

April 2025



Territory-based Approaches to Connecting Opportunity Youth with Jobs and Education

Introduction

The [Global Opportunity Youth Network](#) (GOYN) is a multi-stakeholder partnership 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,” (OY) aged 15-29 who are out of school, unemployed or underemployed. Created in 2018, GOYN’s current network comprises 16 communities in India, Africa and Latin America, with continued plans for replication of the model to other communities and regions.

GOYN São Paulo was born in 2020 in partnership with United Way Brazil, a leading local non-profit focused on youth and early childhood development. There are an estimated 765,000 Opportunity Youth in São Paulo, making this one of the largest GOYN communities. Many of these young people are concentrated in the “territories”, peripheral areas east and south of the city that are underserved by public services and have low levels of formal economic activity.

Community Profile

Country: Brazil

Community: São Paulo

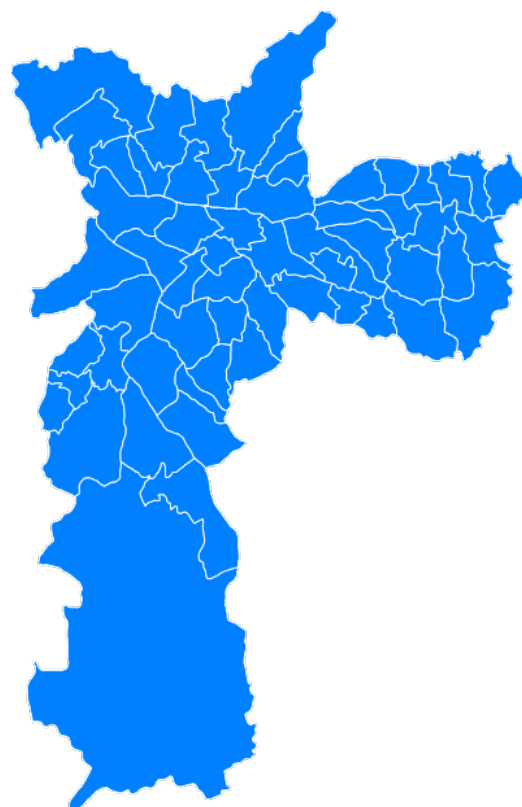
Opportunity Youth population: 765,000

Main drivers of youth economic opportunities: Lack of connection between the territories where Opportunity Youth are located and the market. 70% of Opportunity Youth live on the edges of the city, in territories isolated from economic opportunities.

GOYN Anchor Partner: United Way Brazil (UWB)

Opportunity Youth reached by GOYN since 2020: 61,000+

The GOYN initiative had a great reception by the territorial communities, and from January 2023 started operating under the local brand of *Juventudes Potentes*. Working closely with GOYN Global Partner Accenture, GOYN São Paulo mapped the entire youth employment ecosystem in the city and conducted in-depth research to identify the systemic issues preventing young people from accessing economic and educational opportunities. In this research, structural barriers such as lack of access to information and education, misalignment between skills demand and educational offer, lack of connections between employer and Opportunity Youth were highlighted. In parallel, several grassroots organizations that respond to these issues were identified in the territorial ecosystem. However, these organizations have their own implementation limitations, mostly related to difficulties accessing funding and capacity-building to expand their impact. Following the principles of GOYN as a multi-sector collaboration programme aiming to generate systems-level change, GOYN São Paulo developed a territorial strategy to strengthen grassroots organizations working with local vulnerable youth. This case study details the strategy designed and implemented by GOYN São Paulo.



The context

São Paulo is the largest urban economy and city in Latin America, with approximately 22.81 million people living in the São Paulo metropolitan area. Of this population, more than 2.5 million are young people between the age of 15 and 29, of whom 812,916 are in a situation of social vulnerability, understood as not formally employed and/or not having completed higher education. To date, GOYN São Paulo has identified at least 765,525 Opportunity Youth in the city—young individuals with untapped potential who are currently not engaged in

formal education or employment but hold significant promise to contribute to their communities.

Some of the biggest challenges for economic inclusion of youth are related to structural racism, unemployment crisis, limited access to school and low digital literacy. These barriers trace back to structural inequalities and the overlapping intersectionalities related to gender, race, low income or economic poverty and geographic location.

The challenge

Young people from vulnerable communities who attend public school often lack access to opportunities. The latest data from SEADE¹ reveals that in 2022, 18 out of every 100 young people in São Paulo were unemployed. This marks the highest youth unemployment rate across age groups, reflecting a longstanding trend where the youth unemployment rate is consistently double that of the broader economically active population. The public school system in São Paulo does not adequately prepare

students for entering the workforce, as it does not provide sufficient technical and skills-development training to meet the market job demands. As a result, young people are often stigmatized as inexperienced or uninterested in formal jobs, education or political participation, which calls for an urgent change in perception of young people's potential by the private sector and government organizations.

¹ Sistema Estadual de Análise de Dados (seade.gov.br): [Unemployment is higher among women, youth and mixed-ethnic Brazilians](#)

Grassroot organizations have been and will continue to be crucial in the process of empowering youth by bridging the gap between them and education and economic opportunities. There are about 149 local organizations working in São Paulo's economic inclusion ecosystem, implementing at least 134 income-generating initiatives for vulnerable groups. Of these, 89% are performed by non-profit organizations, research, educational or social institutes. These local organizations have probably the broadest coverage in the most vulnerable areas of the city, which makes them key actors in the Opportunity Youth collaborative mapping of São Paulo's territory.

Nonetheless, there are systemic issues evidenced in the study "[Structural Injustices among youth in the city of São Paulo](#)" conducted by GOYN São Paulo and that experts continue raising in diverse media² that hinder grassroot organizations' impact and work. Although the education sector continues to be the sector with the largest investment in Brazil ([GIFE Census 2022- 2023](#)), youth programs are not prioritized or targeted. This has resulted in three main challenges for São Paulo's territorial organizations working on this matter:

1. **Little investment:** there is a recurring funding problem in initiatives targeted to youth, which are often centralized and bureaucratized, resulting in donations barely reaching grassroots organizations. The limited territorial knowledge of donors commonly leads to a doing-more-with-less dynamic, leaving little resources to cover operational costs and, consequently, triggering organizational instability, high talent turnover and lack of continuity in implementation.
2. **Ecosystem disarticulation:** when GOYN São Paulo began operations in 2020, there was no networking or collaboration between territorial organizations. Isolated and disarticulated actions could be identified, resulting in small micro-localized impacts. Partnerships were not valued or encouraged, as there were not articulating entities.
3. **Barriers accessing capacity-building spaces:** the existing training and learning spaces demand many hours and are often aimed at the corporate environment and not the social sector, demotivating employees from grassroots organizations that have few hours to spend on training.

GOYN São Paulo found an opportunity to address these ongoing challenges by strengthening the capacity and reach of those territorial organizations that work with vulnerable youth in the city. By targeting the South and East areas of the city, as informed by the ecosystem mapping at the onset of GOYN São Paulo (2020), the team developed a **holistic and tailor-made approach** looking to generate a long-term systemic change in the collaborative ecosystem through two territorial strategies: 1) Fundo Territórios Transformadores (FTT) and 2) Microfundo (YIF).



Follow the story of **Thalita** by scanning the **QR code**.

² Such as [Economato](#), [Monitor Mercantil](#), [Editais Filantropia](#) and [ABCR](#)

The approach

Strategy 1: Fundo Territórios Transformadores (Transforming Territories Fund)

Based on this analysis and looking to sow the seed of a systemic change in the city ecosystem, GOYN São Paulo developed the strategy **Fundo Territórios Transformadores (FTT)**. The FTT seeks to generate capacity-building in grassroots organizations that offer training and skills-leveling programs for Opportunity Youth oriented to the “professional careers of the future” and, thus, expand their impact. This approach is aimed at social and public organizations in the peripheral South and East areas of São Paulo, such as local NGOs, public schools, national apprenticeship and social assistance institutions (Sistema S), and “qualificadoras” that support apprenticeship orientation processes.

Goals

With this overarching objective and working framework, since 2022 the FTT aims to meet the following goals per year:

- Support 15-20 organizations;
- Offer training or skills-leveling program to 5.000-7.000 young people;
- Connect 2.000- 3.000 young people with employment opportunities.

How does FTT amplify territorial work?

The FTT includes three components for organizations to expand their work accompanying young people in their educational and income-generating pathways:

1. **Financial allowance:** to improve training programs, reach more young people and ensure that they successfully complete their studies. In addition, the financial support is intended to promote the monitoring of youth pathways within the framework of the GOYN: connected, improved and transformed³.
2. **Knowledge sharing through research and/or thematic workshops with experts:** monthly meetings with beneficiary organizations are held to support technical capacity. In these collaborative encounters, the GOYN team identifies relevant technical areas where these institutions need strengthening. On a case-by-case basis, the team organizes training, case studies, workshops with experts or directly provides data and research tools. Some of the most common thematic areas

3 The GOYN Monitoring & Evaluation framework designed by Accenture defines *connected youth* as those participating in GOYN activities (reached); *improved* as those who have been equipped with mindsets, skills and experiences and, therefore, report a substantive life improvement; *transformed* youth as those enduring change in circumstances, either by returning to school or accessing income-generating opportunities.



“The partnership between Despertar and Juventudes Potentes over the last two years has been very important. In addition to providing effective collaboration with various organizations that work with young people, resulting in valuable exchanges of knowledge, we have received resources that have been directed towards training our young people, making possible to visit the company Meta/Facebook. In addition, we developed training of our employees through the Artéria consultancy, with a focus on strengthening socio-emotional skills. Finally, Juventudes Potentes systematized our youth data, providing a deeper understanding of Despertar’s participants. We thank you and we want to continue working with you for many more years!”

Cecília Zanotti,
Executive Director, Despertar

for capacity-building are: youth data, how to find and analyze geographic data, AI as a tool for social change and education, how to connect with collaborative institutions (articulation) and companies (effective placement).

3. **Networking support to promote new partnerships:** monthly virtual networking spaces among FTT participating organizations, opening spaces to share experiences and connect. Additionally, an in-person annual event is held, where topics of interest raised by the territorial organizations are addressed, either as training spaces with experts or open discussions among attendees. The objective of this pillar is to promote joint work and articulation among the local ecosystem of youth-oriented income-generating initiatives. Finally, these efforts are reinforced by a collaborative network on whatsapp, where territorial NGOs share activities, events, opportunities and action calls.

Throughout this process the GOYN São Paulo team closely monitors the number of young people trained and their progress after the training, that is, access to income generation opportunities.

Strategy 2: *Microfundo* (Youth Innovation Fund)

The Youth Innovation Fund (YIF), locally referred to as *Microfundo*, is a youth-led initiative designed to empower young people to drive social change within their communities. The fund is managed and implemented through the territorial organizations that help young people roll out their projects and achieve the expected results. Rooted in grassroots organization and the local context, its primary goal is to equip youth groups with the resources and opportunities to deliver high-impact projects, fostering social entrepreneurship and creating ripple effects that benefit the broader community. The learning objectives of the YIF focus on fostering:

- **Design Thinking:** Youth innovators learn to apply design thinking, which helps them break down complex problems, generate creative solutions, and build user-centered innovations. This iterative approach encourages empathy and innovation.
- **Leadership and Project Management:** Participants are trained to lead their own initiatives, manage projects, and make strategic decisions to ensure the sustainability and success of their efforts. These skills include planning, execution, and evaluation of projects.
- **Problem-Solving:** Youth are guided through processes to identify community issues, analyze challenges, and explore viable solutions. They develop the capacity to prototype and refine their ideas based on feedback and community needs.
- **Collaboration and Community Engagement:** The program fosters collaboration between youth innovators, mentors, and community organizations, enabling participants to leverage local resources and networks to maximize the impact of their projects.
- **Civic Engagement and Advocacy:** Through their projects, youth learn to address barriers to social equity and economic opportunity, advocating for systemic changes that promote sustainability and inclusive development.

In addition to GOYN global funding, the most recent edition of *Microfundo* received funding from a government public call, which was distributed to partner community based organizations and collectives. The projects were selected by an internal voting process led by youth. This approach ensures that the initiative remains authentically youth-driven and community-centered. Its contract-based implementation has also

provided a higher degree of accountability and tracking, by outsourcing the identification and management of the YIF program. As an indirect result, this restructured allocation of resources addresses barriers related to bureaucracy and an oversight of local initiatives.

Each participating youth group receives a stipend or subsidy to help kickstart their projects. This financial support is used for purchasing materials, organizing activities, or implementing campaigns within their communities. As these projects progress, the youth involved become part of the GOYN Collaborative network, which connects them with resources and further opportunities for growth. Some participants also take part in the Youth Advisory Group (YAG), where they continue to influence decision-making processes within the initiative.

Projects span diverse areas, from education and environmental sustainability to skills development and cultural initiatives. For instance, a school garden project promotes environmental awareness through hands-on education, while an eco-fashion initiative recycles textile waste into affordable, sustainable clothing. These initiatives align with GOYN's broader mission to foster equity, youth leadership, and systemic change. By equipping youth with the necessary tools and support, *Microfundo* contributes to more equitable opportunities for Opportunity Youth, driving lasting community impact.



“My name is Leiriane, I'm 19 years old! I live in the South Zone of São Paulo. I am currently part of the GOYN Youth Advisory Group. This certainly made and still makes a total difference in my life! Through the program I was able to improve my communication, despite more challenges due to being shy, and today I work in a wonderful company, a job that I also got through the program. It has been very rewarding to be part of it all.”

Leiriane, Young Ambassador and GOYN São Paulo Youth Advisory Group member

The impact

GOYN São Paulo's territorial approach has progressively matured since 2022, year after year the team has been fine-tuning and improving the implementation following annual results and review, and integrating feedback from participating organizations and youth. The accumulated impact in numbers at the end of 2024 looks as follows:

- More than 61,400 OY connected, over 33,600 improved (or trained) and more than 13,650 OY transformed by GOYN São Paulo.
- More than 45 organizations supported by the FTT

- About R\$ 1,245,500.00 invested in grassroots organizations.
- 49 youth collectives supported by the microfund
- About R\$ 300,000.00 invested directly in youth initiatives

In addition, as a result of these territorial-based strategies, GOYN São Paulo has increased its collaborative network and, thus, its geographical scope of work. The increase in partnerships and connections between local organizations has fostered and strengthened the articulation of the income-generation ecosystem.

Looking forward

The territorial strategies have demonstrated successful results broadening the impact of local organizations and reaching more and more Opportunity youth in the vulnerable areas of São Paulo. This has also progressively impacted the economic inclusion ecosystem, strengthening territorial nonprofit organizations capacity and, therefore, their stability and reach. These approaches have also proven to close gaps between youth in peripheral areas of the city and economic opportunities, both formal employment and entrepreneurship or self-employment pathways. One question remains open: how to grow initiatives such as FTT and *Microfundo* so that a system long-term change takes place?

The first concern is attracting more funding to such initiatives. However, from a systemic-change and sustainability perspective, this cannot be solely a third sector responsibility or depend only on specific social investments, even though this is something that needs to be further developed. Better skilled youth to respond to market demands means also better qualified talent available for companies. For the private sector, investing

in these types of projects would also mean investing in training specific profiles that meet talent market requirements, while opening pathways to just and diverse working teams in various economic sectors. The latter is especially relevant in such a diverse and large city as São Paulo.

Narrative change efforts remain a parallel priority to territorial approaches as we strive to bring private sector investments closer to vulnerable youth and promote public policies that prioritize this population. Integrating young people with socio-economic opportunities also means responding to talent needs and impacting household economies in the territory. Ultimately, achieving a long-term system shift requires developing holistic inclusion pathways that connect all players within the localized ecosystem, integrating the private, social, and public sectors. Strengthening collaborative networks in smaller sectional areas of the city could yield better results for testing and improving the territorial strategy, helping to attract additional funding for expansion into other regions.



Interested in learning more? Use this **QR code** to hear the inspiring entrepreneurship story of **Carolina Vicente**, ex-participant of the YIF with her project "As Minas Empreendem" in São Paulo.