



THE FUTURE IS YOUNG
LEARNING SERIES

**PARTNERING, MOBILIZING,
CONNECTING:**
GOYN's Approach to Youth Engagement
August 2022



INTRODUCING GOYN'S "THE FUTURE IS YOUNG" LEARNING SERIES

The [Global Opportunity Youth Network \(GOYN\)](#) is a multi-stakeholder initiative committed to catalyzing place-based systems shifts in communities—cities and rural districts—around the world through the creation of sustainable economic opportunities for “Opportunity Youth,” aged 15-29 who are out of school, unemployed or underemployed. Created in 2018, GOYN’s current network is comprised of nine communities in India, Africa and Latin America, which together represent over three million such young people. Over the next decade, GOYN aims to directly produce positive outcomes for at least 350,000 youth globally and improve lives for millions more, build community-based Collaboratives that can coordinate work to improve the youth employment ecosystem, and catalyze systemic shifts to accelerate youth participation, opportunity, and equity, ultimately contributing to more peaceful, vibrant communities.

GOYN’s *The Future is Young* Learning Series seeks to identify and present scalable solutions for youth economic opportunity that can inspire others to act. This second installment makes the case for investing in young people and presents the cornerstone of GOYN’s approach: the creation of Collaborative Infrastructure for scaled impact and systemic change.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

GOYN's approach to youth engagement is centered around youth agency. GOYN works to increase access to dignified, productive and sustainable employment and entrepreneurship pathways for "Opportunity Youth" (OY) – youth aged 15-29 who are out of school, unemployed or underemployed. Supporting a young person's well-being and helping them to develop a sense of belonging and purpose through meaningful engagement and action is a critical part of this work to enable them to build the necessary agency to desire and work towards personal success. Meaningful youth engagement also opens up a world of possibilities for adults and adult-led institutions by breathing new life into repeated conversations and inspiring new possibilities by shifting the focus from asking "why?" to asking "why not?".

The approach highlighted in this Learning Brief builds upon decades of work by other youth organizations. Thirty years ago, the Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework¹ revolutionized how youth-serving organizations viewed the young people they engaged with by appreciating their lived-experience as assets, creating caring and nurturing environments, promoting youth agency and

¹ In the 1990s, Karen Pittman of the Forum for Youth Investment presented the 5 C's of Positive Youth Development: Confidence (a sense of self-worth and mastery; having a sense of self-efficacy and belief in one's capacity to succeed); Character (taking responsibility; a sense of independence and individuality; connection to principles and values); Connection (a sense of safety, structure, and belonging; positive bonds with people and social institutions); Competence (the ability to act effectively in school, in social situations, and at work); and Contribution (active participation and leadership in a variety of settings; making a difference). In 2007, Richard Lerner proposed a 6th C - Caring (a sense of sympathy and empathy for others; commitment to social justice).

ownership of their lives, and creating a sense of hope for young people while tapping into their aspirations and talent. GOYN's work builds on the principles of the PYD framework in two ways: first, by emphasizing the need for a genuine *partnership* with young people, and second, by focusing on engaging OY (as opposed to all youth), who are often deemed too hard to reach or seen as less valuable contributors, and therefore left behind in youth engagement activities.

In each global community, GOYN partners follow the same four **Core Practices** when engaging Opportunity Youth:

- 1. Valuing and amplifying the voices of Opportunity Youth through meaningful youth engagement.**
An asset-based lens invites young people to share their voice in a way that lifts their talents, lived experiences and aspirations for the future. This approach respects four core principles: lift and amplify young people's narrative without exploiting it, respect and value young people's time, remove barriers to participation and finally be an adult ally and partner.
- 2. Engaging Opportunity Youth as partners in the co-creation and design of solutions to youth unemployment.**
This methodology is centered around the establishment of a structured Youth Advisory Group (YAG), which works closely with the GOYN Anchor Partner² and other stakeholders in the community. As partners, OY are viewed as experts in their lived experiences and engaged throughout all phases of GOYN's work not simply the beginning or end.
- 3. Supporting and mobilizing Opportunity Youth as leaders in their communities.**
Reaching, engaging, and supporting young people to formulate and implement interventions that address local barriers to youth economic opportunities is central to GOYN's approach. As an example, through the GOYN Youth Innovation Fund, we provide financial and capacity building support for OY to design and implement local projects focused on issues related to environmental sustainability, promoting diverse and inclusive communities, and the effects of youth unemployment.
- 4. Connecting Opportunity Youth to a global platform to share and inspire others.**
One of the unique features of GOYN is its ability to bring OY from different communities, countries and continents together into a global peer-to-peer network. Through GOYN, OY have started a unique dialogue with other young people experiencing the impacts of systemic inequities (such as those related to gender, race, ethnicity or social class, among others). GOYN actively supports this global dialogue by creating spaces for OY to connect and exchange ideas across GOYN communities.

Through these four Core Practices of youth engagement, GOYN opens up the world to a new and hopeful reality where there is a mindset shift around OY and a willingness to learn from them as they express their needs, challenges and aspirations. The innovative thinking and creativity of the global cadre of OY leaders that emerged from GOYN's work have inspired the network to think differently about what opportunities

² An Anchor Partner is a local institution, with deep and long-term ties to the local community, that takes on the coordination and facilitation role in the Collaborative, bringing stakeholders together, building a common vision and driving joint activities.

should look like and about what topics, and which stakeholders, need to be part of the global conversation around youth unemployment.

The Youth Partnership Checklist below provides a snapshot of GOYN's approach to working with youth to devise solutions that holistically tackle the problems they face.

THE GLOBAL OPPORTUNITY YOUTH NETWORK YOUTH PARTNERSHIP CHECKLIST

- ☐ Use an asset-based lens to lift and amplify young people's voices
- ☐ Compensate young people appropriately for their time and contributions
- ☐ Remove barriers to young people's participation
- ☐ Train adults to act as allies to young people
- ☐ Design outreach efforts that can reach a diversity of youth, including those belonging to marginalized groups
- ☐ Let youth decide how they want to organize themselves
- ☐ Provide youth with learning and capacity-strengthening opportunities
- ☐ Treat youth as experts on their own lives, peer groups and communities
- ☐ Make meaningful investments in young people's ideas
- ☐ Invite youth to participate, shape and lead conversations in their communities and beyond