Investing In A Future That Works:
Preparing Detroit's Young Talent for the Dynamic World of Work

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Metro Detroit's economy faces a labor shortage in coming years, as adult workers retire in large numbers and employers in new economy industries grow and expand. The region can reduce this challenge by ensuring that it has an efficient and effective workforce preparation system, which funnels employment ready youth to the region's talent-hungry employers.

There are many barriers to youth workforce preparation that similar communities across the U.S. are working to address. This region's peers are engaged in a myriad of practices with potential for replication in Detroit, including development of coordinated systems, effective strategies for employer engagement, and other emerging approaches.

This report examines demand for youth-focused workforce preparation, the barriers that inhibit its success, and best practices from around the nation. It concludes with a series of recommendations for improving Detroit's workforce preparation system. Among the findings of this analysis are that Detroit's system can be most rapidly enhanced with investment in:

- Better coordination of the workforce preparation system
- Wider use of youth assessment tools
- More robust evaluation and feedback mechanisms
- Capacity building
- Expanded use of evidence-based practices

The findings in this report are the result of a community collaborative project facilitated by City Connect Detroit, in close partnership with the Corporation for a Skilled Workforce and the University of Michigan. Its findings are particularly relevant for the people and organizations of metro Detroit, but are likely to resonate in markets across the nation, particularly those experiencing challenges similar to those confronting metro Detroit.

II. SUPPLY AND DEMAND OF YOUNG TALENT

Southeast Michigan's labor market faces substantial gaps in alignment: the region's youth population is shrinking and the adult population is retiring in large numbers. Preparing and retaining the region's future workforce can help mitigate the economic impact of future labor shortages and create new opportunities for growth and prosperity.

This need comes at a time when young Detroiters face barriers to employment. Access to quality education, income levels, and racial disparities all factor into low employment levels. Failure to remove barriers to employment could harm the region's long-term economic growth, if the next generation of workers are unprepared to enter the workforce. Without action, the region faces a situation where its future workforce (supply) does not meet the needs and expectations of its employers (demand).

Detroit's Ten Largest Employers (2009)

Rank	Organization	Employees
1	Detroit Public Schools	13,750
2	City of Detroit	13,187
3	Detroit Medical Center	10,499
4	Henry Ford Health System	8,502
5	U.S. Government	6,335
6	Blue Cross Blue Shield	6,000
7	Wayne State University	5,019
8	State of Michigan	4,910
9	General Motors	4,652
10	Chrysler Corporation	4,517

Source: Detroit Economic Growth Corporation

Detroit Youth Employment in Context

Today's youth are increasingly absent the labor market and the skill-building experiences that participation in it provides young workers. In June 2010, only 28.6 percent of the nation's teens were employed, representing a post World War II low. In Detroit, this steady decline has resulted in dire employment conditions for the city's 121,782 youth ages 16-24 (American Community Survey, 2009). While unemployment rates for youth are typically well-above those of the general population, rates in Detroit are more than double the national average. The following chart provides a comparison between youth employment in Detroit and the nation.

Detroit Youth Employment Data

	Total	In labor force (%)		Employed (5%)		Unemployed (%)	
	Detroit	Detroit	U.S.	Detroit	U.S.	Detroit	U.S.
Population over 16 years	689,282	55	65	43	60	22	7
Population 16-19 years	61,858	36	44	17	34	53	23
Population 20-24 years	59,924	67	75	45	65	33	12

Source: ACS 2005-2009 5 year estimates

Detroit's African American population is disproportionately affected by the city's high unemployment. The largest racial group in Detroit, African Americans comprise 77 percent of the city's population, but 83 percent of its unemployed. The same dynamic holds for Detroit's youth population; black youth are disproportionately unemployed compared to other demographic groups in the city. This challenge is not limited to Detroit, however; nationally, only 15 of 100 African American teens holds a job. The employment rate is even worse for black teens and young adults from low income households, with *only 9 percent employment*. More than half of all black teens reside in families with less than $40,000 in household income (Sum, 2010).

Low levels of educational attainment are also hindering youth entrance to and preparation for the workforce. High school dropouts on average experience an employment rate 22 percentage points below those with a high-school diploma, 44 points below those with 1-3 years of postsecondary schooling, and 41 points below those with a four-year college degree (Sum, 2009). Yet, just over one-fourth of Detroit students who entered the ninth grade in 2002 graduated four years later. Consequently, Detroit's future workforce lags behind in national benchmarks of educational attainment and the corresponding propensity to innovate, compete, and secure and retain meaningful employment. The following chart provides a comparison of educational attainment rates in Detroit and the nation.

Detroit Youth Educational Attainment Data

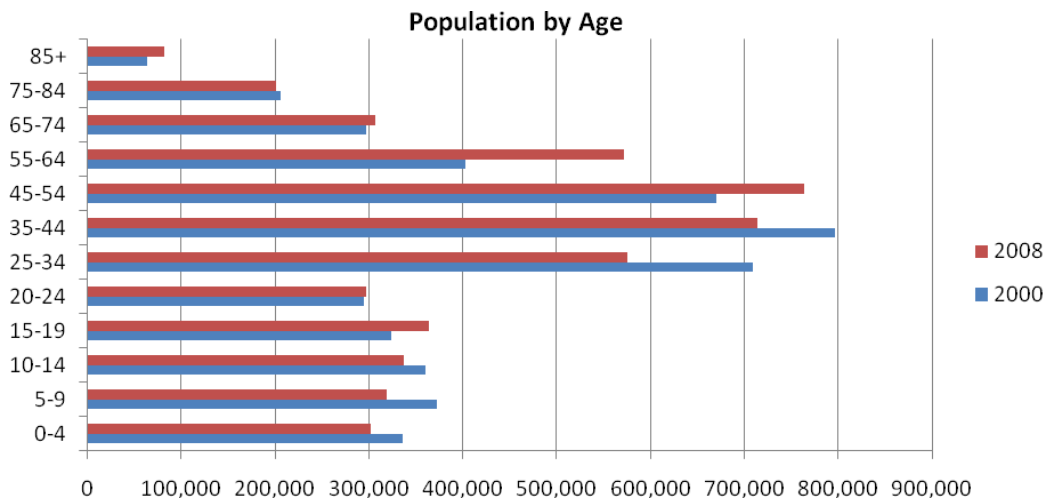|	Total		Male		Female	
	Detroit	U.S.	Detroit	U.S.	Detroit	U.S.
Population 18-24	87,729	29.8 m	43,064	15.4 m	44,665	14.5 m
Less than H.S. grad	29.10%	17.2%	34.10%	19.8%	24.40%	14.4%
High school grad/equiv	34.7%	32.0%	35.30%	34.4%	34.00%	29.4%
Some college or assoc	32.4%	41.9%	27.5%	38.6%	37.10%	45.3%
Bachelor's +	3.8%	9.0%	3.10%	7.2%	4.40%	10.9%

Source: ACS 2005-2009 5 year estimates

A lack of work exposure and educational attainment for youth are problematic for many reasons. Research suggests that early work experience leads to higher incidences of future employment, higher earning potential, and a lower likelihood of various risk behaviors and incarceration. In addition, work exposure can help youth make transitions from school to work; help youth understand the positive connection between education level and job opportunities; and help them acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in the challenging job market. Similar positive outcomes are attributed to youth with higher educational attainment. Furthermore, research shows that young people who see a connection between their education and jobs are more likely to attend school regularly, hold positive attitudes about school, and stay enrolled, benefitting their future job prospects (Jekielek, et. al, 2002).

Generation Gap: Youth and the New Economy

With an aging population and the need to transition to a knowledge-based economy, many are concerned about the long term economic consequences of an unprepared future workforce. The retirement of 79 million baby boomers in the next several decades may present future labor shortages (Kliesen, 2007). The first members of the baby boom generation began retiring in 2008, and over the next two decades, an average of 10,000 individuals will retire *per day*. In addition, population growth is expected to slow significantly during the next 20 years. Currently, there are approximately five workers ages 20 to 64 for every retired person; by 2030, when the last of the baby boomers retire, there may be only two workers per retiree (Pew, 2011).

This situation presents challenges for Southeast Michigan. From 2000 to 2008, the region experienced significant demographic changes. The number of people in their prime working years (ages 25-54) declined by 123,000 and the number of children, teens, and young adults (ages 0-19) decreased by 70,000. When combined, these numbers represent a five percent decline. In contrast, the number of individuals above age 65 grew by 22,000, or four percent and the 55-64 age cohort grew by 170,000, a 42 percent increase. If this trend continues, by 2030, the region will face significant labor shortages (SEMCOG, 2010). The following chart from the U.S. Census Bureau illustrates how southeast Michigan's population has aged in the past decade.

Population by Age

Age	2008	2000

Legend: 2008, 2000

(Horizontal axis: 0, 100,000, 200,000, 300,000, 400,000, 500,000, 600,000, 700,000, 800,000, 900,000)

Age groups: 85+, 75-84, 65-74, 55-64, 45-54, 35-44, 25-34, 20-24, 15-19, 10-14, 5-9, 0-4

Demand: Detroit's Employer Base

The aging population concerns many businesses, labor associations, policymakers, and others as they consider the implications of future talent and experience shortages.(Herman, et. al, 2002) New economy industries such as healthcare, advanced manufacturing, technology, engineering, finance, energy, and education could have trouble attracting the talent necessary to fill positions (Eisenburg, 2002). The following table provides data on projected employment gains in the region's fastest growing employment clusters. An important strategy for closing the gap between labor supply and project demand is to capitalize on the region's existing assets by providing young people work exposure and training supports.

Southeast Michigan's Fastest Growing Employment Clusters, 2010-2015

Name	Jobs 2010	Jobs 2015	Net Change	% Change
Business & Financial Services	321,321	354,750	33,429	10
Biomedical/Biotechnical	239,428	262,978	23,550	10
Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, & Visitor Industries	76,303	83,217	6,914	9
Energy (Fossil and Renewable)	126,997	132,030	5,033	4
Information Technology & Communications	100,356	105,080	4,724	5
Defense & Security	84,069	88,635	4,566	5
Education and Knowledge Creation	40,213	44,632	4,419	11
Transportation & Logistics	63,627	67,915	4,288	7
Printing & Publishing	41,572	44,349	2,777	7

Source: Corporation for a Skilled Workforce, 2011

The shift to new-economy industries and current competitive pressures is increasing demand in two particular areas of the labor supply: workers skilled in enabling technology and process improvement. There is growing demand in fields like cloud computing, mobile software application, and energy management. According to Dice Holdings, Inc., a job-listing website, technology job postings in the Detroit area doubled in the last year, the fastest expansion in the country. Human resources executives in technology fields cite a "talent war," where they are having difficulties attracting workers, even recruiting outside the community to meet their workforce needs (Bloomberg, 2011). This demand comes when many of the region's major automotive and other manufacturing firms have learned to do more with less. A strong push towards quality and efficiency has resulted in even greater reliance on technology-driven production and process development. For example, much of the growth in the emerging cluster "business and financial services" (see table) comes from growth in testing laboratories (process improvement), HR consulting (staffing efficiency), and computer programming and systems design (systems integration, automation, and efficiency enhancements).

These changes in demand should influence which professions youth consider preparing for and around which awareness and preparation strategies focus. This includes a range of basic office-readiness skills to some practical, hands-on experience in certain science, technology, math,

and other competencies. The former are particularly important. A recent online survey of Southeast Michigan businesses confirms that employers who are hiring already are looking in particular for workers who possess the following characteristics, in order of priority (Corporation for a Skilled Workforce, 2010):

- Technical skills (very specific to certain types of work)
- Specific experience or industry knowledge
- Work ethic
- Customer service
- Analytical capacity
- Creativity
- Communications and writing (especially proposals)
- Multi-tasking
- Project management

While employers highly value technical skills, and jobs in technology and skill-based fields (including health care, financial services, etc.) are emerging rapidly, there is a strong sense that workers can be trained in these areas, as long as they are fundamentally job-ready.

The recent recession resulted in the loss of thousands of low-skill jobs in manufacturing, natural resources, and several other industries that are unlikely to be recovered. The jobs that replace them (such as the technology and skill-intensive occupations identified above) require that workers be

> *"In addition to preparing kids for a skill set, we also need to address culture (timeliness, adhering to policy and rules, etc.). Many of our young people are not exposed to this culture."*
>
> **Source**: *Detroit employer, March 2011 listening session*

prepared much differently than they are today. Some experts predict that by 2018, 63 percent of job openings will require at least some college education, up from 56 percent in 1992. Thus, it will be necessary to incorporate work exposure with educational attainment, with a view towards post-secondary attainment.

Bridging The Gap

Many innovative efforts are underway in Detroit to connect youth to work exposure. *The Grow Detroit's Young Talent Campaign* has placed youth at many of Detroit's leading businesses

including DTE, Bank of America, and Compuware. These placements provide youth with high quality work exposure along with support from program staff.

However, the *Grow Detroit's Young Talent Program* is able to serve only a small number of youth. While the program is growing, it employed just 600 young people in 2010. Though other programs also offer work-related experiences to Detroit youth, far too few are getting the kind of exposure that helps prepare them for many of the region's emerging careers or for additional education that can propel them even further.
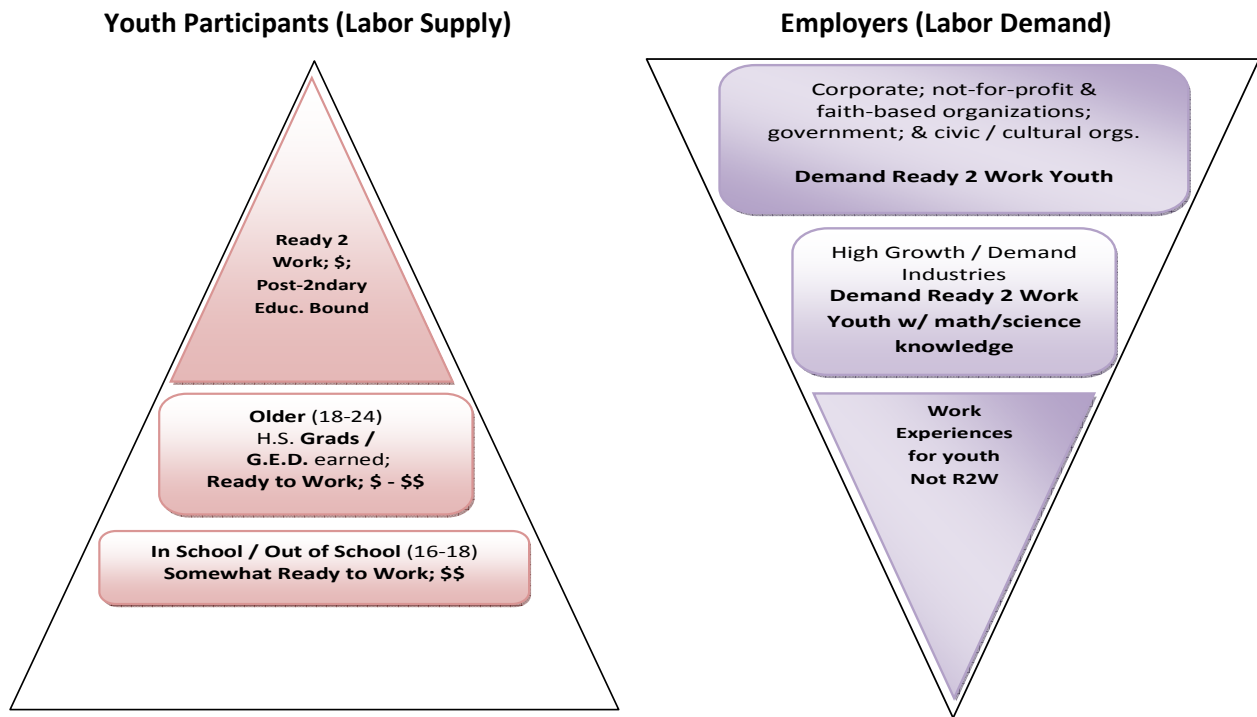
Moreover, despite the trends in Southeast Michigan's emerging economy, it is important to understand that most youth are not ready to engage immediately in a high-technology, high-skill setting. In some cases, it takes additional resources to help youth become ready for work. Thus, when formulating strategies for incorporating youth into the workplace, it is necessary to meet young people where they are, providing different types of support to youth with different levels of work readiness and experience.

The supply of youth varies dramatically, ranging in age and educational attainment level. Younger students tend to be less prepared for work experiences (and hence more resource intensive to prepare), with those in-school likely more ready than those out of school. High school graduates or those with equivalent credentials are more ready, but still require a range of support and career exposure to ensure their long-run success. Those who have work experience or may be college bound, have even fewer requirements, but still benefit from work-relevant classroom experiences, mentoring, coaching, career-planning, job pipelines, and other forms of guidance.

Employers understand the diversity of youth and, as such, have diverse expectations. General employers—whether for-profit or non-profit, faith-based, government, or others—want youth to have a sense of the workplace, including "soft skills" (productivity, ethics, teamwork, self-direction, how to dress, arriving on time, etc.). High growth, high-demand industries demand soft skills, but may be looking for youth to have knowledge and familiarity with their industry—at the very least the basic math and science skills that might be applied on the job. For youth

who fit into neither category (those who are not work ready) intervention must occur at the most basic level, including preparedness workshops/classes and job exposure through shadowing and career awareness so they can explore their interests and begin accumulating knowledge and insight that will help them understand the relevance of more advanced work-place preparedness efforts, including actual experience.

The figure below illustrates the current situation in Detroit. The two triangles represent Detroit's youth and employer base. In the youth triangle, the largest cohort represents individuals who are not "employable." These are youth who do not possess basic work readiness skills. As one travels up the triangle, the smallest cohort represents youth who are

Youth Participants (Labor Supply)　　　　**Employers (Labor Demand)**

Ready 2
Work; $;
Post-2ndary
Educ. Bound

Older (18-24)
H.S. **Grads /**
G.E.D. earned;
Ready to Work; $ - $$

In School / Out of School (16-18)
Somewhat Ready to Work; $$

Corporate; not-for-profit &
faith-based organizations;
government; & civic / cultural orgs.

Demand Ready 2 Work Youth

High Growth / Demand
Industries
**Demand Ready 2 Work
Youth w/ math/science
knowledge**

**Work
Experiences
for youth
Not R2W**

"ready to work." In other words, they possess the skills that employers demand. In contrast, the largest section of the employer triangle represents employers' high demand for youth who are ready to work, and the smallest section represents youth who are not ready to work. There is clearly a gap in alignment. Thus, in order to maximize youth employment efforts, a two-pronged strategy is necessary that will (1) prepare youth for work and (2) provide them with work exposure.

While many Detroit and Southeast Michigan programs and initiatives may adhere to this two-pronged strategy, the region's future workforce needs are vast, both in terms of numbers and adequate preparation. The community requires a more comprehensive, collaborative approach, which emphasizes the leveraging of various resources (human, information, financial, etc.). This could allow existing efforts to take place on a broader scale, resulting in larger numbers of youth exposed to the workplace and ready to meet employer needs. To be successful, such efforts must adequately understand barriers to youth employment and address them head on.

III. BARRIERS TO YOUTH EMPLOYMENT IN DETROIT

While the recent economic crisis has exacerbated the youth employment problem, it is not the only reason for it. There are many reasons for the decline, including growing competition among groups that traditionally have not sought the same employment opportunities, rising wage rates, developmental and socio-economic factors, and basic systemic challenges that undermine youth preparation for emerging industry occupations. It is important to keep these factors in mind when considering any solution to help better connect youth employment-related experiences.

Economic, Social, and Developmental Factors

There have been a series of economic challenges, including the technology "bust" that began early in the decade, followed by the economic meltdown that began in 2007. In general, a weaker economy has resulted in sluggish employment rates across the board, but youth employment has been further compromised by the fact that employers now have access to pools of experienced, more mature adult jobseekers that are willing to work in jobs traditionally held by youth. Several factors have contributed to this trend.

For example, between 2007-2009, the federal minimum wage rate climbed 40 percent (Sum, 2010). University of California-Irvine's David Neumark has found that a 10 percent increase in the minimum wage correlates to a nearly 4 percent decrease in employment for black and

Hispanic 16- to 24-year-olds. Presumably, the higher required wage rate makes young workers too expensive to hire and increases the attractiveness of alternative solutions like automation, self-service, placing more demands on existing staff, and hiring older workers now enticed by the better wage rate. Changing demographics also affect youth employment. For example, immigrant jobseekers are believed to be replacing youth in several occupations common among immigrants, like service and agriculture. Because youth tend to

> *"We have to teach youth right, but they have to live in a world that isn't right. They have to make transparent transitions from the hood to the corporate world. They have to know how to do the right things in both places. We have to teach them how to transition. Otherwise there is no balance."*
>
> ***Source***: *Detroit employer, March 2011 listening session*

be less attached to the workplace they are easily dislocated by more experienced adult workers, regardless of their countries of origin (Federal Reserve, 2010).

Socio-economic factors are other relevant impediments to youth employment. In 2007, nearly half of all Detroit children under age 18 lived below the federal poverty line. These young people face substantial instability, exposure to violence, and poor nourishment, all of which hinder youth development and are barriers to employment. Moreover, youth tend to reside with caregivers who lack education or sustaining jobs themselves. In fact, nearly 60 percent of Detroit children live in families where no parent has full-time, year-round employment, and 29 percent of Detroit heads of household are high school dropouts. This dynamic means many youth grow up without role models who possess strong education and work backgrounds and who understand how to offer the guidance and support needed to propel youth down strong academic and professional development pathways. Socio-economic challenges also correlate with:

- High teen birth rates (36 per 1,000 in Detroit), reducing the propensity for graduation and further reinforcing the cycle of poverty.

- High incarceration rates (23 percent jailing rate for young black men who drop out of high school, a rate 47 times greater than similar-aged peers with a four-year degree (Sum, 2009)), making social and workplace reintegration extremely difficult.

Developmental factors may also undermine youth employment, regardless of socio-economic or other status. Scientists point out that human brains develop well into adulthood, meaning that youths' emotional and cognitive abilities are not fully developed. As a result, their decision-making is often compromised, including when choices related to education and careers (Bartok, 2011). Further, youth are in the process of active exploration and formation of their identity. This identity exploration may affect how youth transition into mainstream work cultures (DeCoursey, et. al, 2007).

Strategic Alignment and Policy

While it is difficult for communities to shift economic and social dynamics, there are several areas that are under their control, including many institutional, policy, and other barriers that get in the way of success. This is true when it comes to implementing programs or organizing comprehensive, system-wide efforts that support youth employment.

A major challenge in successfully addressing youth employment is an agreed-upon definition of what it means for a young person to be "work ready." In some circles, work readiness refers to proficiency in a set of basic skills, like math, reading, and information finding. Others interpret it as understanding what it means to work in an office setting, including expectations around productivity and ethics, problem resolution, team work, self-sufficiency, and cultural acclimation. To others "work readiness" refers to proficiency in a set of technical skills, including computer navigation, the operation of certain machinery and equipment, or performing a very specific set of functions.

Some believe that work-readiness does not correlate to any single one of the above areas but to all of them together. They believe that work readiness is a journey along the continuum of basic skills, work-related preparation, and technical skills development, and that each should be addressed in the course of career readiness. Moreover, they believe that part of career readiness should entail a belief in young people that there is no end point to their success: they should be prepared for work in a way that enhances their capacity to continually learn, grow, and advance on the job.

In conversations with service providers, business leaders, and other Detroit youth employment stakeholders, there appears little agreement regarding what "work readiness" or "career readiness" means for young people. Other communities, like Philadelphia, Boston, New York, and Baltimore, have brought stakeholders together and now share a vision that has shaped policy decisions, strategic action, and investment around this and other related issues.

Many Detroit stakeholders point out that there is lack of agreement or shared understanding around effective youth employment strategies, methods, and expectations. National experts

try to explain this phenomenon, pointing to insufficient evaluation and analysis of effective programs and performance measurement, which make it hard for stakeholders to readily identify and agree on a preferred course of action (DeCoursey, Holzer, Sum, 2011).

Detroit stakeholders also identify communication and alignment challenges that prevent effective sharing around exemplary practices. Among the challenges they cite are:

- **Informal hiring practices and loosely structured career pathways** that make it hard for youth to connect to and grow/advance as the result of employment experiences (or for trainers and other service providers to prepare youth for these opportunities).   It is important for the youth-employment community to better understand employer needs and to work with employers to develop solutions that better serve the employers themselves, but also create opportunities for youth.

- **A siloed, compartmentalized approach to school and workforce**, which translates into stakeholders not knowing how to interact with or leverage one another effectively. Exacerbating this dynamic are the facts that school outcomes are not tied to employment and that federal workforce, education, and other funding streams are administered from the federal, state, and local levels in uncoordinated ways. As a result, there are many missed opportunities to prepare youth for the world of work during school hours. For example, school counseling staff and educators often have little practical career knowledge (specific jobs, hiring requirements, and promotions) or understand how best to impart this information to youth. Or, classroom experiences do not relate to the world of work experiences, so youth fail to see the relevance and become disenchanted with their school experience.

A 2006 study found that "dropping out of high school is not a sudden act, but a gradual process of disengagement" (Bridgeland, et. al, 2006). The primary contributor of this disengagement, according to the authors, is the lack of a clear link between high school and personal goals. A Southern Regional Education Board report adds, "As occupation-specific programs have dwindled in high schools, graduation rates have subsequently declined." The report points out

that high school graduation rates declined from 75 percent in 1982 to 68 percent in 2002, along with the availability of these programs.

Even in cases where there is a strong focus on job readiness or linkages between school and work, there is a tendency to ignore younger and disadvantaged youth who may need more assistance to succeed. This is particularly the case when it comes to on-the-job expectations and behaviors—basic work preparedness—that might be taken for granted in some populations (where professional adult role models may be fairly accessible), but may be woefully underdeveloped in places where adult unemployment, poverty, and socio-economic barriers are more pervasive.

When it comes to the offender population—which is comprised disproportionately of young, black males—and those with disabilities, there are additional challenges. These systems tend to have fewer connections to mainstream programs and funds. As a result, exemplary practices that may exist within these systems are not shared, limiting the capacity for innovation. Programmatic isolation also may translate into youth isolation, making it harder to integrate young people into mainstream employment and educational settings.

Funding

Public funding for youth employment is woefully inadequate. The public dollars from federal sources, while useful, do not provide enough work exposure for disadvantaged youth. Under the federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA), youth services receives roughly $1 billion in funding per year (just $828 million in 2011), as well as dedicated expenditures for Job Corps ($1.7 billion) and Youth Build ($80 million). Heinrich and Holzer estimate that it would require $5 billion annually to provide even moderate services to half of the nation's roughly one million dropouts each year. This comes at a time when national policymakers have opted to cut youth-related workforce development funds even further, with an eye for more cuts in the future..

Meanwhile, the education system's school-to-work policy failed to get reauthorization in 2001 when academic testing became a primary focus. At the federal level, Perkins funding for career and technical education (CTE) remained fairly flat from 2002-2011, though, adjusting for

inflation, the program has seen a steady decline, despite growing national need. At the state and local levels, funding cuts have become the norm, particularly since the economic crisis of 2007 (Career Tech, 2010). Funding cuts in Detroit are anticipated to reduce public youth employment participants in the city from 7,000 in 2009 to less than 800 in 2011.

While public funds continue to dwindle, the way funds are administered in systemic silos is also challenging to their efficacy. Several communities have sought innovative ways to address this problem. The most successful communities have found ways to work beyond the compartmentalized federal administration of these funds to ensure alignment of resources in their communities.

Employer and Youth Engagement Factors

When faced with the challenges of starting, growing, and maintaining a successful business, many employers are hard-pressed to take on the challenges of hiring youth, especially those suffering from the most severe socio-economic and developmental challenges. In conversations with Detroit-area employers, there is a sense that there is a lack of infrastructure to help employers engage successfully with youth employment efforts. This includes programs and initiatives that help youth prepare for a job setting, including preparedness that addresses basic, technical, and employability skills, with a strong emphasis on the latter (as well as screening to help determine where on this spectrum youth fall and how best to intervene).

The infrastructure gap also includes programs and initiatives to help employers prepare themselves for working with youth, whether through direct employment, mentoring, career awareness, or other opportunities. National experts considering this lack of infrastructure point to a disconnection with providers, who do not expect (and hence, have not prepared) employers to engage youth at a personal level and do not provide enough information or support to employers to help them meet the needs of youth. This may translate into to employer training, toolkits, and even support staff/mentors/intermediaries who can help address a challenge, resolve a conflict, or help a young person connect to needed support and resources.

There also is a sense that employer expectations are not necessarily realistic or healthy. For example, when there is a question of racial, culture, or even generational difference, employers tend to expect youth to adapt. However, youth are rarely equipped with the tools or capacity for doing so. When directed with care and in a positive way, these tensions in the youth and employer relationship can translate into a positive rather than negative experience.

Another concern that many employers hold is that youth are not interested in working. This is a misconception. In fact, according to some studies, more than 80 percent of youth who are unemployed would work if they thought they could get a job now (Heinrich and Holzer, 2009). This group is referred to as the "hidden unemployed," because they are not accounted for in official unemployment statistics.

Detroit youth service providers and other national researchers do see a challenge, however, in the need to ensure that youth are linked to career opportunities that are engaging or interesting. Without interest, youth tend to disconnect. There is need to assess youth work-readiness, understand what interests them, and try to align young people with employers who represent the closest match.

To avoid a sense of job entitlement among youth, the same group of Detroit service providers recommends not just assigning youth to jobs at random, but to ensure they go through as real an employment experience as possible, right down to an actual job interview with real potential employers.

There are a number of reasons for communities to organize and seek ways to overcome some of the identified challenges to youth employment. From an economic and community prosperity lens, there is the need to ensure that youth of today are prepared for the jobs of tomorrow. A rapidly aging adult population means that many highly qualified workers will be exiting the job system, leaving behind a substantial talent void that will be in need of filling. If Southeast Michigan's high-tech turnaround is to remain on track, as many youth as possible must be ready with credentials (at least a high school diploma with some college preferred and

a four-year degree most desired) and experience to support employer needs. Providing youth with career-related exposure and experiences can help fill the gap between employer demand and youth workforce preparedness.

IV. Best Practices in Youth Employment Supports

Detroit is not alone in facing barriers and grappling with how to effectively engage youth in meaningful opportunities that emphasize work experience and educational attainment. The solutions that communities undertake to address this challenge are just about as diverse as the communities themselves, and so are the outcomes. This section explores some of what promises or has been proven to work across the nation, ranging from broad-based systems approaches to programs that target specific youth populations or needs.

National and local experts emphasize that some initiatives might be more effective for certain youth populations than others, depending on a specific advantage, disadvantage or circumstance facing the individual or group. They argue that approaches to serving youth should address a range of needs and provide a range of options, in as coordinated a manner as possible to maximize resources, knowledge, expertise, and effort.

Systems Based Approach

There are a handful of communities—Philadelphia, Boston, and San Francisco, for example— that are frequently lauded for their excellent youth employment and educational attainment efforts. Other communities are home to excellent programs and initiatives, but efforts remain disconnected and do not add up to a whole beyond the sum of their parts. Still others fall in between.

One cannot determine whether a community has embraced a strong systems-based approach to youth employment simply by looking at youth employment figures. While Detroit unemployment rates are particularly high for youth and the general population, youth unemployment rates in many heralded cities (along with many others not known for their youth employment systems) also fall well below national averages. San Diego and San Francisco are exceptions, but even these well-recognized youth employment systems do only slightly better than the national average. The following table provide youth employment data for several leading national communities, including Detroit.

Youth Employment Rate (%)

	Atlanta	Baltimore	Boston	D.C.	Detroit	L.A.	N.Y.C.	Philadelphia	San Francisco	U.S.
Population over 16 years	9	11	9	9	22	8	8	12	7	7
Population 16-19 years	33	40	25	31	53	28	32	39	22	23
Population 20-24 years	13	19	13	17	33	12	16	22	11	12

Source: American Community Survey, 2009

Still, many argue that a quality youth-employment system can create more and brighter future opportunities for youth. In communities with well-developed systems, there are increasingly strong and innovative programs that leverage exemplary and proven practices believed to yield positive results for young people.

The nation's most promising systems have drawn lines in the sand and made it clear that they are betting on the future, designing their youth employment and educational systems with the long-run in mind. Based on extensive literature review and consultation with local, state, and national experts, key characteristics of the nation's leading youth-employment systems have been identified, including strong leadership, active engagement, and case management-styled supports.

Leadership

Leadership is an essential thread in the nation's most successful systems-based youth employment and educational attainment initiatives. There are various elements of leadership that are important to consider in the design process and that have proven critical in various communities explored in the course of our research. Among these elements are the following:

> *"A comprehensive youth employment delivery system pulls together the resources and funding streams - public, private, and foundation – in a strategic way and draws on the strength of public systems and community providers to create supported pathways that provide youth with the education, skills, and access to good jobs and successful careers."*
>
> *SOURCE: CLASP: Building a Comprehensive Youth Employment System: Examples of Effective Practice February 2010*

Strong connections to the community's policy leadership, particularly the mayor's office. A strong mayor who buys into the importance of a cohesive youth development strategy can prove a strong influencer in many respects. Credible leadership at this level that is attuned to positive outcomes (i.e., not just political outcomes) can help attract meaningful engagement from other respected community and business leaders; support governance and organizational structures that maximize scarce resources; and help set and keep focus on a strong youth-development vision. Strong mayoral support has proven critical to success of efforts in communities like Boston, Philadelphia, and New York (Pines, Holzer, Thakur, 2011) . Not only is it important for efforts to possess strong buy-in from the mayor, another important success factor is having a strong connection to the mayoral cabinet. Communities that have had a direct line to the mayor, with information and strategic dialogue flowing to and from the office, have had more success in achieving pivotal policy changes, strong community awareness, and broad-based buy in and support.

A trusted third-party champion to convene stakeholders, strive toward and hold stakeholders accountable to a common vision, and maximize community-based resources (e.g., leveraging each other, eliminating overlap and redundancy, etc.). CLASP, in its examination of five national communities, found that a trusted third party played an important role in these communities' success (CLASP, 2010). Others have reinforced the call for a local intermediary to act as a neutral convener and facilitator of a systems-based partnership, pointing to the Philadelphia Youth Network, Boston's Private Industry Council, and San Francisco's Taskforce on Youth (Thakur, 2011).

These entities serve as a sounding board for stakeholders and help convey information and intelligence to policy, business, and other leaders. They also serve as advocates on behalf of youth and other stakeholders (and their efforts) and, in many cases, prove important sources of intelligence gathering that helps keep efforts on the leading edge (e.g., youth employment-related data, exemplary practices research, etc.). Further, these third-parties play an important role in keeping partners accountable, both through the establishment and tracking of key benchmarks and metrics and partner recognition and accolades that keep motivation high.

A central administrative agent that works to ensure smooth operations (both in terms of quality and fiscal standing) and collaboration across service providers. It incentivizes and ensures adherence both to policy and governance concerns, as well as the commonly shared stakeholder vision. It also helps ensure multiple points of entry to the system for both youth and employers and helps craft agreements and processes to ensure that needs are being met by the community of stakeholders. Further, it helps monitor, report on, and ensure adherence to required and desired outcomes, both for the system and for youth.

It also is important to consider this agent's role in administering programmatic funds that might come from different sources. Properly aligned, such resources can support a greater common end than might be possible if left in silos. For example, both Philadelphia and Boston support their youth employment and educational attainment efforts through an alignment of public (e.g., education, workforce) and private (corporate, philanthropic) funding. (Thakur, 2011).

Stakeholder Engagement

No vision, however great, can help increase youth employment and educational attainment without strong buy-in, expertise, resources, and effort that come from the right mix of community stakeholders. When it comes to engagement, the most successful efforts have a strong and comprehensive multi-stakeholder partnership that engages all stakeholders serving youth, from workforce development and education to human services and juvenile justice. This partnership aligns to leverage and share resources, but also to provide additional support for the most vulnerable youth.

Researchers Carolyn Heinrich and Harold Holzer call for a comprehensive stakeholder partnership, noting the special role that education should play: "Secondary schools, community colleges, and local employers should be more engaged in local youth 'systems' that integrate educational and employment opportunities for them, with fewer 'silos' separating the relevant youth populations, institutions, and policies."

Mala Thakur from the National Youth Employment Coalition, in a February 2011 interview,

emphasized the need to engage such system players as traditional public schools and also charters. She noted that partners should ensure that educators, not just school administrators, are at the table and placed importance on the presence of post-secondary schools.

Marion Pines from John's Hopkins University, in a similar interview, added mental health and human services experts to the critical list of engaged stakeholders and noted, "Don't forget youth themselves." Meanwhile, Public/Private Ventures, in a 2006 report, explained the important assets that community-based organizations and the faith-based community bring to successful community change efforts: possessing an abundance of resources for at-risk youth in particular, with a strong focus on human services, emotional, social, and other supports. (Public/Private Ventures, 2002).

Strong employer engagement, including employers from leading and emerging industries and representing both large and small firms. Employers should be involved in helping design core initiatives and, ultimately, be sponsors, investors, and customers of these efforts. They also should serve as champions among their peers, recruiting additional business and other leadership participation and support. These roles are mentioned fairly ubiquitously, with special focus paid in Jan DeCoursey and Ada Hill's *Making connections: Engaging employers in preparing Chicago's youth for the workforce (2007)* and in various reports by MDRC, which explores employer ties to Career Academies (MDRC, 2011).

Case Management

A well-designed, youth assessment and case management approach that works closely with and engages youth, identifying their needs and meeting them where they are—in other words, providing support around education, workforce preparedness and basic skill development, and wrap-around support. Several experts (Curnan, Bartok, Shanks, McGhee, 2011), through literature and interviews, emphasize the importance of assessing youth, both through written and personal approaches, to better understand their strengths and challenges and to better target their needs. A March 2011 focus group of Detroit service providers and faith-based leaders underscored the need for this understanding, noting that youth preparedness—and

understanding what it takes, whether basic skill development, workplace preparedness, emotional or psycho-social support, transportation, or other—is one of the most important issues facing successful youth development programs. Having a well-designed process and collection of partners to understand and fill these needs is important to positive youth outcomes.

Leading System Features

In addition to various components that make up a strong youth employment and educational attainment system, there are certain features and practices that distinguish these systems from their counterparts. Examples include the holistic way in which partners address youth and how they integrate efforts tied to education and employment. Features in some of the exemplary systems examined include the following:

Differentiated solutions for specific youth cohorts based on certain characteristics—for example, in school or out of school; aged less than 16, 16-18, and 19-24; race and gender; and even according to risk type (e.g., low-income, unstable housing, low basic skills, ex-offender, substance abuser, teen parent). At the same time, there are youth who are work ready and simply need assistance finding the right fit and support to cultivate their success. Each of these populations has a unique set of challenges and needs, and strong systems find ways to carefully coordinate among stakeholders to ensure that each is properly addressed.

According to research from CLASP, both Hartford, Connecticut and Boston, Massachusetts have "tiered" or cohort approaches to supporting youth.

- *Tier I/Level I* targets the youngest students, ages 14-15, emphasizing learning and development. Job readiness training for this group may include communication, decision-making, team work, conflict resolution, and attitudes/ethics.
- *Tier II/Level Two* adds more real work and job readiness components to the youth employment experience. In Boston, this manifests in skill-development in a particular area, additional professional training, and integrated academic training, with a special focus on reading and math skills.

- *Tier III* in Hartford typically targets high school juniors with some kind of work experience (perhaps participation in Tiers I and/or II). In Boston, level 3 integrates job placement with career counseling and additional skill development. (For youth drop-outs, Boston integrates GED courses and high-school completion curriculum.)
- *Tier IV* in Connecticut targets those ready for partially subsidized or unsubsidized work and learning experiences.

Heinrich and Holzer conclude: "Clearly, different programmatic strategies are promising or even proven for different populations of disadvantaged youth with different circumstances, suggesting that policy efforts should seek to promote a range of approaches for youth, along with ongoing evaluation efforts to improve our understanding of what works, and specifically, which program components, for whom."

High quality work exposure and career awareness components that provide hands-on and applied work-place exposure, while preparing youth with fundamental employability skills, such as workplace productivity, behavior, and ethics. Career awareness around various occupations in leading and emerging sectors also is key. Marion Pines of John's Hopkins University, during a February 2011 interview, strongly emphasized career exploration and experience, particularly for dropouts. Public/Private Ventures, in their community guide around youth employment, underscores the need for a variety of experiences that connect school-based learning with actual work experiences and support for youth as they participate in these programs, but also as they transition through life, whether focused on school, work, or personal development.

Strong links between schools, exemplified by K-12, community colleges and four-year colleges collaborating around curriculum and other experiences—including authentic projects, job shadowing and internships—that excite students about learning, introduce them to the skills and knowledge they will need for emerging fields, and convince them that they will benefit (personally, professionally, financially) from learning to do hard things.

The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) notes that, when school districts and community colleges work in partnership, they can design effective transitions and provide students with greater opportunities to learn about the habits and skills of effective workers. They also play a critical role in helping students acquire the skills necessary to compete in a knowledge-based economy. Examples from SREB that schools and postsecondary institutions can follow to support this preparation include:

- Helping students, by the time they reach middle school, to have a six-year career development plan covering four years of high school and two years beyond.

- Ensuring the development of a P–20 (pre-school through four-year degree attainment) system that requires academic and technical studies are taught in the context of careers and according to college- and career-readiness standards.

- Offering joint grants that encourage community colleges and high schools to collaborate on curriculum and other academic programs that relate to high-demand, high-skill, high-wage career fields.

- Fostering a strong professional development system for teachers and possibly other staff to train them to work with a small group of students and parents through all four years of high school to set postsecondary and career goals and to pursue a program of study to achieve those goals.

Strong links between education and workforce, exemplified by strong support from the business community and active involvement from the workforce system directly in the educational setting. Here, stakeholders work together to help students understand emerging career opportunities and how to pursue them through various educational and work experiences. Workforce and education stakeholders work together to overcome obstacles frequently encountered in schools (e.g., human and financial resource constraints) to support career awareness and otherwise engage students in career-contextual education. Examples of this

collaboration include:

- Education (K-12 and postsecondary), business leaders, and the workforce system coming together to create theme-based learning pathways in high-demand, high-skill, high-wage fields that motivate high school students to master knowledge and skills needed to graduate from high school ready for college and careers.

- Workforce and education systems deliberately connecting with one another. CLASP provides examples of how these ties play out in Boston:
    - Three of the city's one-stop career centers have identified one staff person in each center who is devoted to working with young adults to provide information and support in accessing education and career development opportunities, including secondary and postsecondary options and skills training programs.
    - The Youth Employment Task Force, in partnership with the school system, created a dropout recovery program in which dropout outreach specialists get a list of all the youth in the city who have dropped out, find them, and reconnect them to education or training opportunities.
    - The workforce system funds career counselors at all of the schools.

Emphasis on providing high levels of value to employers, understanding that they are a primary customer of the youth employment system. Employers stand to benefit in many ways from participation in youth job experiences, including relatively low-cost support for their firm and involvement in successfully growing and preparing their own future workforce. Youth efforts that strive to understand and meet employer needs tend to demonstrate stronger employer engagement, which, in turn, attracts youth who see an immediate connection between the programs and their current and future job prospects. Philadelphia Youth Network is well known for its active employer community, and in Boston, firms go so far as to sponsor every high school in the city, offering support for career fairs, mentoring, internships, job shadowing, and more. Following are some steps communities have taken to help employers understand how they benefit from participation in youth employment and educational attainment efforts:

- *Communicate the value proposition effectively*—communities that successfully attract employers have taken careful pains to speak about and design processes and programs in ways that appeal to employers. Some businesses engage simply because they see the value in making a community contribution, while others need a clear demonstration of how their involvement somehow will support their firm's bottom line. Regarding the latter, messages that have resonated with employers identify how their involvement might prepare the *future* workforce, while others focus on more immediate concerns, like relieving staffing pressures during summer-vacation season or when more costly, long-term hiring is not an option.

- *Subsidize the experience*—Timothy Bartik, senior economist for the W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, has written extensively about subsidized work experience programs, for example, the Minnesota Emergency Employment Development (MEED) program. From 1983-1989, about 45,000 people enrolled in the program, which provided a wage subsidy of up to $4 per hour ($10 in 2008 dollars) for employers to hire new workers, many of whom were low-skilled or among the long-term unemployed. More than 20,000 of those workers succeeded in staying on with their employer or finding other permanent, unsubsidized employment. Bartik says that wage-subsidy programs such as MEED provide valuable work experience for participants and contribute to a more-trained workforce. They also provide incentives for businesses to create jobs, and the relative cost of programs like MEED appears to be lower than other job creation programs. (MEED cost $33,541 per job, compared to the $112,000 under the federal stimulus program or the $145,000 cost of indirectly spurring employment through tax cuts). Bartik asserts that, within 10 years, MEED actually saved the Minnesota government money, as it placed workers on payroll and took them off public service programs. He and other national experts (Pines, Thakur, Holzer) encourage exploration of a similar approach for youth, though, they acknowledge the

challenge of tight budgetary times.

- *Invite them to design custom programs* (if they build it they will come)—Asking directly for employer input in program design is a very common and effective practice adopted in each of the communities that CLASP explored in its 2010 program review. In many cases employers were engaged through sector strategy/industry partnership approaches, for example, special education and work-experience programs in around health care and life sciences. Under such scenarios, employers are asked to provide input into:

    o Skill requirement models for entry-level employment and post-secondary education (and at what stages of youth education and professional development employers should be involved);
    o Designing career pathways and awareness models around targeted industries;
    o Integration of work-readiness standards and skills/technical-based knowledge in school curriculum
    o Custom training programs to meet immediate skill needs (especially at the post-secondary level).

- *Make it easy for them to participate and succeed*—employer involvement seems most successful when the following elements are involved, according to various sources:

    o Clear communications and expectations with employers—what is being asked of them and what they should expect in return
    o Training and preparation—understanding strategies to help them work better with youth
    o Awareness of services available to support at-risk youth (and how to access or refer youth to those services)
    o A known and trusted intermediary that both employers and students can consult as needed (potentially youth case mangers with ties also to the employer)

- Toolkits—information and materials with quick-tips and resources for working with youth

- *Publicly recognize them for their involvement*—public recognition not only is emotionally rewarding for the employer, but it also serves an important role in helping promote the firm more broadly within the community—a value-add that is friendly to a participating firms' bottom line. Ways that some communities are able to recognize or raise awareness of employers' involvement include:

  - **Sponsorships**, whether for individual program, training activities, or even materials. Employers can make a financial contribution and have their branding affixed to a program or product or otherwise receive recognition for their support. In Boston, employers go well-beyond sponsoring materials or individual programs: every high school in the district (and many middle and elementary schools) has a corporate sponsor that helps support career awareness, mentoring, career fairs, and other employment-related activities for youth.
  - **Engagement awards** for businesses or individuals who provide particular leadership and support.
  - **Spokesperson initiatives** that ask businesses to publicly promote the value of engaging with the youth employment and education attainment system.   This honor benefits the programs themselves (businesses tend to respond best to other businesses) but it positions certain firms or individuals in a favorable leadership role, bringing additional value through the public/community relations process.

- *Help prepare and screen youth* to promote and demonstrate their level of work readiness—employers want to ensure that youth are ready to work for them. They find value in efforts that do an exceptional job of preparing and screening youth to ensure a strong fit with their firm and that reduce the human resources burden on their end. Employers could be involved in developing a strong screening process where a system-

wide approach may be lacking. Many have found that approaches that are as close to the real world as possible (for example, where youth encounter mock interviews that prepare them for a real encounter with an employer) are highly valued and yield positive results.

Several well-functioning systems include many of the above features, but few integrated them all. By moving the needle in just a few key areas, the Detroit youth employment system could do much to improve outcomes both for young people and employers. Based on current resources, political will, and other factors, the community must identify its own approach for moving towards its vision of a systems-based approach. The next section outlines a possible approach for Detroit.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Demand for youth may be tempered by barriers to their workforce readiness, but evidence-based approaches from around the country provide promising opportunities for improvement of Detroit's workforce preparation system for young people. Based on the challenges and opportunities described in this report, the following recommended strategies should be adopted to enhance the Detroit-area youths' workforce preparedness in coming years.

1. SYSTEM ORGANIZING – Leading systems from around the country are well-coordinated, bringing together stakeholders from multiple sectors, including employers, educators, policy-makers, and others through the support and guidance of a neutral convener. Detroit should invest in efforts to increase system coordination, including recruitment of a diverse partnership, mapping of existing assets and a gap analysis, creation of a shared vision, development and utilization of common employer engagement approaches, and elimination of cross-systems barriers, such as funding and eligibility challenges.

2. ASSESSMENT TOOLS – The diversity of barriers to youth employment and the need for customized services rests on understanding where young people are when they enter service systems and attempt to access community supports. Other communities are working to develop common assessment tools that help workforce preparation providers understand youths' needs and customized services accordingly. Detroit service providers would be well-served by effective assessment tools, also; the community would be better served by assessment tools that are common among providers, reducing switching costs between service providers and increasing the ability of youth and families to compare the efficacy of various service providers.

3. FEEDBACK MECHANISMS – Information for continuous quality improvement is necessary for Detroit's system to know whether its reforms are working. The community should invest in longitudinal feedback mechanisms, which facilitate access to information about the system and which facilitate continued system reform, based on empirical data.

4. CAPACITY BUILDING – The poor state of youth employment in Detroit and nationally will be changed in the long term with thoughtful system reform, but it remains urgent that service providers provide more opportunities to today's youth. For this reason, the community should invest in capacity building targeted towards existing service providers, which facilitates their ability to serve more youth, more effectively, today.

5. EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES – The changing nature of business and employment today have rendered many workforce preparation services and supports ineffectual, but they remain in use. The Detroit community should aggressively adopt evidence-based practices, which are demonstrated to effectively meet the workforce preparation needs of diverse youth populations.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The capacity of Detroit's young people to participate in tomorrow's economy is critical for their success and for the success of the region. Today's youth employment system is not well aligned to un-tap this potential, but opportunities for reform exist. Exemplary practices identified in other communities across the country are a framework that Detroit can model, given the proper will and recalibration of resources. It is clear that stakeholders are passionate about youth and making a difference in their futures, and they are prepared to go to great lengths to do the best they can to make sure this happens. When asked, the vast majority of stakeholders were open to setting aside old ways of doing business and to begin thinking about and acting on more collaborative approaches that leverage each others' resources, know-how, and effort. Investing in a future that works for young people, employers, and communities throughout Southeast Michigan will pay off substantial dividends in the future. It is time to begin making that investment now.

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Focus Group Discussions

Detroit Youth Employment Consortium

Business panel

Faith-based and community leaders

Detroit policymakers