



CULTIVATING **POSSIBILITIES**

WHITE HOUSE YOUTH POLICY SUMMIT 2024

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Section 1 – Background & Planning

Background

Since taking office, the Biden-Harris Administration has consistently engaged with, partnered alongside, and delivered for young people across the nation. In mid-2023, federal policymakers – from the White House and six federal agencies critical to the wellbeing of young people – began to conceptualize a Youth Policy Summit to hear directly from young people about issues that matter most to them.

In particular, they wanted to hear from youth for whom the systems have not worked. This was also an opportunity for the agencies to explore the interconnectedness of their work in delivering for all youth in a more comprehensive and coordinated way.

Leaders wanted this to be a first-of-its-kind intergenerational exchange, with youth and federal agency staff as the majority of the 270+ participants. The science of adolescent development defines “youth” and “young people” as people between the ages of 10-24. The majority of youth attendees

were aged 16-24; therefore, most of the policies discussed were relevant to that age group.

The U.S. Department of Education anchored the event, collaborating through a Memorandum of Understanding with the Funders for Adolescent Science Translation (FAST) Collaborative* that provided resources to plan and execute the event.



“This summit is a stepping stone to establish a foundation for this country where we see young people leading and creating the policy that directly impacts us.”

Malaak Elhage



Federal Partners in the Summit

The White House

U.S. Department of Justice

U.S. Department of Labor

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

U.S. Department of Education

U.S. Department of Homeland Security

*See page 45 for a full list of FAST Funders.

Planning

To authentically host a summit for youth, the first step was to establish an intergenerational planning team, composed of eight advisors - half youth and half adult allies - who ensured that young people were at the center of each decision. This group came together weekly for five months to inform federal policymakers' plans, design the agenda, and develop the overall plan for Cultivating Possibilities: White House Youth Policy Summit 2024. To prepare the youth participants, drawn from youth organizations across the country, the team organized online gatherings to build community and connections, learn about the developmental goals, and understand administrative advocacy definitions and opportunities.

This intergenerational team liaised with the internal government planning team consisting of members of the six agencies and senior White House staff, who met on a monthly basis. These monthly meetings provided an opportunity to identify cross-cutting themes and projects they hoped to discuss with youth leaders. It also provided an opportunity for senior

administrative staff to be trained in narrative change and to learn from youth about adultism, youth engagement, and how to enter the room ready to share power.

For the day of the Summit, the planning team, with input from the full group of youth leaders, established intergenerational principles to ensure that youth expertise and lived experience was centered and respected throughout each session. For instance, no federal policymakers spoke on the stage without being in dialogue with young people. The result was genuine collaboration and conversation throughout the Summit, creating opportunities for new narratives to emerge and inform policy.

Key Takeaways

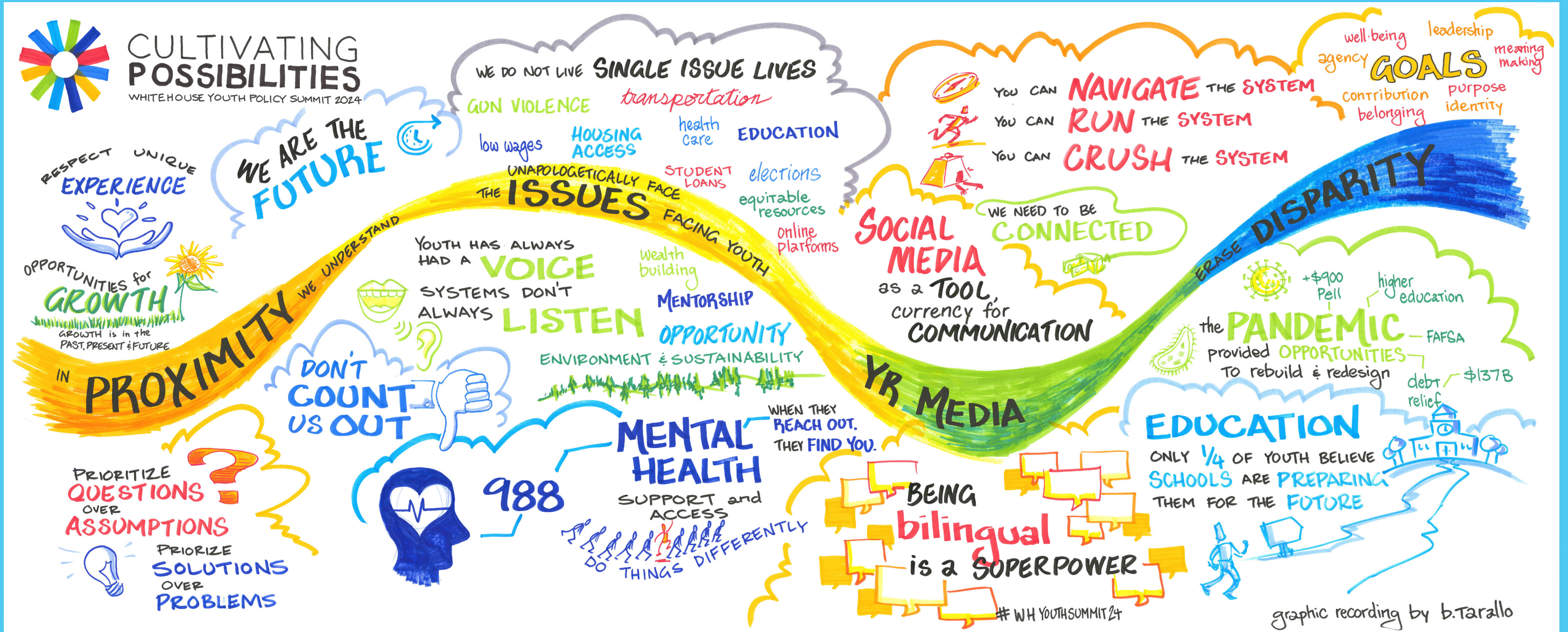
1. Process and preparation are critical to building a foundation that guides the shifting of power for both the initial and continued engagement for policy change
2. Youth are ready to provide input and solutions, but federal structures are often not designed for meaningful collaboration.
3. Adults in all youth-serving systems need to understand and align under evidence-based developmental goals one through six.
4. Systems, policies, and leaders need to recognize, engage, and compensate for different types of expertise to cultivate representative administrations and legislation.
5. Youth need system leaders to de-silo, coordinate, and find collaborative, developmentally aligned solutions to cultivate federal agencies and programs that are more effective for youth.
6. The narratives of policy and systems must shift to highlight and elevate the strengths and assets of youth.

"Young people are speaking up. It is our job to make sure our systems are ready to listen."

Secretary Miguel Cardona



Section 2 – Embracing Developmental Goals



Embracing Developmental Goals

A key design decision made by the planning team and federal agency partners was to anchor the meeting in the broader developmental goals that happen throughout adolescence - instead of ordering by agency-specific initiatives or themes. The six goals come from the Center for the Developing Adolescent's work on translating the science of adolescent development.

While the research is still emerging, it is clear that everyone goes through this period of life aiming to find purpose and passions, to feel belonging, to develop a sense of self and identity, to find meaning in life, and to practice and grow agency. Youth also need experiences that develop leadership skills and opportunities to give back to communities. Contribution, it turns out, is a key part of healing and resilience. So why isn't it a core part of how programs are designed by adults? These goals - sometimes divided up or combined in different ways - are fairly consistent in the research.

The planning team members helped to shape these larger goals into six clear areas- and agreed that framing the meeting around these would help elevate what youth need during this period of their lives, and how all the programs and policy areas have to work

together to accomplish these goals. Wellbeing, for example, doesn't just sit in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, it cuts across all the agencies. Similarly, working to provide youth with opportunities to build agency, and find purpose, doesn't come with a department head and a line-item in a federal budget. One Department staffer, after reviewing these goals, said, "but where does education fit in?" These are exactly the conversations the planning team hoped to spark - wrestling with how systems together can better deliver on these fundamental goals, while centering on youth expertise and lived experience.

Developmental Goals

1. Wellbeing & Environment
2. Belonging
3. Purpose
4. Identity & Meaning-Making
5. Agency & Decision-Making
6. Leadership & Contribution



"Youth are experts in their own lived experiences. When we are given agency, wellbeing, belonging, purpose, meaning, and leadership within our federal government to express our voices, we are empowered to bring these values to our peers as well."

Sriha Srinivasan



"The adolescent brain does not develop in isolation. Racism, bias, and discrimination can create barriers to healthy brain development."

Adriana Galván

Embracing Developmental Goals — Wellbeing & Environment

1

Session Focus

Policymakers were encouraged to move away from a medical model to focus on the social drivers of wellbeing such as the role of environment, community, and the multiple systems that intersect and interact in the lives of youth.

Session Leads

Shawn Ginwright, Harvard Graduate School of Education

Jessica Kim,
West Regional Youth Poet Laureate

Marco Lima, Every Hour Counts

Facilitator: Andy Kucer,
Spring Point Partners

"I know wellbeing isn't about being well enough to be perfect, but welcoming a version of myself who can stand with her arms wide enough to touch the warmth of the air."

Jessica Kim

[Click Here for Jessica's
Spoken Word Poem](#)

Key Discussion Points

- Democratizing wellbeing by providing culturally responsive care and reducing stigma
- Trauma and wellbeing are not independent of each other and solutions should not focus only on the individual but rather the wellbeing and healing of entire communities
- Promote wellbeing in communities by ensuring mental health professionals are culturally competent
- Youth voice is good; youth power is better
- Cultural competency and context is key
- Work with credible messengers who are trusted by the community to advocate for mental healthcare and foster healing
- Recognize the role that environmental factors play in mental health and trauma
- Mental health intersects with multiple systems and cannot be addressed as a single issue.
- Research with and for young people



Shawn Ginwright

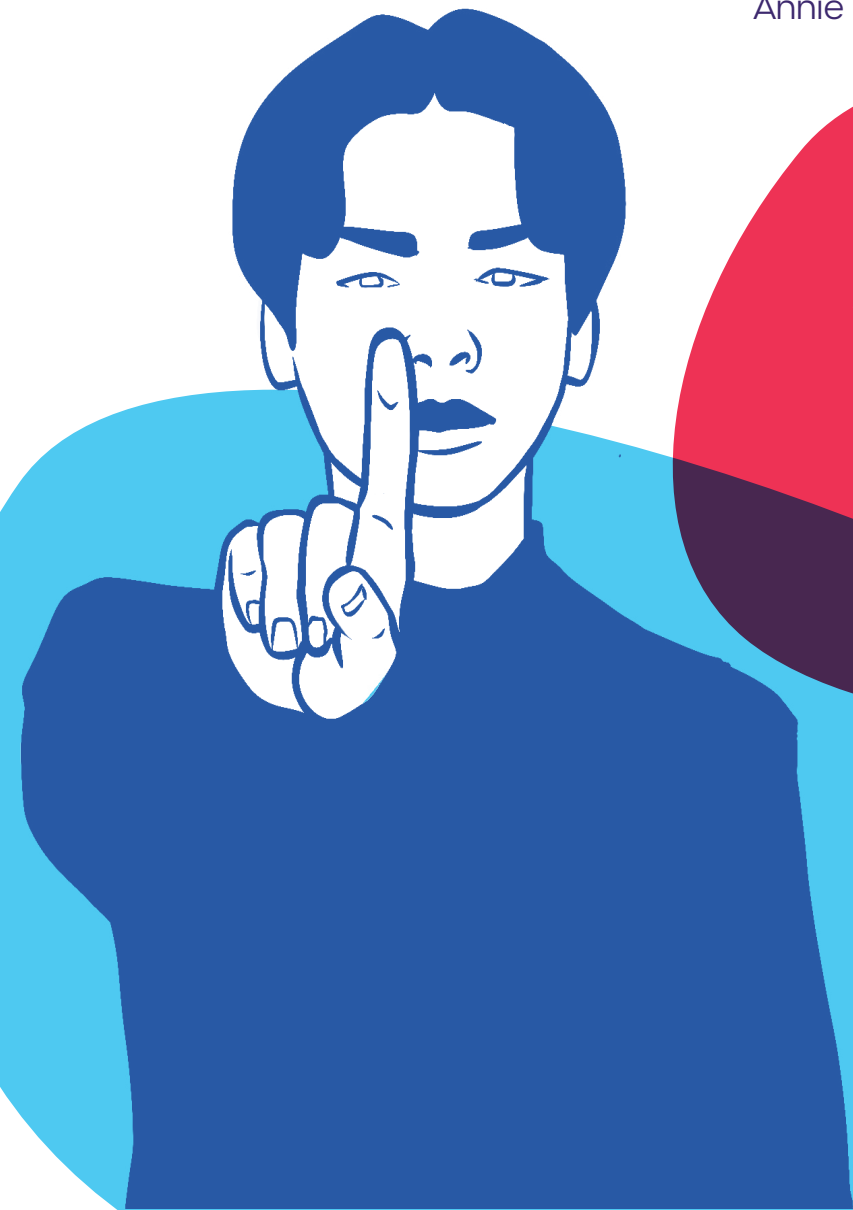
Embracing Developmental Goals —

Belonging

2

Session Focus

Policymakers were encouraged to ensure that young people are accepted, respected, and feel connected to caring adults and peers.



Session Leads

Evan Wang, Youth Poet Laureate of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania

Ashlin Malouf-Gashaw,
Othering & Belonging Institute

Isabel Mavrides-Calderón,
Latina Disability Justice Activist and Organizer

Facilitator: Sandra Gasca-Gonzalez,
Annie E. Casey Foundation

“We wash across the veins of this country like a brushstroke of calligraphy never taught to us. Still, we are headed home.”

Evan Wang

[Click Here for Evan's Spoken Word Poem](#)

Key Discussion Points

- Recognize lived experience in all of its diversity
- Ensure young people have pay equity; do not ask them to be volunteers
- Mental health does not discriminate across race/gender/class
- Adolescents need to be policy makers
- Utilize better data that is representative of the communities that we aim to serve
- Set a table that is accessible to young people with disabilities
- Schools provide a sense of belonging for a vast number of students; however, they need to be intentional about providing an atmosphere of belonging, recognition, and safety for students of color



Ashlin Malouf-Gashaw

Embracing Developmental Goals — Purpose

3

Session Focus

Policymakers were encouraged to provide experiences that help cultivate a sense of purpose; creating equitable and diverse pathways to explore and discover individual and social purposes.

Session Leads

Fatima Ahmad, New York City Youth Poet Laureate 2024
Anthony Burrow, Cornell College of Human Ecology
Alyssia Leach, Grip Tape
Facilitator: Samira Pingali, Hopelab

Key Discussion Points

- Partnerships are key for cultivating purpose
- Purpose intersects with education; there should be opportunities for innovation within school spaces
- Purpose is cultivated not found. Consider ways to support/pay/reward young people to explore purpose
- Recognize there is a gap between the “intelligence” youth display in community versus what is being measured in school
- Purpose is deeply impacted by lived experience
- Purpose is a super power. In a world where all is negative, to find purpose you need to focus on the abundance of good things versus bad things
- Purpose is a component of wellbeing. When you feel better, you do better

“We are seeds bloomed in soil planted in freedom. Through monsoon or drought, our roots extend against skylines, twinkling in dreams, in history, in prayers.”

Fatima Ahmad

[Click Here for Fatima’s Spoken Word Poem](#)

Anthony Burrow

Embracing Developmental Goals — Identity & Meaning-Making

4

Session Focus

Policymakers were encouraged to nurture environments and systems that shape and enhance rather than inhibit a sense of identity and offer opportunities to define personal values and goals.

Session Leads

Salome Agbaroji, United States Youth Poet Laureate 2023
Jorge Alvarez, Active Minds
Natalie Collier, The Lighthouse I Black Girl Projects
Facilitator: Sara Bathum, Pivotal Ventures

Key Discussion Points

- It is important for young people to have access to resources where they feel seen
- Consider opportunities to share information with young people about investments that have been made and resources available at the state, local, and federal levels
- Seek representation of identity
- Young people do not support code-switching which upholds the notion that you cannot bring your true self to work/school
- You cannot support people being themselves and having a sense of identity, while also subscribing to code-switching and dominant culture dress norms
- There is a need for more mental health advocates who can combat stigma and create space for storytelling

“As long as it’s in the beloved King’s English. No quieren tu español, Tagalog, o Creole. Because we would hate for ‘We The People’ to be lost in translation.”

Salome Agbaroji

[Click Here for Salome’s Spoken Word Poem](#)

Natalie Collier

Embracing Developmental Goals —

Agency & Decision-Making

5

Session Focus

Policymakers were encouraged to provide opportunities for autonomy in decision-making and create space where young people can take healthy risks, try, fail, and try again.

Session Leads

Mateo Acuña,
Seattle Youth Poet Laureate
Patricia Chin, Annie E. Casey Foundation
Alaa Mohamed,
Ci3, The University of Chicago
Facilitator: Jared Joiner,
Chan Zuckerberg Initiative

Key Discussion Points

- Place emphasis on partnerships in decision-making to create room for young people to be heard
- Provide access to knowledge and resources for decision-making
- Create youth-adult partnerships where adults help to foster young people’s ability to do a task and believe in their growth and potential to learn
- Agency and decision-making means giving young people a voice, experience, and the authority to make decisions along with leaders
- Challenges and barriers arise when young people feel like the finish line gets pushed back even though they are meeting the original goals



“We called wildlife sanctuaries. None of them took birds. They said not to touch you. They said some are born to die, that nature finds a way to survive.”
Mateo Acuña

[Click Here for Mateo’s Spoken Word Poem](#)



Patricia Chin

Embracing Developmental Goals — Leadership & Contribution



Session Focus

Policymakers were encouraged to expand opportunities for youth to cooperate, collaborate, and lead in their communities across racial, economic, and cultural differences. Intentionally fund and support youth leadership and contribution across all systems.

Session Leads

Mary-Pat Hector, Rise
Ben Kirshner, Colorado University, Boulder
Stephanie Pacheco, New York City Youth Poet Laureate 2023
Facilitator: Chris Plutte, Bezos Family Foundation

Key Discussion Points

- Adults need to learn and grow in order to be in genuine youth-adult partnerships
- Treatment of young people needs to shift so that they are seen as experts in their own right
- Adults need to walk humbly, listen, and unlearn their assumptions about young people
- Young people are motivated to engage in activism out of necessity (climate change & debt relief)
- Many leaders look to young people as “the tomorrow” when in reality they are “the today”

“If youth involvement is key to a world that does not collapse, I wish there were more times we were asked what we thought about how the world unraveled before us.”

Stephanie Pacheco

[Click Here for Stephanie's Spoken Word Poem](#)



Ben Kirshner

Section 3 – Shifting the Narrative



Research, Evidence, & Storytelling

In this session, three leading voices wove together a conversation on research, evidence-building, and storytelling. They discussed the inequities and power dynamics in current research structures involving youth and explored ways to ensure that storytelling is a valued part of evidence-building in communities. The session asked “what we know” and “how we know it?” The presenters provided approaches to youth research and knowledge that is not extractive, but is built collectively from the beginning of the process, by and for youth, anchored not in deficits, but strength and assets.

[Link to Recording of the Session](#)

Kick-off Speakers

- **Joanna Williams**, Search Institute
- **Gael Aitor**, Astro Studios
- **Amanda Tachine**, Arizona State University

Key Takeaways

- Research has been (mis)used to tell stories about youth/communities that misrepresent them, perpetuate deficit- and damage-focused narratives, especially when structural and systemic causes of inequality have been left out. Research needs to acknowledge responsibility in perpetuating harmful stories and narratives.
- Stories have power and should be viewed as legitimate knowledge, getting at a deeper understanding of the influences of historical and sociopolitical contexts.
- Research should be done with and by youth/communities, not “on” them; think critically and carefully about how young people are being positioned/ described in research.
- Young people need to be included in the process of interpreting and sharing out research, so that they have power in shaping the stories that emerge from the research findings.
- Dream big about how research can change conditions, so that all youth have equitable access to resources for thriving.



“Whoever tells the story holds the power. To own your story is powerful.”

Gael Aitor

“There are biases in who has been included and how it gets interpreted and who has the power to even conduct research. So we can’t treat research as if it’s the only valid truth.”

Joanna Williams



“I am here to tell you that story is a legitimate tool of knowledge systems that has been passed down from generations to generations that make us who we are today.”

Amanda Tachine

Shifting the Narrative

In this session, Frameworks Institute demonstrated that the way ideas are presented and words are chosen can significantly impact how people think, feel, and act. This concept is especially important when telling stories about young people and the ways that young people tell stories about themselves. When stories about young people focus only on the negative, there is a limited understanding of how development happens which leads to a lack of support for policy solutions that promote positive development. Referring to adolescents as a “vulnerable population” is not helpful in shifting mindset and policy. But referring to collective prosperity as a result of investment in this population can be inspiring.

[Link to Frameworks Session](#)

There are three powerful cultural mindsets that need to shift.

- Away from seeing adolescence as “dangerous times” to one of opportunity and potential
- Away from the “othering” of adolescents as “them” to inclusive language of us and building two-way community connections
- Away from simply stating the existence of inequality and explaining inequalities and their roots

5 strategies to shift this narrative:

- Rebalance the discussion and repeat
- Explain structural factors that lead to disparities
- Start talking about adolescence in the context of a time with vast social, emotional development and identity formation..not the brain
- Use language of discovery/exploration to explain the benefits of opportunities to try and learn
- Use community connections to widen the lens



“Narrative change is policy change.”

Andre Simms



“It is not just what you say, but how you say it [that matters].”

Nat Kendall-Taylor

Section 4 – Building Collaborative Spaces with Youth



How to Build Spaces: Principles and Actions for Policy Maker and Youth Collaboration

“Nothing about us without us” is the demand that youth be part of the planning, implementation, and evaluation of programs and policies that focus on their development and wellbeing. It is a recognition that young people have expertise and lived experience that contribute to more effective and sustainable solutions. Importantly, this requires that adults share power with youth and work together towards shared goals and mutual accountability. This Summit was an attempt to create a new kind of shared space where power was shifted and gave young people a central role.

The principles we used were:

- Resource young people
- Co-create with young people
- Prepare adults
- Cultivate shared space
- Focus on inclusion & accessibility
- Ensure accountability & follow-up



Resource Young People

1

Respecting young people’s experience requires the resourcing of that expertise. Asking youth to volunteer their time is both disrespectful and likely to skew the demographic towards those who can “afford” to volunteer.

Summit-Specific Actions

- Paid young people on the planning team for their time, just like another consultant.
- Provided youth participants with a generous per diem and covered all travel expenses, including adult allies, as requested.
- Resourced youth with what they needed to feel confident at the Summit (clothing allowance, advanced training, support people).
- Virtual and in-person trainings and community building for all youth attendees. Training included scientific evidence and a positive asset-based framing for solutions.

Co-Create With Young People

2

“Creating with” rather than “creating for” is a critical shift which recognizes that young people possess critical expertise in matters concerning them. It is also a recognition that true partnerships with adult allies require a power shift, with youth taking on new roles.

Summit-Specific Actions

- Created a cross-generational planning team of 50% youth and met on a weekly basis.
- Invited teams of young people with support from local organizations, rather than as individuals, to ensure support, continuity, and sustainability.
- Built [ground rules for intergenerational engagement](#) at the Summit.
- Created space for young people to get to know one another in advance and to be prepared to be advocates for the types of policymakers they are engaging with-- e.g. administrative changes with federal administrative teams, legislative ideas for Congress or other elected legislators and their staff.
- Created incentives for engagement on the online meeting platform WHOVA, leading to extensive communication across generations prior to meeting.

“The growth you gain from working with people from different parts of the country is exponential. Coming together always leads to positive outcomes, especially with policies, as it keeps your mind open.”
Marquan Teetz



Prepare Adults

3

While youth are ready and eager to engage, it is often the adults that require the most intense training and re-wiring. Adults are accustomed to making decisions, even when they “consult” young people as part of the process. Training adults to avoid “adultism” and to honor the expertise and capability of young people is an exciting and necessary journey.

Summit-Specific Actions

- Trained adults to enter the intergenerational space with respect for a range of expertise, including lived experience.
- Taught the concept of of adultism and how it is experienced by young people.
- Provided examples of concrete roles that adults could take on as allies.
- Young people were made central, but not held responsible as those who need to change (federal agents and partners were).



Cultivate Shared Space

4

Think through what is required for physical, virtual, and metaphorical space to be shared. Who is at the table, on the stage and on field visits? How are individuals cared for, particularly when being asked to share their experience and truth?

Summit-Specific Actions

- Created a room of half youth leaders/ half federal policymakers where no policymakers spoke without being in dialogue with young people. Youth were both speakers and moderators.
- Co-created the [Cultivating Possibilities 2024 Playlist](#) with all participants.
- Created and staffed a wellness room during the event to care for the socio-emotional wellbeing of participants.
- Balanced space constraints and opportunity to be in critical places of power. While the bulk of the meeting was at the U.S. Department of Education, young people were hosted for dinner at the White House the night before.
- Approached issues in terms of quick wins and long-term transformative change.

“It was very different from other Federal meetings... with music and liveliness and art!”

Federal Partner Representative from the U.S. Department of Justice

Focus on Inclusion & Accessibility

5

Inclusion and accessibility were a focus throughout the process – both in terms of who was included and how participants experienced the event. The planning team continued to learn and adapt throughout!

Summit-Specific Actions

- Focused on inviting organizations that represented young people in all their diversity (geography, race, gender, rural/urban, disability), with a particular focus on young people for whom the systems have not worked.
- Created Zoom environments that accommodated participants with visual disabilities. This included speakers describing themselves and briefing their slides and refraining from chatting in the text while there was a presentation (so that those with a reader could focus on the speaker).
- Registration asked about accommodations in an open-ended way so that individuals were not constrained by a limited number of options for accommodation. Staff followed up with each individual requesting accommodation so that an individualized plan could be created.
- Left off honorific titles from participants and speakers, and asked federal partners to try not to wear suits to the convening, aiming to level the playing field and think about ways to shift power.
- Offered the option of adding pronouns to nametags and provided gender neutral bathrooms during the Summit.

Ensure Accountability & Follow-Up

6

Authentic engagement goes beyond one-off consultations and guarantees a process overtime to see a goal through to its end. Plan from the beginning for a process and timeframe that allows for meaningful change.

Summit-Specific Actions

- Ensured transparency and youth engagement throughout planning, implementation, and follow-up.
- Created a participatory fund for young people to move ideas forward with the input and partnership of federal policymakers.
- Focused on concrete policy solutions throughout the day.
- Uplifted the outcomes and lessons of local and state organizations.
- Held a six-month follow-up call for accountability, based on federal commitments made at the Summit.
- Migrated from the meeting platform to Google Groups and Slack to enable continued communication and collaboration.
- Embedded a young person in the U.S. Department of Education after the event to coordinate follow up across agencies.

“The Youth Summit was a rare and invaluable opportunity for those running this country to listen directly to those living with the policies they create.”

Naomi Cruz Ojeda



Lessons Learned on Building Spaces

Even with clearly defined principles, the planning team continued to learn and course-correct throughout the meeting. Upon reflection after the meeting, the following points are things that could have enhanced the experience.

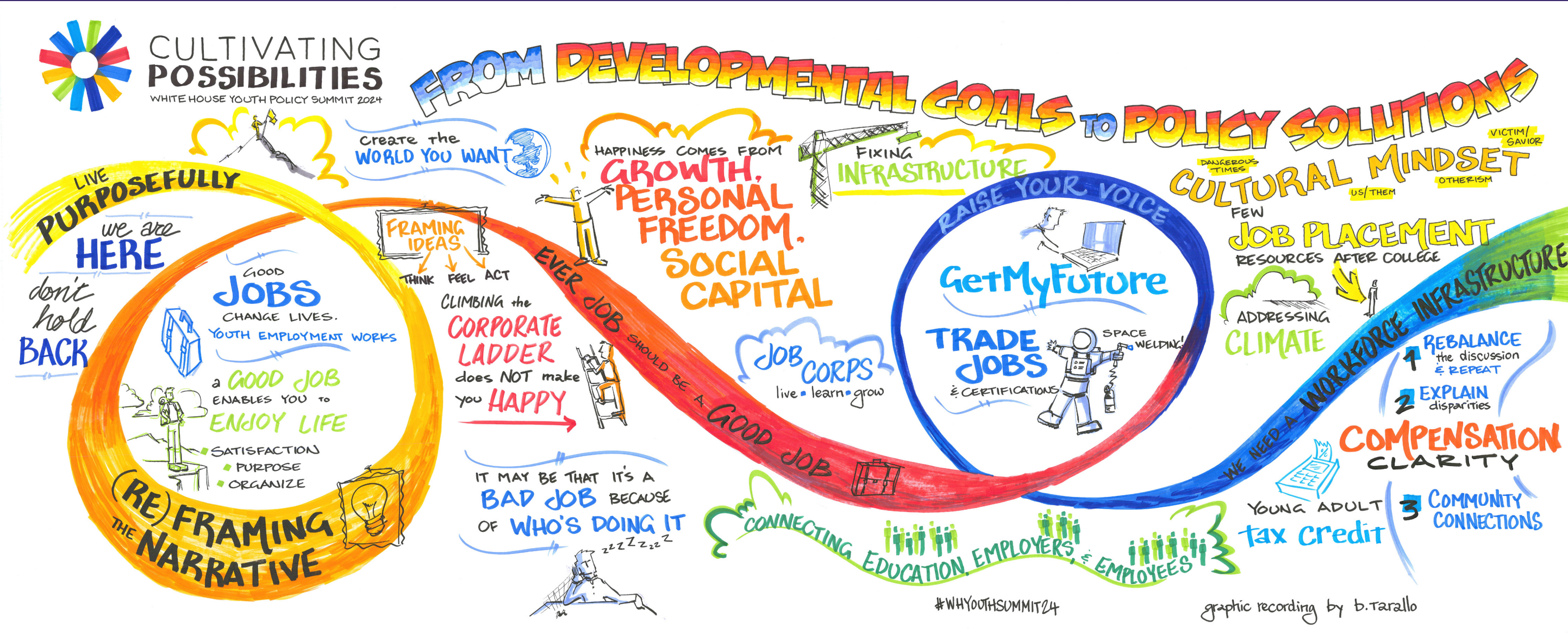
Opportunities for Improvement:

- Make even more youth speakers center-stage presenters.
- Have organization partners present more data and narratives created by, for, and with youth.
- Train all adults, not just the federal partners, in how to show up. Make sure adult presenters answer youth questions and discuss their challenges and mistakes as much as their successes.
- Create even more opportunities for youth to engage in content creation in advance of the Summit.

[Link to Washington Latin Public Charter School Performance](#)



Section 5 – Co-Creating Policy & Imagining a Shared Future



Co-Creating Policy & Imagining a Shared Future

During plenary sessions, fireside chats, and breakout sessions, young people and federal policymakers collaborated across sectors to co-create innovative solutions grounded in lived experience. Below are the key topics for each session. The pages that follow provide a deep dive into the conversations and key discussion points.

Key Session Topics

Making Workforce Programs and the Economy Work for Young People

Fostering Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing Across Systems

Connecting and Supporting Youth Across Health and Education Systems

Reimagining Our Justice Systems To Work With Other Systems

Using Arts, Passions, Sports, Service, and Leadership to Build Belonging, Meaning, Healing, and Contribution in Communities

Creating Communities Anchored in Belonging and Identity- Lessons From LGBTQIA, Indigenous Youth, and Youth With Disabilities

Creating Holistic Wellbeing That Ensures Basic Needs Are Met Through Place-Based Initiatives

Using Developmental Goals to Improve Education, Training, and Workforce Pathways

Building Safe Schools and Safe Communities With Youth Definitions of Safety

Shifting Research and Narratives to Reflect Young People’s Experience and Capabilities

Key

Use the key below as a guide to which federal departments are potential partners in these solutions.

DOJ	U.S. Department of Justice
DOL	U.S. Department of Labor
HHS	U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
HUD	U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
ED	U.S. Department of Education
DHS	U.S. Department of Homeland Security

Co-Creating Solutions — Making Workforce Programs and the Economy Work for Young People

This fireside chat focused on creating opportunities for young people to step into leadership and workforce spaces with agency and possibility.

Kick-Off Speakers

Acting Secretary Julie Su,
U.S. Department of Labor
Genisus Holland,
Justice and Joy Collaborative
Jaime Jimenez,
National Youth Employment Coalition

Key Discussion Points

- Good jobs change lives and are particularly important for young people, but young people often struggle to obtain them
- There are key standards that can and should define good jobs: (1) Possibility of growth; (2) Ability to gain personal freedom; (3) Ability to build social capital
- It is important to nurture and support tradespeople in this country, particularly during this time of significant investment in physical infrastructure. Four-year college is not the only viable path to good employment
- Policymakers have the opportunity to change labor standards to better support young people
 - E.g. HHS and DOL implemented a pilot program and partnership called Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) to increase awareness of the impacts of substance use on employment and create policies that go beyond zero tolerance to provide support and resources to young people.

DOL

ED



“Every job should have the capability of being good.”
Genisus Holland



“There is not a ‘worker’ shortage in this country; there is a good jobs shortage in this country.”
Acting Secretary Su

Co-Creating Solutions — Fostering Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing Across Systems

This session explored how organizations can move away from adult and or/pediatric-focused models of care towards models that integrate the full spectrum of wellbeing that youth need to thrive.

Kick-Off Speakers

- Alfiee Breland-Noble**, The AAKOMA Project
Malaak Elhage, CLASP/New Deal for Youth
Mimi Haley, National Youth Employment Coalition
Dianne Primavera, Lt. Governor of the State of Colorado
Facilitator: Robert Boyd, School-Based Health Alliance

Key Discussion Points

- Key challenges that impact youth mental health and wellbeing include stigma around accessing mental health services, difficulties accessing those services in multiple languages, and lack of culturally competent providers.
- Stop using “vulnerable” and “at risk” youth in program and policy materials
- Youth have experienced a loss of community and connection. They need a sense of belonging
- Data is a key factor in understanding which communities need support, but data collection standards must be revised to ensure the experience of otherwise forgotten groups are reflected
- Community members need to be involved in cultivating solutions and changes to ensure each community is equipped with the tools it needs



HUD

DHS

DOL

DOJ

HHS

ED

Co-Creating Solutions – Connecting and Supporting Youth Across Health and Education Systems

This fireside chat focused on the ways in which mental health and education systems overlap and the opportunities that exist for collaboration and the creation of innovative methods for supporting youth wellbeing

Kick-Off Speakers

Secretary Miguel Cardona,
U.S. Department of Education

Secretary Xavier Becerra,
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Cherie Animashaun, YR Media

Ariyana Griffin, YR Media

Key Discussion Points

- Social media can be an important tool for connecting and supporting youth mental health
- Schools can be a critical “hub” for mental health supports for youth. We need to increase the mental health supports available in these spaces and provide connections to community-based organizations to ensure all students feel connected
- Effort should be made to meet youth where they are and support the integration of their voices using a “for us, by us” approach
- There is potential in developing a youth task force (by congressional district) that would foster greater connection between the education system and elected officials
- It is extremely Important to break down barriers between departments, recognizing that youth do not live siloed lives
 - E.g. ED and HHS are collaborating in innovative ways to provide better mental health services in schools, looking at how Medicaid dollars can be sent directly to schools

HHS

ED

“Youth have always had a voice, but sometimes our systems are not designed to listen. We have to do more than just listen; we have to act.”

Secretary Cardona



“What the youth were saying is they want more opportunities. They wanted the opportunity to be able to go to school and it be affordable.”

Ariyana Griffin

“Why not have the school be a hub for so many more things than education?”

Secretary Becerra



Co-Creating Solutions — Reimagining Our Justice Systems To Work With Other Systems

This session highlighted new approaches to justice programs around the country, with a focus on cross-sectoral collaboration that is developmentally aligned and embraces fairness, rehabilitation, and social supports. Participants considered how to design such systems for healing, meaning-making, and purpose.

Kick-Off Speakers

- Josiah Akau**, Kinai ‘Eha
Ben Danielson, Allies in Healthier Systems for Health and Abundance in Youth (AHSAY)
Jordan King, Philadelphia District Attorney’s Office - Diversion Policy & Juvenile Justice Programs
Andre Simms, DayOneNotDayTwo/ New Deal For Youth
Facilitator: Liz Ryan, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice

Key Discussion Points

- The current incarceration system is broken and perpetuates inequities in our country
- We have to work backwards from the results we actually want for the young people involved in the juvenile justice system
- The language we use matters
- We need to invest more in rehabilitation and provide opportunities for young people to work in their communities and find positive purpose
- Additional support must be provided to young people who are housing insecure (e.g. invest in long-term support after prison release, increase job training opportunities)
- We cannot reimagine the justice system without meeting people’s basic needs

DOJ

DOL

HUD

HHS



Co-Creating Solutions — Using Arts, Passions, Sports, Service, and Leadership to Build Belonging, Meaning, Healing, and Contribution in Communities

This conversation explored how policymakers might embed arts, sports, and creative opportunities into all systems touching the lives of youth -- from workforce to education, justice, health, and housing. How might this be encouraged, financed, supported, and expanded to all youth?

Kick-Off Speakers

- Kahlil Chatmon**, Kingmakers of Oakland
- Camea Davis**, Urban Word
- Paul Monteiro**, Maryland Department of Service and Civic Innovation
- Marcus Pope**, Youthprise
- Facilitator: Jessica Donner**, Every Hour Counts

Key Discussion Points

- Creating spaces for young people to be of service is an important component of belonging
- Solutions can be found together at the community level when methods shift from blame and towards innovative solutions
- The strength of moving the work forward is collaboration
- Power comes from bridging community-building, system-change, and the arts
- Service allows people to learn by doing

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Co-Creating Solutions – Creating Communities Anchored in Belonging and Identity- Lessons From LGBTQIA, Indigenous Youth, and Youth With Disabilities

Recognizing that systems often fail to reflect the diversity and strength of today’s youth, session participants explored policy lessons that LGBTQIA+ youth, Indigenous youth, and youth with disabilities have employed to create communities and systems anchored in belonging and identify to support all youth.

Kick-Off Speakers

- Veralucia Mendoza Arana**, American Association of People with Disabilities
Mandy Litwin, Los Angeles LGBT Center
Renee Pope, Prince George’s County Department of Social Services, Maryland
Jazmine Wildcat, New Deal for Youth
Facilitator: Arc Telos Saint Amour (Tay), Youth MOVE National

Key Discussion Points

- Systems need to embody disability justice in order to build a future for young people with disabilities
- There needs to be a cultural shift toward meaningful and practical inclusion
- Policymakers need to value and institutionalize diversity. Funding requirements can be an important tool for holding programs accountable for making necessary changes.
- The policies created today must still evolve and shift to the changing identities/needs of young people
- Youth should be engaged and respected in policymaking spaces
- Money is an important motivator for change
- It is important to pay the youth who are serving on boards



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Co-Creating Solutions — Creating Holistic Wellbeing That Ensures Basic Needs Are Met Through Place-Based Initiatives

This session explored citywide wellbeing initiatives for youth that go beyond the usual health and behavioral health systems. Participants examined the social drivers of health that involve nutrition, income, and housing, as well as an environment of community safety and support.

Kick-Off Speakers

- Karen Evans**, New Orleans Children and Youth Planning Board
- Lisette Gil-Sanchez**, Massachusetts Department of Public Health / The Massachusetts Pregnant and Parenting Teens Initiative
- Maddox Guerilla**, Point Source Youth
- Hayin Kimner**, California Community Schools Learning Exchange
- Facilitator: Naomi Cruz Ojeda**, Young Invincibles

Key Discussion Points

- Systems must be aligned to ensure that they are addressing the needs of young people
- Young people must be a part of all community conversations. Cities should focus on building opportunities for youth contribution and leadership in their existing decision-making structures
- Services need to be culturally competent
- There must be intentionality and purpose when designing schools to ensure they are supportive of the actual needs of students
- Young people need to be asked what success looks like and what matters to them
- Policymakers need to identify the good, youth-centered work that is happening and scale it



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Co-Creating Solutions — Using Developmental Goals to Improve Education, Training, and Workforce Pathways

This session explored the potential to build education and workforce systems that are designed for, with, and by young people and intentionally elevate belonging, purpose, and agency-building.

Kick-Off Speakers

Kyle Hartung, Jobs for the Future

Lazaro Lopez, Illinois Community College Board

Chastity Lord, Jeremiah Program

Jawan Phillips, Job Corps

Facilitator: Merita Irby, KP Catalysts

Key Discussion Points

- Create inclusive pathways for young people with no dead ends or wrong doors
- Young people must be given the agency to choose their own pathways
- Increase awareness of registered apprenticeship opportunities
- Reinvent and refine the community college system, K-12, higher education, and workforce systems to better serve young people
- Students need opportunities to explore in a safe environment, “fail forward,” and change their minds

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Co-Creating Solutions — **Building Safe Schools and Safe Communities With Youth Definitions of Safety**

This session explored how to build safe schools and communities in a way that all youth can experience wellbeing, agency, and belonging. Solutions focused on ways that youth define and contribute in their communities. Participants noted that existing approaches to safety often come in a protectionist framework which embed harm and bias into systems.

Kick-Off Speakers

Thanasi Dilos, Civics Unplugged

Daniel Forkkio, Represent Justice

Maheen Kaleem, Grantmakers for Girls of Color

Denia-Marie Wright, Safe UT/
Huntsman Mental Health Institute

Facilitator: Sneha Revanur, Encode Justice

Key Discussion Points

- Our goal should be to reinforce and increase safety, but not surveillance
- There are a new set of dangers that exist online that many school personnel are not trained to address. There are situations in which school staff are not always able to mediate/help
- We must improve access to mental health support by providing actual space for conversations rather than punishment
- Security cameras are a band-aid solution to a crisis
- We need more counseling, not criminalization, in schools

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Co-Creating Solutions – Shifting Research and Narratives to Reflect Young People’s Experience and Capabilities

This session focused on using storytelling in writing, media, and other outlets to push for positive change in youth lives, our communities, and country. How might federal policymakers advance equity in youth research and change government research structures, questions, and processes to more fully depict what’s happening in the lives of youth?

Kick-Off Speakers

- Gael Aitor**, Astro Studios
- Nat Kendall-Taylor**, FrameWorks Institute
- Yalda Uhls**, Center for Scholars and Storytellers, UCLA
- Joanna Williams**, Search Institute
- Facilitator: Mishaela Durán**, Forum for Youth Investment

Key Discussion Points

- Media is an extremely important mechanism for creating the space to shift policy
- Young people want to see a greater variety of relationships represented in media.
- Many young people missed key social milestones during the COVID shutdown years
- Language matters. What we call or label something can do more harm than good.
- Bring youth organizations together to create a list of words to be retired (e.g., words like “delinquent” and “neglected youth”)
- Mindsets can and do change in response to the stories we tell
- Not all stories are being shared; look for the harder stories to tell to get momentum on mindset change



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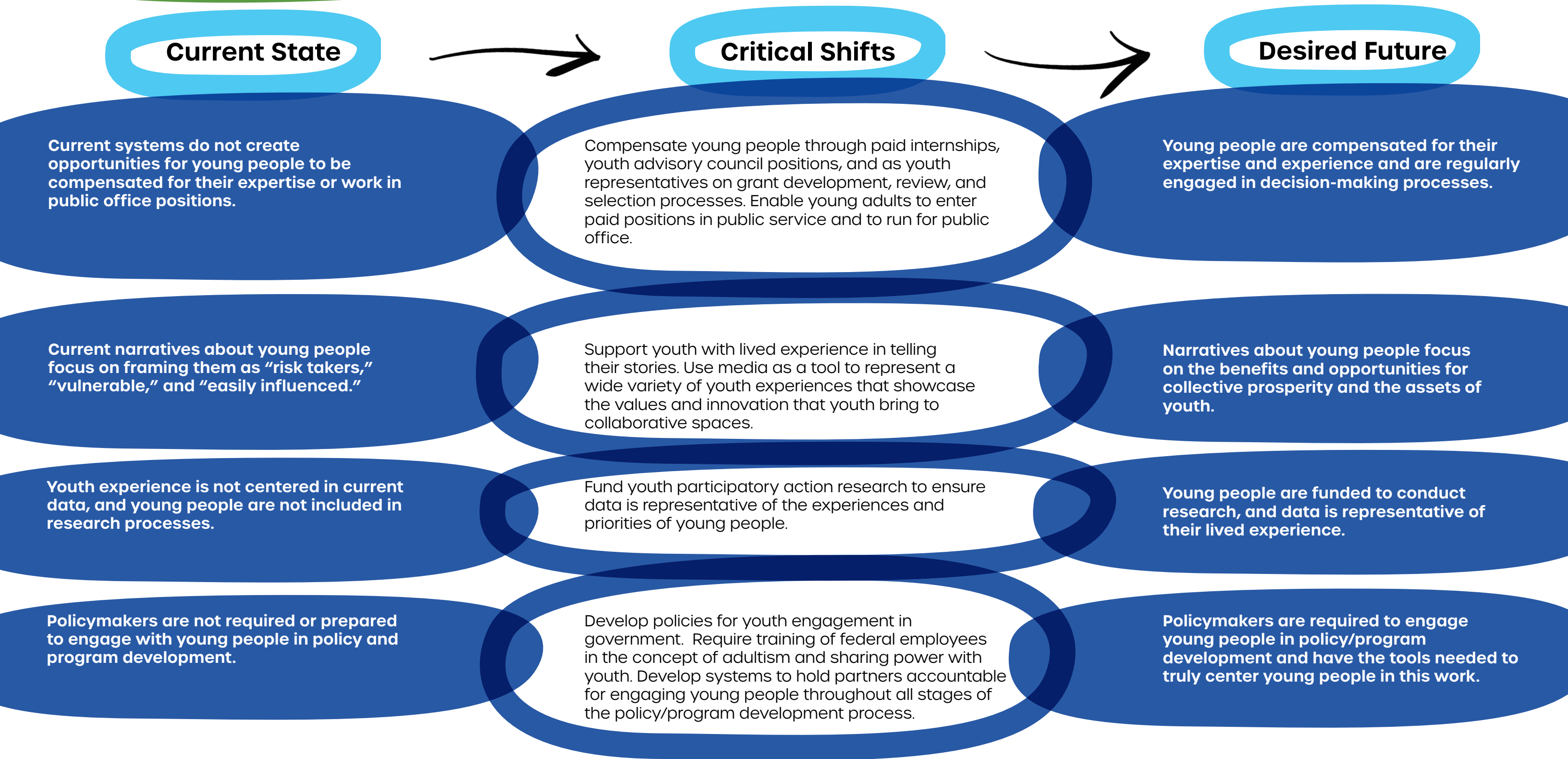
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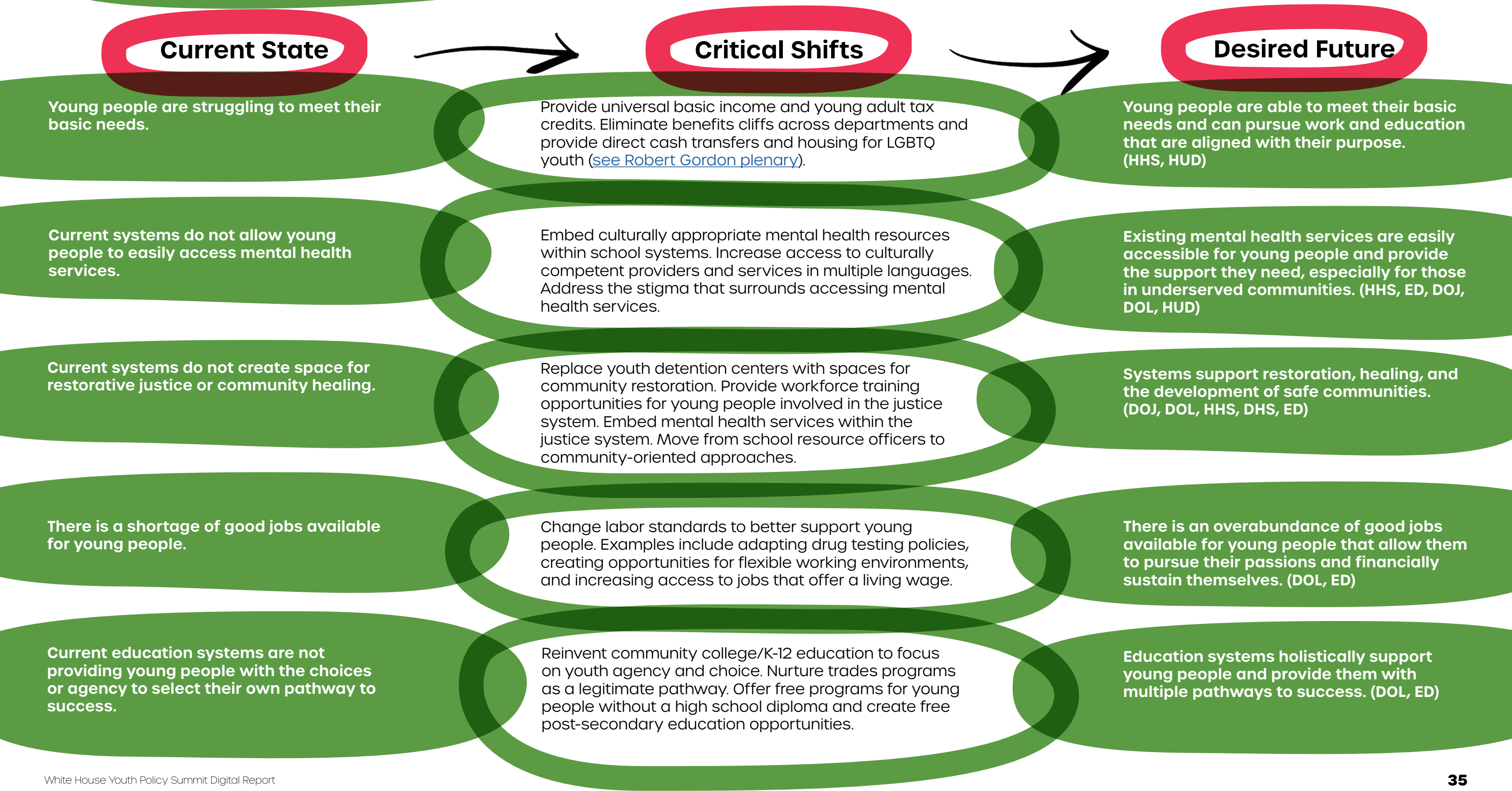
How Policymakers Should Engage Youth

The Summit highlighted key opportunities to transform the ways that policymakers engage with youth. Outlined below are those critical shifts needed to move from our current state to our desired future.



Co-Created Policy and System Shifts

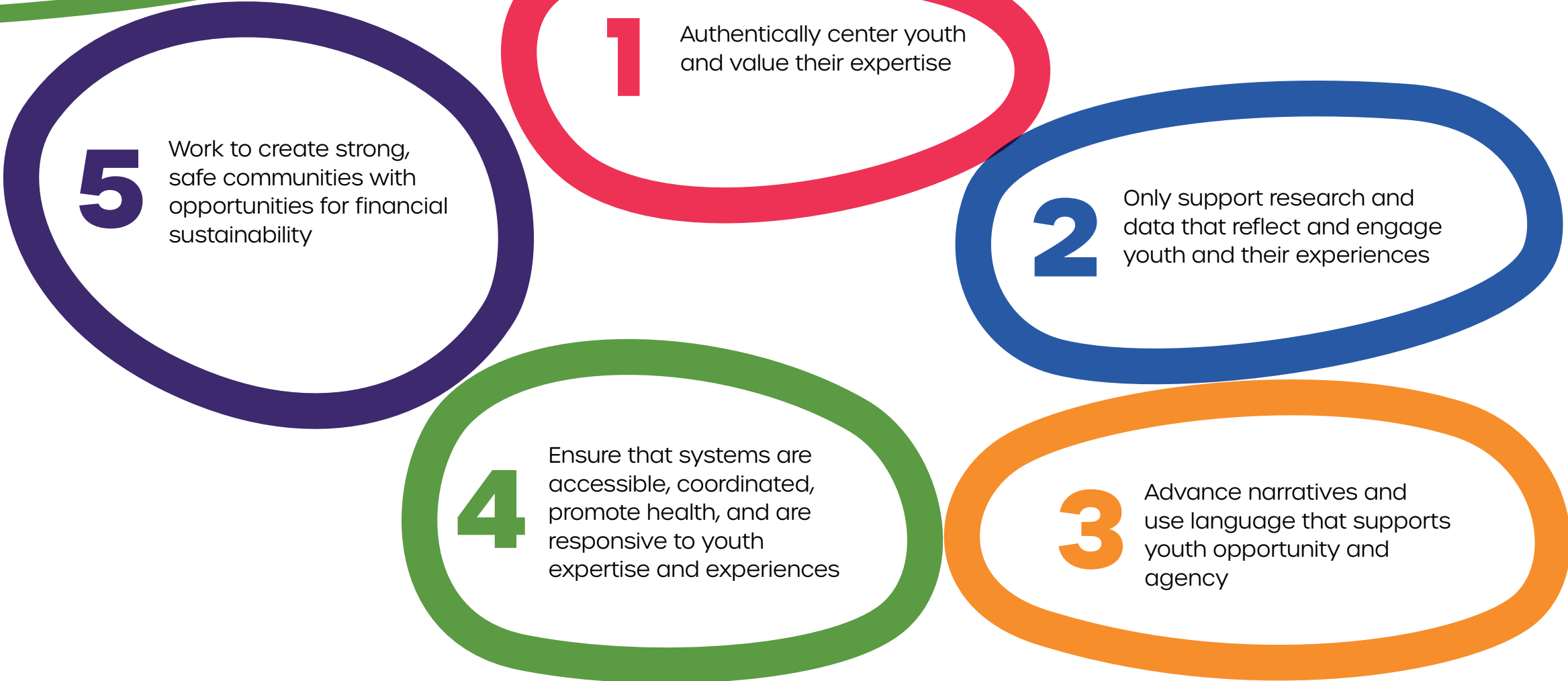
The Summit also identified opportunities to make key changes in policy to better serve and respond to the needs of young people. Outlined below are key points of change that are specific to federal agencies.



Co-Creating Policy and Imagining a Shared Future

The White House Youth Policy Summit provided space and opportunities for agency partners and young people to collaborate, connect, build relationships, and co-create ideas for a shared future. Following a day of breakout sessions, plenary sessions, and fireside chats, participants then worked in small groups and arrived at five key recommendations for policymakers to consider as leverage points for positive change.

Policymakers Should:



Closing Plenary Fireside Chat

The final plenary fireside chat provided a space for reflection on the ways in which the White House Youth Policy Summit created spaces for young people to be heard and their experiences to be centered.

Speakers

- **Iziaih Choquette**, Point Source Youth
- **Robert Gordon**, White House Domestic Policy Council
- **Jazmine Wildcat**, Center for Native American Youth

[Link to Closing Plenary Recording](#)

Key Takeaways

- The White House Youth Policy Summit created a space where young people did not have to experience adultism. The focus was on allowing young people to speak on the issues that were of importance to them.
- There was an openness and engagement from all attendees that led to fruitful discussions and innovative ideas.
- It is important to have more opportunities to engage where young people and federal partners can have collaborative discussions across sectors and create spaces to break down silos.

- Never underestimate the potential and capacity that young people bring to the table. Focus on shifting the narrative to showcase the power and possibility that young people possess.
- To sustain this work we must go beyond verbal commitments and actually create systems that incorporate and center young people.



“None of these are siloed issues. Homelessness is tied to education and economic equality is tied to healthcare inequality. It does nothing for us if we succeed and our community is struggling.”
Iziaih Choquette

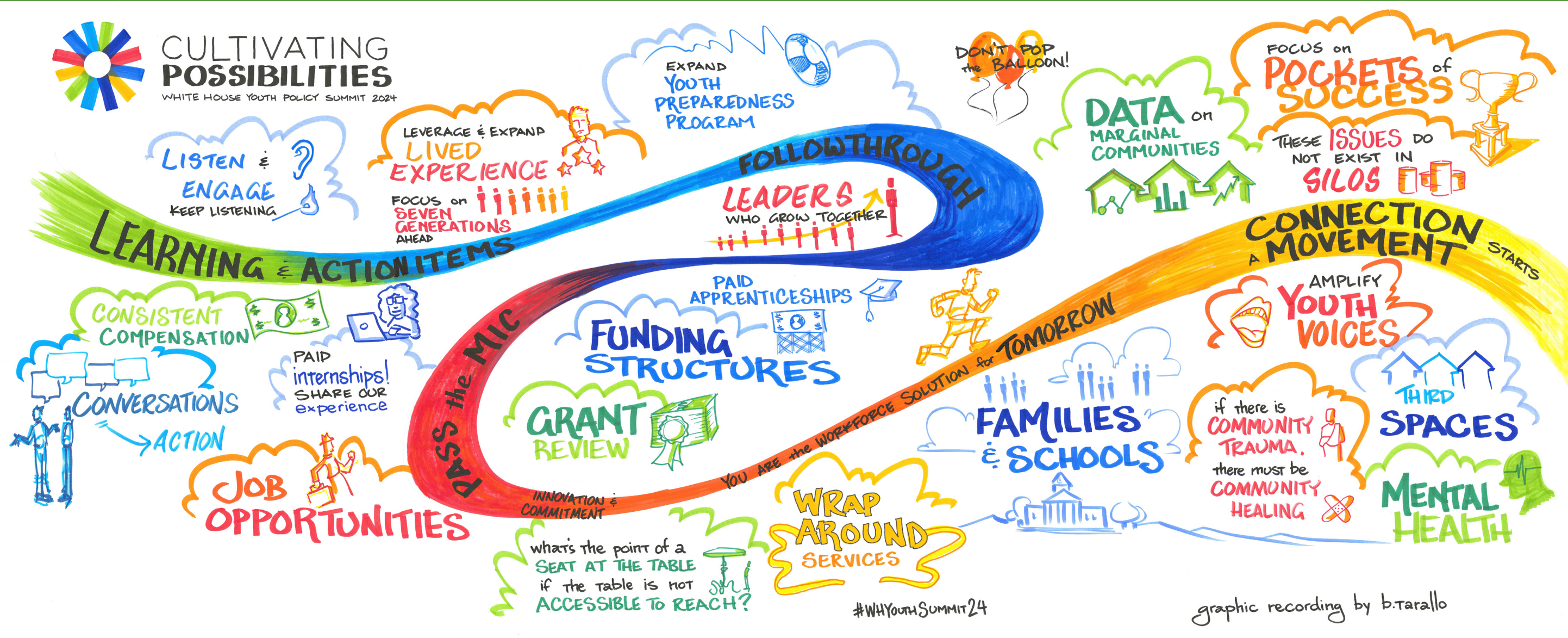


“Even though Native youth are the most impacted (by the mental health crisis) we are the least talked about. We need to Indigenize research.”
Jazmine Wildcat



“This Administration is committed to investing in and breaking down silos so folks are working together. We have particular efforts around promoting respect and treating everyone with dignity and then helping young people who are in different systems get what they’re entitled to and deserve.”
Robert Gordon

Section 6 – Federal Partner Commitments & Next Steps



Next Steps – Federal Partner Commitments to Actions

During the final plenary session of the Summit, representatives from each agency took the stage to reflect on what they had heard and provide initial commitments for the road ahead. The commitments made across all six agencies aim to elevate youth voice, ensure equitable access to opportunities, and involve youth in decision-making processes. By focusing on under-resourced communities, providing internships and job opportunities, and engaging youth in policy and grant reviews, these efforts seek to create more effective programs.

Six months after the Summit, representatives reported back to Summit participants on progress related to those commitments. Every agency had made significant shifts in the way in which they do their work, leading to tangible and positive outcomes for youth and their communities. They also identified legal or procedural roadblocks that were constraining change in other areas. Across the board, representatives were tenacious in continuing to push for change and working across agencies to address common roadblocks.



U.S. Department of Education

Commitments made during the White House Youth Policy Summit

- Shape policy decisions and grant programs that we fund to support youth and family
- Focus on data that is centered around under-resourced communities, focusing on individual identity and their communities
- Amplify exemplars
- Convene Summit participants virtually for local and federal updates

And After 6 Months...

- For the first time, we opened up the Promise Neighborhoods (PN) grant program to youth peer reviewers!
- PN grantees are explicitly encouraged to engage young people in the planning and execution of their two year grants.
- The Secretary wanted more two-way conversations on issues of interest to young people so each program office is now meeting with youth regularly to discuss policy and programs.
- We hosted a youth engagement training for all agency staff in September 2024!
- We hired a youth engagement coordinator for the Office of the Secretary to work across agencies as well with external organizations.
- We convened the Summit participants after six months!

U.S. Department of Labor

Commitments made during the White House Youth Policy Summit

- Consider changing the terminology from Youth (ages 16-24) to Youth and Young Adults or Young People
- Hire Young People in local, state, and Federal government so they can not only share ideas, but lead the change
- Lift up the voices of youth and young adults
- Provide wrap around support services
- Raise awareness about the Workforce Recruitment Program

And After 6 Months...

- We've invested in several new youth focused grants and ensured that supportive services are included in all of our grants and contracts.
- Worked with 57 Youth and Young Adult Apprentice Trailblazers (ages 16-24) to launch the first Nationwide Youth Apprenticeship Week May 5-11, 2024 which resulted in 127 apprenticeship proclamations and 423 youth apprenticeship events in all 50 states with over 680,000 attendees.
- We connected Summit youth with disabilities with the Cape Youth Project which puts youth advocates into a policymaking space.
- Based on youth feedback, we are not only engaging youth in advising on our programs, we are hiring them. 45 students have been hired into registered apprenticeships in Washington DC government jobs.
- We recently launched a Federal Youth Apprenticeship program where we plan to hire three young people with plans to expand across the Federal Government.
- We listened and heard that those aged 18-24 do not like to be referred to as "youth." We now in the Office of Apprenticeships use the term "young adult" when referring to this age group.
- We are kicking off the ten year Anniversary of National Apprenticeship Week on Monday, November 18, 2024.

U.S. Department of Justice

Commitments made during the White House Youth Policy Summit

- Engage youth consultants who advise on programming
- Work with youth to peer review grants
- Provide youth justice fellowships

And After 6 Months...

- The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), an office within DOJ's Office of Justice Programs, is working with a group of young people with lived expertise as consultants to help develop policies and practices to better partner with young people and their families.
- OJJDP is recruiting and training young adults to serve as peer reviewers for its grant proposals.
- For each notice of funding opportunity, OJJDP asked applicants how they will involve youth and families.
- OJJDP selected three Second Chance Fellows with lived experience to work with and inform one of OJJDP's training and technical assistance providers.
- We engaged two Youth Summit Participants in roundtable events and panel discussions to inform OJJDP's work.
- OJJDP collaborated with DOE to discuss school justice partnerships as a way to reduce the number of students referred to courts, and are also working to incorporate and engage youth in follow-up activities.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Commitments made during the White House Youth Policy Summit

- Listen and engage young people with lived experience as partners and subject matter experts
- Commit to turning the conversations that were had into action (e.g. peer supports, grant reviews, internships)

And After 6 Months...

- The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration (SAMHSA) has added youth members to their National Advisory Council and intend to add young people to all of their National Advisory Councils.
- We know we need better data. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently released a youth risk behavior surveillance survey that collects information directly from middle and high school students on a variety of health outcomes.
- We are working with youth and their families to incorporate their expertise into materials and trainings, such as the development of materials for a back-to-school campaign and on youth mental health.
- We are going to where youth are to meet with them and learn about their priorities, including through Youth Advisory Councils.
- We created opportunities to interact directly with youth from the Summit through office hours, informal mentorship, and discussions of potential projects.
- We are offering paid internships and fellowships as part of building the pipeline of workforce opportunities.
- The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) created a dedicated behavioral health webpage that includes audience-specific resources about mental health and substance use informed by young people.
- We developed an information memorandum highlighting strategies to engage young people through co-design and hiring. We made it clear that federal grant funds can be used to compensate youth lived experience and expertise.
- We published materials to inform federal staff about strategies to involve people with lived experience in grant reviews.

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

Commitments made during the White House Youth Policy Summit

- Job opportunities, internships, and paying youth
- Creating a funding structure in the federal office

And After 6 Months...

- We conducted seven listening sessions around the country on LGBTQIA+ youth homelessness to better inform our programs, grants, and technical assistance to ensure services are affirming. HUD published some of its early findings in an Edge Post and is working on a longer research article which will hopefully influence programs at HUD.
- Our Special Needs Assistance Programs (SNAPS) team visited a youth homeless provider grantee in Los Angeles who was at the Youth Summit.
- We opened a funding opportunity for a Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program.



“Young people with lived experience are integral in the prevention and ending of youth homelessness. Employing youth to improve housing systems is key to that goal.”

Milo Edwards

U.S. Department of Homeland Security

Commitments made during the White House Youth Policy Summit

- Expanding the use of the Youth Preparedness Council
- Ensuring youth are involved in the grants review process
- Ensuring paid internship opportunities to support youth interest in federal opportunities

And After 6 Months...

- DHS is developing Memorandums of Agreements with youth serving workforce development organizations, allowing us to provide paid high school internships across the country.
- DHS is focusing on expanding the Youth Preparedness Council; ensuring youth perspectives are involved in policy decisions; and building new career pipelines to include internships and other paid opportunities. In the meantime, DHS has hired a record number of summer interns to staff the advisory committee meetings.



Next Steps

1 Federal partners committed to a check-in video call after six months to report on progress.

2 Federal partners committed to hiring a young person to coordinate on-going work across agencies.

3 FAST created a \$400,000 participatory fund that supported 17 youth-led initiatives in partnership with federal agencies.

4 The Center for the Developing Adolescent released an online policymakers guide to using developmental science to inform policy: [Link to STEPS for Youth Science to Enhance Policy Success](#)

5 Youth leaders committed to staying connected, holding government accountable, and making sure this was not a one-off meeting.

Thank You

Organizations Represented

Active Minds

Advocates for Youth

AHSHAY

Allies in Healthier Systems for Health and Abundance in Youth (AHSHAY)

American Association of People with Disabilities

AmeriCorps

Arizona State University

Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions

Astro Studios

California Community Schools Learning Exchange

Center for Native American Youth

Center for Parent and Teen Communication

Center for Scholars and Storytellers, UCLA

Center for the Developing Adolescent, UCLA

ChildFocus

Ci3, The University of Chicago

Civics Unplugged

CLASP

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning

Community Schools Learning Exchange

Cornell University

CR Strategies

DayOneNotDayTwo

Encode Justice

Every Hour Counts

Forum for Youth Investment

Forward Change

FrameWorks Institute

Franklin County Board of Commissioners, Ohio

Future Coach

Georgia Youth Justice Coalition

Grantmakers for Girls of Color

Grip Tape

Harvard Graduate School of Business

Huntsman Mental Health Institute

Illinois Community College Board

Institute for Educational Leadership

Jeremiah Program

Job Corps

Jobs for the Future

Justice and Joy National Collaborative

Kinai ‘Eha

Kingmakers of Oakland

Knowledge to Power Catalysts

KP Catalysts

Learning Policy Institute

Los Angeles LGBT Center

Los Angeles Youth Development Department

Lt. Governor of the State of Colorado

Maryland Department of Service and Civic Innovation

Massachusetts Department of Public Health

Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

National Center of Learning Disabilities / Young Adult Leadership Council

National Governors Association

National Institute of Mental Health

National Institutes of Health

National Youth Employment Coalition

New Deal for Youth

New Orleans Children and Youth Planning Board

Oregon Department of Human Services, Child Welfare

Philadelphia District Attorney’s Office - Diversion Policy & Juvenile Justice Programs

Point Source Youth

Powerfullyisa

Prince George’s County Department of Social Services, Maryland

Represent Justice

Rise

Safe UT

School-Based Health Alliance

Search Institute

Seattle Foundation

State of Colorado

The AAKOMA Project

The Lighthouse | Black Girl Projects

The Massachusetts Pregnant and Parenting Teens Initiative

The National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine

The Othering and Belonging Institute, UC Berkeley

The Trevor Project

Think of Us

University of Wyoming

University of Colorado Boulder

Urban Institute

Urban Word

YMCA

Young Invincibles

Youthprise

Youth First Justice Collaborative

Youth MOVE National

Youth Speaks, Inc.

YR Media

Federal Agencies

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)

U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS)

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)

U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ)

U.S. Department of Labor (DOL)

U.S. Department of Education (ED)

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

US Attorney’s Office, Western District of North Carolina

US Department of Agriculture (USDA)

White House (WH)

White House Domestic Policy Council

White House Hispanic Initiative

White House Office of Gun Violence Prevention

**Funders for Adolescent
Science Translation (FAST)**

Annie E. Casey Foundation
Bezos Family Foundation
Chan Zuckerberg Initiative
Conrad N. Hilton Foundation
Ford Foundation
Hemera Foundation
Hopelab
Pivotal Ventures
Raikes Foundation
Seattle Foundation
Spring Point Partners
Stuart Foundation

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