financial services training program, help career coaches and college navigators guide

participants, create new industry-recognized credentials, and formulate policy and systems changes needed within the industry and the public workforce system. The process of developing the career pathway guides also raised the level of employers' support for opportunity youth policies and enhanced the quality of Year Up's workforce partnerships.^{13,14}

Some observers hold the position that youth should not be tracked into specific careers too early. Others argue that with ample guidance and support young adults can make informed decisions. Regardless of future career choices, youth should be exposed to a set of baseline competencies and skills sooner than later. To gain greater buy-in from youth who do not understand the value of training or simply want a job, Our Piece of the Pie in Hartford, Connecticut, for example, has used information about earnings and career pathways to help participants understand the economic gains of earning a diploma or GED and pursuing postsecondary education. This information is introduced during the recruitment and enrollment processes and reinforced throughout the training and retention phases.

Respondents were asked if, in their experience, there are particular industries or occupations that are better suited for youth-focused sector strategies. BACH's partners place people in a range of low-level healthcare jobs, including non-care positions such as patient transport, environmental service and food services jobs. It observed that food services jobs seem to appeal to youth, particularly those who do not exhibit an immediate interest in nursing. BACH works with food services workers to create pathways and crosswalks to better jobs. Sinai/VSP's Healthcare Career Alliance observed a similar interest in food services. While some of its participants move into better jobs in patient care, HCA does not provide specific services to help participant navigate these pathways. Providers are sensitive to concerns about low-skilled youth being tracked into dead-end food services jobs, but noted the importance of quick labor market attachment and work experience for youth. The challenge is to provide participants with career information and planning early in the training program and to reinforce this with ongoing education and career advancement services.

Life Skills, Job Readiness Skills and Youth Development

Opportunity youth programs will need to instill a broad range of life skills and job readiness skills within the context of positive youth development. Life skills and job readiness skills are not synonymous, but they are equally important. Life skills address a range of social, psychological, cultural, and interpersonal attributes one needs to function productively. Many elements of life skills training are akin to soft skills, such as work ethics, communication skills, decision-making skills, and coping skills. They may also include other essential elements for a productive life, such as financial literacy, as well as more nuanced workplace skills. Loyola University's National Center for Community Literacy in New Orleans, for example, licenses a four-week modularized life skills curriculum that can be customized to specific industries and targeted occupations. In addition to core life skills, the 21st Century Success Principles curriculum addresses critical thinking skills, conflict resolution, racism in the workplace and cultural competence, and has been used successfully with adults and youth.

Job readiness skills specifically relate to the world of work and focus on job search practices, career coaching, industry and occupational information, and academic readiness skills. Life skills and job readiness skills overlap, and many programs blend them into one track. Others sequence job readiness with occupational skills training or as a separate track that continues during the retention period. Many life skills and job readiness skills align with or augment youth development practices, such as ongoing engagement with caring adults and mentors, positive social

interactions and leadership development. Youth development curricula typically include life skills components, but they are not necessarily contextualized to work. Child Trends has categorized a range of competencies that are critical to successful youth development and work readiness for youth and young adults.¹⁵

Case Management, Coaching and Advancement Support

Although sector strategies espouse a dual-customer approach, the level of attention required by opportunity youth will undoubtedly surpass what is needed by self-directed adults. Employer-driven sector partnerships may not have the resources and capacity to absorb this. The ability of adult-focused sector partnerships to incorporate an explicit youth focus will largely depend on the strength of their partnerships with youth-serving organizations and training providers that can: implement targeted recruitment, screening and referral processes; deliver customized soft skill and job readiness training; and provide intensive case management, mentoring and career/college navigation services. However, these relationships will need to be cultivated and the services and staffing customized to align with a sector strategy.

Several respondents noted gaps in Baltimore's capacity to provide career counseling, coaching and supports to participants. Most organizations are struggling under extremely high caseloads – as high as 115 participants per case manager in the case of YO! Baltimore. Conventional approaches will need to be adapted to incorporate a positive youth development framework. This will require a critical shift in mindset from a barrier mitigation or deficits framework to an assets orientation that builds on youth's strengths, promotes leadership, involves youth in decision-making and adopts a high-touch approach. Similarly, the approach to retention needs to be much more proactive and structured, as opposed to simply tracking whether the young adult is still working. Young adults need explicit advancement services that are delivered by specialists in partnership with employers and guided by well-honed service plans. These staff are not the same as case managers. They have different skills sets and an extensive knowledge of industry and postsecondary education programs. For example, The Way to Work in New York assigns each participant to a career manager who has industry experience and helps participants set career and educational goals. The program works closely with the participants throughout training and for at least one year afterwards to achieve education and career goals. Year Up Boston uses similar long-term advancement strategies that are aligned with and embedded in employers' programs. Few of the Baltimore organizations interviewed for this assessment reported this level of intentional retention and advancement activity.

This will require a critical shift in mindset from a barrier mitigation or deficits framework to an assets orientation that builds on youth's strengths, promotes leadership, involves youth in decision-making and adopts a high-touch approach.

Mental Health

Several key informants underscored the pervasiveness of mental health issues in Baltimore's low-income communities generally and among youth and young adults in particular. Occupational skills trainers (and employers) invariably face challenging situations that they are not trained to address. BTI secured funding to train its instructors to recognize mental health problems and know when to refer participants to case managers, but it does not have connections to the mental health community to help participants get more intensive assistance. HEBCAC and the Johns Hopkins Center for Adolescent Health have developed a program to embed mental health services into job training and report gains in retention and declines in recidivism (discussed further in Section 6).

Partnerships and Collaboration

When asked about the extent to which they partner with other training, service and youth-serving providers, most respondents reported working with a select group of reliable partners. Generally, the sector partnerships do not have close relationships with youth organizations – a critical requirement if they are to serve more young adults.

The current effort to collaboratively address the needs of Baltimore's opportunity youth is premised on a collective impact model that depends on multi-level partnerships. However, many interviewees were quick to point out that Baltimore's nonprofit sector does not have a rich history of partnerships. Within workforce, interviewees described a very competitive environment that stifles collaboration. One manifestation of this is the inefficient referral practices discussed above. With few incentives to collaborate, youth organizations are often unaware of what others are doing and are too protective and guarded to explore new options. This adds to the duplication of services and perpetuates gaps. A few interviewees thought public and private funders should do more to cultivate a spirit of collaboration within the nonprofit sector.

In addition to weak partnerships across nonprofit organizations, respondents suggest that there is little collaboration with city agencies. Particularly troublesome were instances of public agencies not working with providers to pursue available federal funding. It is unclear if this is due to a lack of leadership, agency capacity, politics or indifference, but several examples of missed opportunities were cited. Providers also cited instances of city agencies not collaborating with each other – all to the detriment of Baltimore's jobseekers and businesses.

The city's historically black colleges and universities were identified as underutilized resources. A number of respondents to an Aspen Institute OYIF survey of opportunity youth organizations cited partnerships with Coppin State University and Morgan State University. Both of these institutions are involved in community development and job creation efforts and could be important allies.

Capacity Challenges

Organizational capacity challenges are implicit in most, if not all, of the topics discussed in this section and are a reflection of gaps found throughout the youth and adult workforce systems. The number of youth organizations that have youth employment expertise is thought to be small. Some of them may be targeting clusters of occupations in the same industry, but the extent to which they are actually implementing sector programs with any significant level of employer engagement is also thought to be limited. This presents challenges to designing recruitment,

screening, life skills, readiness training, case management and coaching components that are youth-specific and sector-focused. In the absence of a wide network of youth employment providers, some may consider whether adult-serving workforce organizations could incorporate more youth programs. This should be considered carefully. Setting aside the small number of high capacity organizations that might have the inclination and bandwidth to do this, many of the small- and mid-sized organizations that will be needed for non-occupational training components face considerable challenges. Issues related to the organizational, technical and programmatic capacity of workforce providers connected to the East Baltimore Development Initiative's jobs pipeline were examined in a report for the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Baltimore Civic Site unit. Many of the participants in that study thought the capacity challenges they identified were representative of gaps throughout the city.¹⁶ Low capacity will affect not only the implementation of disconnected youth strategies but long-term systems change objectives as well.

IV. Employer Receptivity to Hiring Young Adults

In the absence of resources to conduct interviews with employers, respondents were asked their opinions about the willingness of employers to hire opportunity youth. Although hiring is an individualized decision, sector partnership managers observed a few general patterns.

The sector partnerships pointed to the readiness and skill level of their graduates, not their age, as the primary selling factors with employers. At the same time, however, employers who face mounting attrition rates are generally more interested in attracting young people. Maryland New Directions, for example, reports that the employers in its Maritime TLD program proactively engage schools as part of their pipeline development strategy. Employers have arranged for high school and community college educators and counselors to attend weeklong industry orientation programs conducted by the Southeast Maritime Training Center. Approximately 25 City Schools educators have participated in this training, which could be a model for other industry sectors.

The physical fitness of workers is a hiring factor in several industries. Although the turnover of young people in construction jobs is high, employers prefer younger, physically fit workers. This is also the case for entry-level patient care and transport positions in hospitals. While physical fitness is also needed in long-term care positions, these employers prefer GNA workers who have more maturity and experience because of sensitive nature of the work.

BTI noted that initially it was hard to convince employers that someone without an associate's degree could fulfill biotech positions, largely due to the exacting nature of lab work. However, this has changed over time as employers experience positive on-the-job performance and favorable retention rate among employees who are BTI graduates. Even without an associate's degree, BTI graduates garner impressive wage gains over time. Once employed in a laboratory occupation, many go on to pursue additional academic training for advancement.

Some respondents think an opportunity youth strategy will encounter skepticism and resistance from employers who have negative past experiences and/or perceptions of publicly funded education and workforce services. Employer champions will be needed to help make the case for increased youth employment and partnerships.

At a tactical level, there is a need to identify employer partners who are bought into an opportunity youth agenda and have the authority to make things happen. Lessons may be gleaned from the Baltimore Integration Partnership's efforts to organize university vice presidents and human resource directors during the initiative's first phase.

Interviewees pointed to the need to increase the understanding of educators, counselors and youth serving organizations to the needs of industry. The inability to deliver sustained retention and advancement services to opportunity youth was also thought to be more of a concern for employers than the absence of these services for adults.

The lack of requisite soft skills continues to be a disincentive to employers. While in many instances these gaps are real, employers' perceptions about soft skills deficiencies are sometimes bound up in implicit and explicit racial and other biases. Strategies that help employers recognize and address structural racism and increase cultural competence are needed. Some sector programs have developed training programs for human resource managers and frontline supervisors to help them work with nontraditional employees and understand cultural and behavioral norms.

Employer Engagement

Interviewees spoke about the need to help youth employment organizations and sector partnerships hone their employer engagement strategies to better serve opportunity youth. Employer engagement at its best includes the participation by employers in a range of activities, including: program development, implementation and evaluation; marketing and advocacy; program financing and donations; work-based learning experiences (such as internships and apprenticeships); hiring; and post-program retention and advancement activities. Industry sector partnerships have proven to be effective mechanisms for leveraging this level of involvement by employers, especially when doing so impacts bottom line business needs.

Year Up Boston offers an example in this area. The organization capitalizes on relationships with individual companies and active employer committees that help it customize its training programs, structure pathways beyond the internships, provide training for human resource managers and supervisors, and increase employers' support of Year Up's systems and policy change agendas.¹⁷ Financial services firms are invested in this program because it directly impacts their revenues, not because of a charitable or civic duty. By accepting Year Up graduates for positions that previously required a bachelor's degree, employers have increased retention rates and secured a pipeline of homegrown workers. This makes Year Up's pipeline important to the financial services industry's regional sustainability. As such, employers are willing to pay for the six-month internships and commit to the long-term career advancement of Year Up's graduates. They work closely with Year Up to provide supports, advancement services, skill building and promotion opportunities. This has led Year Up to create a for-profit job placement subsidiary that serves the advancement goals of its alumni and further solidifies its value to employers. Year Up cultivated its employer relationships over time and they reflect an explicit division of labor – job developers who are drawn from industry and work closely with career coaches, as opposed to job coaches who fulfill multiple participant support and job development functions. Many other factors affect Year Up's success, some of which exist in Baltimore and its targeted industries, some of which do not or are underdeveloped. Changing employers' perceptions about the value of Baltimore's youth will be key to implementing more sector programs.

Paid Work Experience

Several interviewees underscored the need to increase both public and private sector support for paid work experience for young adults. Apprenticeships are reemerging as an important employer-driven strategy. They typically combine classroom training and on-the-job instruction that leads to an industry-recognized credential. Most apprenticeship programs require a high school diploma or GED. Pre-apprenticeship programs like JOTF's JumpStart have been developed for construction and manufacturing occupations in a number of cities and regions. They are well suited for those whose skill levels are not quite up to par for admission to a registered apprenticeship program. However, they typically require a high school credential as well and are less prevalent in other industries.

Some apprenticeship programs explicitly target youth, such as pre-apprenticeship programs associated with high school-based Career and Technical Education programs. Some cities also include apprenticeships as part of their youth employment programming. Berkeley, California, for example administers a 13-week pre-apprenticeship program in the building trades and construction as part of its YouthWorks program. Berkeley partners with the California Department of Transportation and targets young adults ages 18 to 26 who have a high school diploma or GED.

The U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) recent emphasis on apprenticeships¹⁸ is stimulating interest, and states are increasingly providing incentives to expand apprenticeships.¹⁹ In Maryland, recent legislation has mandated the launch of pilot youth apprenticeship programs for high school students in two school districts in 2016. In Baltimore, BACH is working with MOED and City Schools to increase the opportunities for real life work experiences in health care occupations through the expansion of the summer BACH Fellows program. This pilot could become a model for a youth apprenticeship program once it is connected to the community colleges for academic recognition of skills learned. There could also be more significant alignment between youth apprenticeship programs and credit-bearing community college programs. Like other youth employment programs, youth apprenticeship programs need to build close partnerships with community-based organizations and other groups that can provide basic skills, job readiness, public benefits and other supports and help young adults navigate training and retention challenges.

Despite the promise of apprenticeship programs, many of Baltimore's young adults do not meet credentialing requirements. Transitional jobs may offer an interim step to more intensive training and formal employment for these young adults. Transitional jobs allow participants to gain readiness and soft skills, work experience and career exploration while addressing barriers and skill gaps. The emphasis of transitional jobs programs on earning a high school credential varies, but this should be a core objective of these programs. Because transitional jobs have been used with high barrier jobseekers, many of the jobs are within social enterprises operated by nonprofit organizations. However, these enterprises typically are not connected to sector strategies.

V. Complementary Approaches to Sector Strategies

Baltimore’s regional economy offers strong growth potential in a number of targeted sectors. However, Baltimore City’s 3.5 percent projected job growth is the lowest among counties in the metropolitan region.²⁰ Moreover, it is projected that only 19 percent of new jobs that will be created in Baltimore through 2018 will be available to those with a high school diploma or less.²¹ This coupled with the dearth of low-skilled entry-level jobs in targeted sectors suggests the need for diverse job creation strategies and a reexamination of the industries traditionally targeted by sector strategies.

Although sector partnerships can be found across the industry spectrum, the focus has largely been on dominant industries and large employers. For example, the National Network of Sector Partners (NNSP) found that healthcare is targeted by 66 percent of sector partnerships, followed by manufacturing (57 percent) and construction (40 percent).²² Sector partnerships associated with the National Fund for Workforce Solutions mirror these patterns. NNSP noted the value of focusing on niches or sub-sectors within the dominant industries, such as long-term care and acute care in the healthcare field or metal fabrication and food/beverage processing in manufacturing. It also noted an uptick in the number of sector partnerships that target energy and utilities (including green jobs).

The following table shows the projected job growth for the Baltimore region’s dominant industry sectors between 2014 and 2020.

Baltimore Region’s Projected Job Growth, by Sector, 2014-2020	
Education	8.5%
Healthcare	8.2%
Bioscience	7.9%
Information Technology	6.9%
Construction	6.6%
Utilities	6.5%
Business Services	6.3%
Hospitality & Tourism	3.3%
Transportation & Logistics	3.1%
Retail Trade	2.2%
Finance & Insurance	1.6%
Manufacturing	0.8%

Source: Baltimore Regional Workforce Development Strategic Plan

Although there are quite a few sectors that are projected to grow by more than 6 percent, several of them do not have sector partnerships that are focused on Baltimore, such as Business Services and Utilities, and there is unmet need in the IT sector. (YO! Baltimore is conducting a pilot program in the water utility sub-sector, discussed in Section 6.) The region's utilities sector is anticipated to grow by 6.5 percent. Eleven percent of these jobs will require an associate's degree, postsecondary credential or high-school diploma/equivalent.²³ However, utilities are largely overlooked as sector targets.

The table also shows that two sectors often identified as good prospects for low-skilled jobseekers – Hospitality and Tourism and Retail Trade – have rather low projected job growth. Given the job quality concerns associated with these jobs, strategies in these sectors should include explicit career pathways to better occupations and career crosswalks to other industries. Although there is available information about high-demand occupations that have low entry-level requirements in Baltimore,²⁴ the focus is on jobs requiring less than an associate's degree but at least a high school diploma or GED. This is consistent with the sector partnerships' concentration on middle skills jobs and opportunities to build career pathways within institutions. There is less information about the volume of and projected demand for low-skilled entry-level jobs that do not require a diploma or GED. This information will be critical to a sector approach that targets the breadth of Baltimore City youth. Entry-level career pathways will need to be mapped and aligned with pathways and credentials for higher tier entry-level positions that require a diploma or GED.

Linking Sector Strategies to Anchor Initiatives and Business Development

The high number of Baltimore's youth who are disconnected from school or work, the low level of projected entry-level job growth, and gaps in the sector partnership landscape suggests the need to both refine the sector model for specific young adult needs and examine additional strategies. This would include closer alignment of economic development and workforce development approaches, such as leveraging sector-specific supply chain and procurement strategies as well as opportunities associated with small business and minority businesses development.

Although the region's education sector is projected to grow by 8.5 percent, these jobs are largely within colleges and universities and are generally out of reach for the low- and middle-skilled jobseekers. As the Baltimore Integration Partnership discovered, higher education institutions offer limited entry-level job opportunities for low- and middle-skilled workers due to the need for advanced credentials and low job turnover rates. However, anchor institutions, such as higher education institutions and hospitals, are central to a procurement-focused jobs strategy that involves small, local and minority-owned businesses that provide goods and services to these institutions.

Minority business development is a key part of Baltimore's development strategy. Minority-owned businesses are far more likely than non-minority firms to employ members of racial/ethnic groups and accept workers with barriers.²⁵ A number of vehicles exist to facilitate closer connections between minority-owned businesses and sector initiatives. The Mayor's Advisory Council on Minority and Women-Owned Business Enterprises includes small- and medium-sized enterprises that are involved in industry supply chains and procurement networks. Associated Black Charities has advocated the expansion of the African American-owned business sector as part of its More In The Middle strategy and identified industry-specific leverage points.²⁶ Small, local and minority-owned businesses have also been central to East Baltimore Development Initiative's (EBDI) economic inclusion and workforce development strategy in East Baltimore²⁷ as well as to the neighborhood jobs strategy being pursued in Central Baltimore.²⁸

Some construction sector partnerships target public works and infrastructure projects. Additional attention could be given to *capital projects* associated with community development, anchor development, commercial revitalization initiatives and contract set-asides. This, too, should be considered. Additionally, *social enterprises* and *worker-owned enterprises* are proven vehicles for delivering training and work experience to at-risk populations and should be integrated into sector strategies, particularly the business services sector. Cleveland provides notable examples of this through the creation of worker-owned businesses that supply ancillary services, such as laundry and food services, to hospitals.²⁹ Civic Works' Baltimore Center for Green Careers secures government contracts for work and conducts market development efforts that augment consumer demand for services, directing the business it generates to employers that hire its graduates and commit to a set of model employment practices. Humanim and Sinai/VSP's experiences using social enterprises to train and employ young people with disabilities should be examined for their applicability to opportunity youth.

Youth Entrepreneurship

There is a long history of youth entrepreneurship being embedded in youth development programs. The focus is on building leadership, business and other skills that are applicable to both jobseekers and budding small business owners. The Cooperative Extension Service's 4-H program is a longstanding example that has been applied in both urban and rural settings. A 2013 CLASP report underscored the need to engage small businesses in youth employment strategies. The report cited young people's interest in entrepreneurship, particularly among those who face barriers to conventional employment, and noted the success of programs that place participants in small firms and neighborhood businesses to provide job skills and exposure to managing a business.³⁰ Community Action Partnership of Riverside County, California, places high school juniors and seniors in 520 hours of paid work experience in neighborhood small businesses – businesses that employ 10 people or less. Employers serve as trainers and mentors. Participants receive follow-on services during the school year and assistance finding formal technical training programs or jobs after graduation.

...in the wake of unrest in the city, young adults expressed a strong interest in entrepreneurship and small business development – both for themselves and for their neighborhoods.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation identified youth entrepreneurship as a viable component of job creation strategies that are designed to broaden the pool of companies and social enterprises that are likely to hire minority youth.³¹ Similarly, an Aspen Institute memorandum to opportunity youth stakeholders in Baltimore noted the value of including a youth entrepreneurship component.³² More recently, at a forum held by the Casey Foundation's Baltimore Civic Site team in the wake of unrest in the city, young adults expressed a strong interest in entrepreneurship and small business development – both for themselves and for their neighborhoods. As part of a broad opportunity youth agenda, entrepreneurship training offers another vehicle to provide youth with skills that can be applied in multiple settings. The key is to ensure that those involved in entrepreneurship programs receive the same level of career guidance and support as youth in conventional job training programs.

VI. Lessons from Youth Opportunity Baltimore

From 2000 to 2006, Baltimore was one of 36 communities that received Youth Opportunity Grant funding from the U.S. Department of Labor to expand education and economic opportunities to youth and young adults living in high-poverty neighborhoods. The strategy involved strengthening the infrastructure, building capacity and improving administrative and programmatic functions across a range of youth-serving organizations. There was a specific focus on overhauling and aligning the various systems that affect in-school and out-of-school youth. Many of the activities and processes associated with this work mirror those proposed by the Baltimore City Opportunity Youth Collaborative (The Connect), a youth-focused collective impact effort currently being initiated in Baltimore with funding from the Aspen Institute's Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund.

Although the purpose of this study was not to assess YO! Baltimore, we were interested in understanding lessons from the DOL-funded work that might inform current collaborative efforts. Unfortunately, documentation from that period is scant and institutional memories have faded. However, several noteworthy programs were described. Interviewees also raised a number of concerns about YO! Baltimore. This section provides an overview of YO! Baltimore's program under the DOL grant, subsequent modifications, promising practices that deserve further attention and areas needing improvement.

Overview

Under the DOL grant, YO! Baltimore used youth development practices to provide services and supports aimed at reducing high dropout and youth unemployment rates and increasing secondary and postsecondary education completion rates. Comprehensive services and training were delivered through two community centers established to provide young people with access to a wide range of employment, training, educational and supportive services. The YO! centers offered assistance with basic literacy skills, pre-GED and GED services, life skills training, job readiness training, and occupational skills training. Internships and subsidized employment were core components of the program. It also included a strong case management component, mental and physical health services, and recreational and enrichment activities. In addition to the two YO! centers, the DOL grant supported several YO! satellite offices that operated at a smaller scale. The centers and satellites were located in high need communities that corresponded to HUD-supported Empowerment Zones neighborhoods.

According to DOL data, Baltimore received \$43.8 million over a six-year period, with which it enrolled 4,357 participants, 72 percent of whom were out-of-school youth and 28 percent in-school.³³ At its height, the program included 10 case managers, 5 job coaches, 2 job developers, 2 GED instructors, and a mental health specialist, in addition to administrators. The two YO! centers served 500 participants each per year. Caseloads averaged 50 participants per manager. Once the DOL funding ended in 2006, the City of Baltimore assumed responsibility for YO! Baltimore. While the YO! centers have continued to provide core services, the satellite centers were closed and other services and staffing scaled back. Today, the program serves 700 youth and young adults ages 16-24³⁴ per year through the two centers. With only three case managers each, the YO! centers have caseloads of roughly 115 participants per manager, making responsive support nearly impossible. HEBCAC's Eastside YO! Center has a part-time job readiness position and one job developer, but reports that the latter position involves more job coaching than it does employer engagement. Foundation funding supports one fulltime academic specialist and a mental health specialist.

Based on a composite of youth who participated in YO! Baltimore from 2000-2013, MOED reports that 98 percent of YO! Participants are African American, with an average age of 19. The average participant has a 7th grade reading level and 5th grade math level. More than 30 percent of participants have been involved with the criminal justice system. Of those YO! participants who are out-of-school, 76 percent left school without obtaining a high school diploma. Many of those who do not have a diploma have been out of school for one to two years.³⁵ YO! staff interviewed for this study reported that 30 to 40 participants earn a GED each year – roughly 6-8 percent of youth who are out-of-school and do not have a degree.

According to a 2007 National League of Cities report, “Participants in YO! [Baltimore] earned 35 percent more and were employed at a 42 percent higher rate than non-participants, and were one third less likely to be arrested and convicted. Out-of-school youth achieved GEDs at twice the rate of non- participants.”³⁶ Further study is needed to determine if YO! Baltimore has maintained these outcomes during a period when it had significantly less funding.

Process and Structure

Establishing YO! Baltimore involved convening a range of public, private and nonprofit stakeholders and engaging them in a collaborative planning process that led to a shared vision, long-term strategies, partnerships, increased capacity and greater systems alignment. A formal “Declaration of Partnership” guided the effort and a management team and various committees (including a youth council) were formed to implement the work.

The DOL initiative also sought to connect multiple systems and leverage resources across them, including the WIA, public school, postsecondary, welfare, child welfare and juvenile justice systems. As such, YO! Baltimore was originally created as the Baltimore Youth Opportunity System. However, Baltimore was not among the sites identified in the CLASP report as having succeeded in implementing the level of systems changes anticipated by DOL. The report did not offer findings about the causes of Baltimore’s weak systems change outcomes, but the lack of integration across the various youth systems, between the youth and adult workforce systems, and among various types of stakeholder organizations was cited. Stakeholders interviewed for this report observed that these system-level gaps remain today.

DOL also required the YO! sites to develop sustainability plans. Baltimore proposed that by the third year of the program it would fund half of the YO! Baltimore budget through redirected public funds, funds raised from foundations and employers, and additional state and federal funding. However, MOED was not able to secure funding to fully sustain many program elements after the \$44 Million federal grant ended. According to the City of Baltimore’s 2015 operating budget, 90 percent of YO! Baltimore’s \$3.8 budget currently comes from the City’s general and special funds.³⁷

Notable Programs

Despite the missed opportunity to use the DOL resources for long-term systemic improvements, YO! Baltimore developed a number of innovative approaches. The CLASP report cited Baltimore for: implementing an effective dropout prevention program and alternative education strategies; engaging employers; using MOED paid internships to move participants into permanent jobs; and providing coaching and support to participants. Most of these efforts have been scaled back since the DOL funding ended, but several deserve renewed consideration.

- **Pre-Adjudication Coordination and Training (PACT).** Baltimore's high rate of incarceration of African American males – often for minor offenses – begins early in their lives. YO! Baltimore created the PACT program as an alternative to detention. PACT serves boys and young men ages 14-18. The program was expanded to include girls in 2011. The program reports that between 2007 and 2012, 97 percent of participants did not re-offend. However, the number of available slots per session is extremely small (15). The extent to which career exploration and job readiness training are included in this program is not clear.
- **Career Academy.** YO! Baltimore used WIA funds to support an alternative high school where students were able to earn a diploma and college credits and were placed in internships. Until recently when City Schools took full control of the school, MOED was responsible for the career readiness and job development components. Publicly available information about the number of students the program can accommodate varies between 100 and 120 students. They must test above the 7th grade level to be eligible. The program reported a 97% graduation rate. Additional information is needed to gauge career and college outcomes and whether graduates matriculate directly or require development education. Nonetheless, opportunities to refine and expand the program should be explored.
- **HEBCAC's Healthy Minds at Work Program.** In response to findings that 37 percent of YO! Baltimore's participants have depression (compared to four percent of the general population) and 42 percent have symptoms of PTSD,³⁸ Johns Hopkins' Center for Adolescent Health developed the Healthy Minds at Work program to incorporate mental health services into the job training platform. The program screens participants for mental health issues and connects them to clinical services and/or behavioral interventions. It also includes training for staff and peer leaders. In addition to reduced depression and increased coping skills, participants in this programs are "2-4 times more likely to be employed at 6 months," with similar outcomes occurring at 12 months. The project also shows a 34 percent reduction in the rate of male incarceration at 24 months. Currently, this program is only being implemented at HEBCAC's YO! Center.
- **Try-Out Slots.** YO! Baltimore has 10-15 "try out" intern slots (down from 75 slots during the DOL grant). Employers consider hiring participants in permanent jobs after a three-month internship, though there is no hiring guarantee. Try-out slots are reported to be an effective approach for placing low-skilled jobseekers, ex-offenders and those in recovery. In the case of the HEBCAC YO! Center, it develops the jobs but they must be approved by MOED. HEBCAC offers an additional 20 tryout slots independent of YO! Baltimore and reports notable success working with food service and food warehouse employers.

Sector Experience

Under the DOL grant, YO! Baltimore had occupational training programs that prepared participants for jobs in healthcare and information technology. These efforts ended with the grant. Recently, YO! Baltimore has developed two sector-focused training demonstration projects that deserve closer scrutiny to determine their effectiveness and prospects for expansion.

- **Water Utilities Pilot.** In partnership with the Baltimore Department of Public Works (DPW), MOED's Youth Division has developed a pilot project to connect youth to jobs in the water and wastewater sub-sectors. Pilot participants are required to have a diploma or GED. The program has enrolled 20 participants and provides soft skills, life skills and occupational skills training, job shadowing and job coaching with industry employees, and a summer internship component paid for by DPW. Although scale-up and sustainability are undetermined, this opportunity should be explored further as a possible sector strategy.
- **Credential Four Pilot (C4).** In January 2015, YO! Baltimore received DOL funding to implement a one-year demonstration that trains young adults ages 18-24 for entry-level healthcare jobs. Over the course of one year, students earn a GED along with certificates in CNA, GNA and phlebotomy. The program is open to those who test at a 9th grade level. MOED reported recruiting 60 candidates to fill 15 slots. BCCC provides academic and life skills training on campus and occupational skills training is conducted at the University of Maryland, Baltimore's BioPark. The cost is \$5,800 per participant and includes a weekly \$50 stipend and transportation voucher.

In the wake of the 2015 riots, DOL awarded a \$5 million demonstration grant to help Baltimore City address the youth employment crisis. MOED has allocated a significant portion of these funds for grants to support targeted training for in-demand careers to Baltimore City residents. This program is supporting occupational training in five key sectors (health care, construction, technology, manufacturing, and transportation/logistics) and targets disconnected young adults from distressed Baltimore neighborhoods. In August 2015, the Baltimore Workforce Investment Board's Youth Council also awarded grants to five Baltimore organizations to design and deliver innovative programming and comprehensive services to out-of-school youth.³⁹ This work is being aligned with academic and employment services for youth and young adults required under WIOA (including education, occupational skills training, paid and unpaid work experience, support services, entrepreneurship training, and leadership development activities) and linked to career pathways.

Opportunities for Improving the Public Workforce System

Many interviewees provided insights and suggestions for strengthening how Baltimore's public workforce system to respond to the structural problems affecting disconnected youth.

A key concern, not surprisingly, is the level of funding available for disconnected youth-focused programs. The HEBCAC YO! Center, for example, reports a current annual budget of \$600,000 for 350 participants. Observers suggested that MOED should take full advantage of WIOA opportunities and seek waivers to statutory limitations that hinder Baltimore from responding more flexibly to localized conditions and needs. Interviewees also made suggestions for improving MOED data collection and reporting and improving employer engagement. Specific recommendations follow in the next section.

VII. Recommendations

This section offers two sets of recommendations to Baltimore funders, practitioners and public sector actors. The first set includes recommendations aimed at expanding sector strategies to include opportunity youth and general recommendations for developing an overarching youth employment strategy and investments. The second set of recommendations is specific to MOED and YO! Baltimore. The recommendations represent a synthesis of suggestions offered by the organizations interviewed for this report and the author's analysis. The list of recommendations is not exhaustive but it is varied. It will take deliberation among public and private funders, sector partnerships, workforce training providers, employers, City Schools, BCCC and other stakeholders to determine near-term and long-term steps and an effective division of labor for carrying out this work.

- 1. Convene Stakeholders and Facilitate Network Building.** Convene sector partnerships, youth-serving organizations and training providers in targeted sectors to determine appropriate strategies for various cohorts of young adults. Understand where overlaps and gaps exist within and across programs and where there are opportunities for collaboration and alignment. Determine what types of organizations are best suited for various workforce development functions. Funders are in a position to facilitate discussions, share information and best practices, and help stakeholders form partnerships.
- 2. Map Entry-Level Career Pathways.** Provide clear and accessible career information to youth. Map career pathways that have as entry points low-skilled, entry-level positions that do not require a high school diploma or GED and accept low grade-level proficiency. Integrate this information with career pathway and credentialing criteria for higher tiered entry-level positions that require at least a diploma or GED. Consider mapping one or two sectors as demonstrations. Develop products and tools (including digital media strategies) for organizations and schools to use to motivate participants to invest in training and postsecondary education.
- 3. Build Capacity within Organizations and Across the System.** An expanded sector-focused youth employment strategy will require greater organizational capacity in both youth employment and managing partnerships with sector programs. More integration is needed across the system – especially the recruitment, assessment and referral components – to both streamline processes as well as ensure that youth adults land in the programs best suited to help them. An inventory of operational and programmatic gaps should be developed. Practically focused social network analysis will help stakeholders understand disconnections within the broader ecosystem, build partnerships and strengthen referral networks. One specific recommendation from several interviewees is to develop a professional development program similar to the Weinberg Sector Skills Academy for leaders of organizations interested in implementing combined youth development/youth employment and sector strategies.
- 4. Incorporate Positive Youth Development Principles.** Sector partnerships will need to develop partnerships with service and training providers who understand how to work with youth and apply principles of positive youth development. Youth-serving organizations that use PYD practices will need to align this work with youth employment approaches and vice versa. Both types of organizations will need to understand how sector strategies are implemented to customize services for participants. Provide training to organizations about PYD and resources to modify curricula and programs.
- 5. Broaden the Bench.** Community-based organizations (including youth-led organizations) that have trusted relationships on the ground will need to be a part of a youth-focused sector strategy. This means expanding the pool of partners beyond the usual grantees to include smaller organizations that are rooted in communities. The focus of these organizations should

be on front-end tasks such as outreach, recruitment and referrals and providing life skills, soft skills and general case management. This will require organizational development, staff training, exposure to best practices and a clear understanding of their role in sector partnerships. First steps might include convening youth-focused and youth-led community organizations to explore existing capacity and gaps. (Technical training providers, not community-based providers, should carry out employer/industry needs assessments, sector-specific career coaching, career pathway navigation, and other advancement functions.)

- 6. Integrate Bundled Services into Sector Programs.** The entrance of Jane Addams Resource Corporation (JARC) into Baltimore gives local stakeholders a chance to explore how JARC uses a Center for Working Families model in Chicago to embed financial and asset building services into a sector job training program. The model utilized by JARC involves bundling workforce/career services, income supports, and financial education services. In Baltimore, JARC is currently replicating the workforce aspect of the approach and is working to develop the other two components in collaboration with local partners. If fully implemented in Baltimore, this approach could provide a model for integrating services in a way that more fully addresses the needs of young people in Baltimore.
- 7. Identify Employer Champions and Expand Engagement.** Identify employer champions who will advocate for youth and young adults. Build on the experiences of the EARN and BWFC sector partnerships and leverage these relationships. Document and share best practices from EARN and other partnerships that are targeting young people, working with public schools, and supporting intensive coaching and advancement activities. Engage new employers who may be more open to supporting opportunity youth, such as small and minority-owned businesses. Expand engagement to include regional employers and address spatial mismatch issues. Increase employers' investments in internships and apprenticeships (including release time for GED study). Organize employers involved in sector partnerships to advocate for reforms within City Schools and BCCC to improve basic skills outcomes, modify curricula to include job readiness and soft skills training, provide industry-linked career counseling, and support related professional development for teachers and counselors.
- 8. Address Literacy Needs.** With the demise of Baltimore Reads, the capacity of community-based literacy programs has diminished significantly, and there is considerable concern about the quality of the remaining programs. A concerted effort should be made to rebuild this system. WIOA supports aligning adult education, postsecondary education, and career pathway sector programs. Title II's Adult Education and Family Literacy programs address the needs of adults over the age of 16, including out-of-school youth, those lacking a diploma and those whose basic skill deficiencies limit their work potential. Approaches to be considered might include embedding vocational literacy in sector training curricula, contextualized accelerated learning programs, alternative high school credentialing, young adult charter schools and other programs based on best practice models from other parts of the country. Specific contextualized basic skills and GED bridge programs will need to be developed and sequenced with formal sector training programs for people who test at low grade levels.
- 9. Expand Paid Work Experience Models for Young Adults.** Link more internships, apprenticeships and transitional jobs programs to selected sector programs. Align the readiness training component with employers' expectations and provide coaching and retention services that support advancement. Make earning a high school credential a core component of paid work experience programs and explore opportunities to confer high school and/or college credits for participation in such programs.

- 10. Include Youth Voices.** A core concept of positive youth development is that youth are active partners in the planning, design and implementation of programs meant to serve them. Incorporate youth advisors into sector partnerships and include youth-led organizations in the network of partnering organizations. Identify specific points along the workforce development continuum where youth-led organizations and youth advocates can play a role, such as outreach, recruitment, peer mentoring, life skills and soft skills training, retention and training supervisors to work with opportunity youth.
- 11. Support Policy Reforms.** Funders should use their influence to support criminal justice policy reforms, including record sealing and expungement. In 2012, ABAG established public policy protocols to guide the work of the affinity groups, funders' collaboratives and projects housed at ABAG.⁴⁰ This guidance may help funders take a more active role in youth policy reform.

MOED-Specific Recommendations

- 1. Determine What Works and What Does Not.** Conduct assessments of MOED's youth programs, organizational structure, capacity, practices, procedures, data systems, and outcomes to determine effectiveness and actions needed to take advantage of emerging opportunities. Provide staff and administrators with training and exposure to best practices and cultivate a climate of innovation. Frame these assessments and exercises in a way that encourages buy-in from long-term staff. Identify or recruit a champion who can work across stakeholder groups and implement an expanded opportunity youth agenda.
- 2. Credential Four Pilot (C4).** In addition to examining outcomes associated with various elements of this pilot, funders and designers should explore the extent to which the soft skills components provided by BCCC are customized to this population. Although sustainability plans are not clear, expansion of the pilot should involve aligning this program with other health training programs to facilitate college and career advancement.
- 3. Pre-Adjudication Coordination and Training (PACT).** The basic skills, life skills, job readiness, and career coaching components of the PACT program should be examined with an eye toward expansion. Greater collaboration and alignment with youth employment programs and employers in sectors that are more tolerant of those who have been involved with the justice system, such as construction and manufacturing, should occur.
- 4. Mental Health Support.** Increase the level of understanding of MOED and YO! Baltimore staff about the importance of addressing participants' mental health issues and incorporate mental health criteria into academic and career assessment processes. Expand the HEBCAC YO! Center's Healthy Minds at Work Program to the Westside YO! Center and other organizations.
- 5. Enhance Summer Jobs Program.** Develop an orientation program and ongoing outreach strategy for youth participating summer jobs program that is based on an integrated youth development, life skills and career exploration model. Develop tools for employer sponsors of summer jobs to assist them in making the work experience more meaningful and educational through more intentional supervision, mentoring and skills training. Reinforce summer work experience with year-round career development and readiness training activities. Conduct a survey of employers participating in MOED's youth programs to solicit feedback and determine employers' willingness to play an enhanced role. Use social media to engage youth during the training program and the school year, including providing information that reinforces core youth development and career pathway principles.

Appendix: List of Key Informants

Eli Allen

Director, Retrofit Baltimore and New Initiatives
Baltimore Center for Green Careers/
Civic Works

Tona Cravioto

Senior Director, Workforce Development
St. Vincent de Paul of Baltimore

Ernest Dorsey

Assistant Director/Youth Services
Mayor's Office of Employment Development

Gicelle Fundales

Director of Training and Production
Baltimore Center for Green Careers/Civic
Works

Allison A. Gerber

Senior Associate, Family Economic Success
The Annie E. Casey Foundation

Mary Manzoni

Vice President, Workforce Development
Humanim

Patricia McLaughlin

Executive Director
Caroline Center

Lois Mitchell

Director of Programs
Historic East Baltimore Community Action
Coalition/YO! Eastside Center

Mamadou Ndiaye

Senior Project Manager
Jobs for the Future

Kerry Owings

Manager
YO! Westside Community Center

Manny Rodriguez

Director of Replication & Strategic Partnerships
Jane Addams Resource Corporation

David Shegan

Vocational Services Program
Sinai Hospital of Baltimore

Laura Spada

Executive Director
Baltimore Alliance for Careers in Healthcare

Matt Stubbs

Program Manager
Job Opportunities Task Force/JumpStart

Clair Watson

Program Director
Maryland New Directions

Kathleen Weiss

Executive Director
BioTechnical Institute of Maryland

Jo-Ann Williams

Manager, Workforce Development &
Community Partnerships
University of Maryland Medical Center

Dion Wright

Deputy Executive Director
Civic Works

Note: This list provides titles and affiliations for informants at the time they were interviewed.

Endnotes

- ¹ The term *disconnected youth* generally refers to youth and young adults ages 16-24 who are enrolled in school but at risk of dropping out, not enrolled in school, or not working. Typically, these youth have other risk factors and barriers that limit their access to educational and economic opportunities. Other terminology applied to this population includes *out-of-school youth* and, more recently, *opportunity youth*. The upper and lower age limits used to define these youth may vary from as low as 14 years old to as old as 29 years. For the purposes of this assessment, the terms disconnected youth and opportunity youth are used interchangeably and generally refer to youth and young adults ages 16-24 years who are out-of-school and out-of-work.
- ² S. Hastings, R. Tsoi-A-Fatt, and L. Harris, *Building a Comprehensive Youth Employment Delivery System: Examples of Effective Practice*, (Washington, DC: CLASP, 2010).
- ³ Although YouthBuild's current sources of funding are winding down in the next 3-6 months, Civic Works expects the program to continue with new funding.
- ⁴ The Opportunity Collaborative's 2013 *Baltimore Regional Talent Development Pipeline Study* identified six sectors that are crucial to Baltimore's regional economic growth and offer good entry-level job opportunities: Business Services, Construction, Healthcare, Information Technology, Manufacturing, and Transportation and Logistics.
- ⁵ Memo from Aspen Forum for Community Solutions to Baltimore City Opportunity Youth Collaborative entitled, *Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund: Asset Mapping Memo – Baltimore*, documenting a December 5-6, 2013 site visit.
- ⁶ Ann Beaudry (ed.), *Black Lives Matter: The Schott 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males*, (Cambridge, MA: Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2015). This study uses data from by U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. The authors point out that there are differences between these data and data reported by eight of the 56 school districts studied. Baltimore City Public Schools is among the eight, reporting a black male graduation rate of 59.8%, compared to 38% reported in the Schott report.
- ⁷ Martha Holleman, *Young People are Career Ready: Accelerating the Credential Attainment and Employment of Baltimore's Young People Ages 18 - 24: Some Initial Prospects*, (Baltimore, MD: Baltimore's Promise, 2015).
- ⁸ Interpretation of data presented in Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Youth and Work: Restoring Teen and Young Adult Connections to Opportunity*, (Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2012), 3.
- ⁹ Lee Bruno and Carol Pistorino, *Youth Opportunity Grant Initiative: Process Evaluation Final Report*, (Houston, TX: Decision Information Resources, Inc., 2007), 80.
- ¹⁰ Barry Shaffer, *The Changing Landscape of High School Equivalency in the U.S.: Options, Issues, and Improvement Strategies*, (Washington, DC: CLASP, 2015).
- ¹¹ E.Z. Rutschow and S. Crary-Ross, *Beyond the GED: Promising Models for Moving High School Dropouts to College*, (New York: MDRC, 2014).
- ¹² Theresa Anderson et al., *The Second Year of Accelerating Opportunity: Implementation Findings from the States and Colleges*, (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2015).
- ¹³ Marcia Kingslow (for Mt. Auburn Associates), *Year Up Financial Services Partnership*, (Boston, MA: SkillWorks Partners for a Productive Workforce, 2013).
- ¹⁴ Marcia Kingslow (for Mt. Auburn Associates), *Year Up Financial Services Partnership: Final Evaluation Report*, (Boston, MA: SkillWorks Partners for a Productive Workforce, 2014).
- ¹⁵ Child Trends, *A Developmental Perspective on Workplace Readiness: Preparing High School Students for Success*, (Washington, DC: Author, 2009).
- ¹⁶ Marcia Kingslow, *East Baltimore Workforce Development Stakeholder Input Assessment*, (Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014).
- ¹⁷ Kingslow, 2013, 7-11.

¹⁸ <http://www.dol.gov/apprenticeship>

- ¹⁹ David Altstadt, *Improving Access to Apprenticeship: Strengthening State Policies and Practices*, (Washington, DC: Working Poor Families Project, 2011).
- ²⁰ RDA Global Inc., *Baltimore Region Talent Development Pipeline Study*, (Baltimore, MD: Baltimore Metropolitan Council, Opportunity Collaborative, 2013).
- ²¹ Baltimore Integration Partnership, *Skill Level of Employed Residents: Powerpoint Presentation*, (Baltimore, MD: Association of Baltimore Area Grantmakers, n.d.).
- ²² National Network of Sector Partners, *Sector Snapshot: A Profile of Sector Initiatives*, (Oakland, CA: Author, 2010).
- ²³ Chris Seals, *Baltimore Regional Workforce Development Strategic Plan*, (Baltimore, MD: The Opportunity Collaborative, 2014).
- ²⁴ Barbara L. Hopkins, *The Path to Baltimore's "Best Prospect" Jobs without a College Degree: Appendix 1: Industry Sector*, (Baltimore, MD: Abell Foundation, 2015).
- ²⁵ Timothy Bates, "Utilization of Minority Employees in Small Business: A Comparison of Nonminority and Black-Owned Urban Enterprises" in *The Review of Black Political Economy* 23, v. 1 (Summer 1994), 113-121.
- ²⁶ Marsha Schachtel, *African American Business Development Success Metrics*, (Baltimore, MD: Associated Black Charities, n.d.).
- ²⁷ See sections on "Closing the Skills Gap" and "Strengthening Workforce Pipelines" in V. Rubin, C. Schildt and E. Mattiuzzi, *The East Baltimore Revitalization Initiative: An Economic Inclusion Assessment and Recommendations*, (Oakland, CA: PolicyLink, 2013).
- ²⁸ See section on Local Hiring and Purchasing in Joseph B. McNeely, *Homewood Community Partners Initiative: A Call to Action*, (Baltimore, MD: 2012).
- ²⁹ <http://evergreencooperatives.com>. The enterprises also offer internships to young adults.
- ³⁰ Kisha Bird, *Opportunity Says It All: How Five Communities Are Supporting the Transformation, Education, and Employment Success of Young Black Men*, (Washington, DC: CLASP, 2013).
- ³¹ Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Youth and Work: Restoring Teen and Young Adult Connections to Opportunity*, (Baltimore, MD: Author, 2012), 13-14.
- ³² Memo from Aspen Forum for Community Solutions to Baltimore City Opportunity Youth Collaborative entitled, *Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund: Asset Mapping Memo – Baltimore*, documenting a December 5-6, 2013 site visit.
- ³³ U.S. Department of Labor, *Youth Opportunity Monthly Data and Rate Analysis Report*, (Washington, DC: Author, June 2005); and Lee Bruno and Carol Pistorino, *Youth Opportunity Grant Initiative: Process Evaluation Final Report*, (Houston, TX: Decision Information Resources, Inc., 2007).
- ³⁴ Information about the eligible ages of YO! Baltimore participants varies. The YO! Baltimore website says 16-24, while other documentation says 16-22. The summer jobs programs (YouthWorks) targets youth ages 14-21.
- ³⁵ Youth Opportunity Baltimore, *Celebrating 13 Years of YO! Baltimore*, (Baltimore, MD: Mayor's Office of Employment Development, 2013).
- ³⁶ National League of Cities, *Beyond City Limits: Cross-System Collaboration to Reengage Disconnected Youth*, (Washington, DC: Author, 2007), 35-38.
- ³⁷ City of Baltimore, Fiscal 2015 Summary of the Adopted Budget, p. 220.
- ³⁸ Center for Adolescent Health, "Healthy Minds at Work: Addressing the Mental Health Needs of Youth in Job Training Programs" in *Adolescent Matters* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, Spring 2014).
- ³⁹ The awardees are Career Academy, Civic Works, Healthcare Careers Alliance, Hope Forward, and Living Classrooms Foundation.
- ⁴⁰ See internal ABAG Public Policy Task Force memorandum, *Recommendations Regarding the Public Policy Activity of Members*, February 15, 2012.

