



## Policy Platform

### Who We Are

In the United States, there are an estimated 4.8 million opportunity youth—young adults between the ages of 16 and 24 who are neither in school nor employed. They urgently need—and aspire to earn—knowledge, training, and opportunities that lead to long-term professional and personal success. As headquarters for the YouthBuild movement, YouthBuild Global unifies and partners with an expansive network of YouthBuild programs around the world, championing opportunity youth as they achieve their ambitions and reach their full potential. In YouthBuild programs, young people who are out of school and out of work reclaim their education, gain job skills, and become leaders in their communities through service and civic engagement.

At YouthBuild, young adults spend roughly half of their time advancing their formal education goals. These can include: working toward their high school diploma or its equivalent, numeracy and literacy skill-building, and hands-on learning, focused on livelihood preparation (including college, apprenticeships and employment). The balance of their time is spent gaining hands-on work skills by building affordable housing and other community assets in their neighborhoods with other opportunities to learn job skills in high-demand careers like healthcare, culinary, hospitality, manufacturing and IT.

During an 8- to 10- month average enrollment, they become part of a strong global community by engaging in service and leadership training. Youth voice is elevated to cultivate engagement, decision-making, social responsibility, and agency in charting their own path. YouthBuild participants also benefit from services that support them in managing and addressing barriers to their success, helping to meet their basic needs so they can participate, learn, and train at their full capacity.

U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) YouthBuild grants are competitively awarded and a primary funding source for community-based non-profit, college and governmental sponsors of local YouthBuild programs. Participants represent a population that spans many different initiatives and programs at the Federal level. In addition to the DOL grants and workforce funding, Federal funding and policies of the U.S. Department of Education and the Corporation for National and Community Service are important to YouthBuild. Roughly 38% of YouthBuild enrollees are women, and participants are a racially and ethnically diverse group.

## YouthBuild Global Policy Agenda

YouthBuild Global advocates for a policy agenda that not only supports YouthBuild students and alumni and the work of local YouthBuild programs, but also promotes equity and assistance for opportunity youth more broadly. The policy recommendations below focus on improving existing funding streams and public policies to ensure that the needs of the youth served by the program are met while creating new opportunities for growth and success.

**Improving the DOL YouthBuild Program:** Central to the DOL YouthBuild program is its commitment to empowering opportunity youth. By building on its tremendous legacy, we can better address the modern challenges these young individuals face. To accomplish this goal, we support policies that:

- Permit YouthBuild funding to be used for food assistance, so that program participants facing food insecurity are able to receive the support needed to focus on their education and training.
- Expand YouthBuild to include key wraparound services such as transportation assistance so that there are lower barriers to attendance and engagement in programming.
- Extend follow-up services to 24 rather than 12 months to better support the transition of participants to the workforce and postsecondary education pathways.
- Establish a standardized timeline for DOL YouthBuild Funding Opportunity Announcements (FOAs) to ensure funding stability for Youth Build grantees and enable effective program planning.
- Eliminate waiting periods for YouthBuild graduates to transition into other DOL youth job training programs, facilitating smoother career pathways.
- Ensure organizations in rural and tribal areas can compete for DOL YouthBuild grants so that opportunity youth across the globe are equitably served.
- Facilitate participants in applying for Federal and State benefit programs to ensure food and child care-related needs are met.
- Permit the usage of DOL funds for stipends for program participants to help cover daily expenses and boost program participation.

**Better Workforce Training and Access for Opportunity Youth:** Opportunity youth flourish when provided with a wide array of credentialing, certification, and training opportunities. To maximize their access to these vital resources, we advocate for policies that:

- Enable YouthBuild and other opportunity youth-serving programs to connect participants to the full range of in-demand industries, including expanded industry-recognized credentials, ultimately increasing their employability.
- Improve access for graduates of YouthBuild and other opportunity youth-serving workforce programs to apprenticeship programs to facilitate transitions to careers in in-demand industries.

- Expand youth voice throughout the workforce training, placement, and funding system to better inform Federal, State and local workforce strategies and effective services.
- Require performance metrics to be consulted on with YouthBuild programs, ensuring more accountable and effective services for opportunity youth.
- Create performance pilots that allow for innovative and effective means of serving opportunity youth.

**Expanding the Ability to Serve:** A core component of the YouthBuild model is the opportunity for students to rebuild their communities while rebuilding their lives, in part through meaningful service in their communities. We support policies that:

- Increase AmeriCorps funding and expand support for opportunity youth participating in service so that members have more avenues to engage with their communities.
- Ensure that DOL YouthBuild funding can be used as a match for YouthBuild AmeriCorps grants under the National Community Service Act to bring DOL's approach into alignment with other Federal agencies.
- Eliminate the current tax on Segal education awards and raise the living stipend for AmeriCorps members, making service roles more accessible and sustainable.

**Enhanced Educational Access and Success:** Opportunity youth benefit from a wraparound service approach as they first complete their secondary education and transition into postsecondary education or the workforce. To further this growth as opportunity youth pursue postsecondary education, we support policies that:



- Fund partnerships between institutions of higher education (IHEs) and local YouthBuild programs and other support organizations with expertise in working with opportunity youth to better equip those students with financial aid, academic and mental health counseling, career advisors, mentorships and other supportive services while enrolled in postsecondary education.
  - In particular, incentivizing IHEs to partner with opportunity youth using Federal TRIO program funding would both increase access to and retention in higher education.
- Increase inter-department coordination, partnerships, funding, and other resources from the U.S. Department of Labor, the U.S. Department of Education and State education departments and opportunity youth programs (reflecting the fact that successful opportunity youth programs must be both education and career focused).

Launch a new experimental site under HEA to allow individuals enrolled in YouthBuild programs to access Federal financial aid without having to utilize the ability-to-benefit process.

If you would like additional information or are interested in joining our efforts to uplift youth voices, contact the YouthBuild Global Advocacy team at [advocacy@youthbuild.org](mailto:advocacy@youthbuild.org).