



COYN

**CALIFORNIA OPPORTUNITY
YOUTH NETWORK**

Network Charter

January 2021

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Mission

The California Opportunity Youth Network (COYN) works to transform systems, policies, investments, and narratives to ensure all youth and young adults in California have the opportunity to flourish in adulthood.

Purpose

Purpose of this Document

This document defines the goals, relationships, responsibilities, and governance structure of the network. COYN is a group of legally independent entities working together to positively influence systems and policies that affect the lives of opportunity youth. We collectively define opportunity youth, as youth who are between the ages of 16 and 24, and disconnected from, or insufficiently connected to, school and work -- categorically including foster, juvenile justice, and homeless youth within the age range. This document also places a stake in the ground for our commitment to developing and lifting up young leaders -- their input, guidance, and spirit will be infused into COYN structures and actions.

Purpose of the Network

COYN will facilitate statewide communication, organizing, and policy advocacy to remedy systemic inequities affecting Opportunity Youth across California. COYN's formation reflects the recognition that to achieve equitable economic and educational outcomes for youth and young adults it is necessary to address structural and systemic issues through policy and advocacy. COYN is established with the underpinning belief that through a network structure we can behave as a single larger entity increasing our power to affect change and support shared learning in this emerging field.

Core Functions of the Network

The core functions of the network (these are functions network members agree to champion, support, do, and/or lead) are:

- **Connection and Communication:** COYN connects and unifies California's Opportunity Youth-serving organizations, including collaborative backbones, public institutions, service providers, advocacy organizations, and others vital to achieving lasting change for young people.

COYN creates a channel for information sharing that fosters a common language and narrative across the field. To achieve this COYN hosts regular calls, semi-annual in-person meetings, and creates shared messaging tools and content.

- **Advocacy and Action:** COYN responds to and promotes legislation and policies at the local and state level that support positive life trajectories for Opportunity Youth. COYN builds relationships with legislators to ensure that a well-informed understanding of Opportunity Youth is top of mind for the representatives accountable to our communities. COYN develops and promotes common data, metrics, and lifts up voices that tell the Opportunity Youth story in COYN communities to funders and legislatures to gain a deeper understanding of both the problems and solutions facing young people and their communities.
- **Youth Leadership:** COYN supports the emergence of sustainable and meaningful Opportunity Youth leadership across the state. We recognize that the sustainability of the work lies in the knowledge, energy, and passion of the young people most affected and their development into leaders capable of sustaining the vision. COYN incorporates a cadre of “COYN fellows,” working on state and national policies that affect Opportunity Youth, into its governance structure and ensures young leaders co-create the agenda. True to the spirit of “nothing about us without us,” COYN believes that no policy should be decided without the direct participation of members of the groups affected by that policy.

Stakeholders

This work is supported by *Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions*, whose *Opportunity Youth Forum* connects COYN with a national network of organizations that share our purpose. Opportunity Youth are our most important stakeholder, and COYN members are committed to partnering with young leaders in their communities. COYN views all following partners and participants in the work as COYN stakeholders:

- California policymakers
- Funders (philanthropic and governmental)
- Allied non-profit organizations and their youth councils
- Public workforce development system
- Education institutions (secondary and postsecondary)
- County and municipal systems: justice, child welfare, education, behavioral health, etc
- Other organizations in the state and nation who are working on the issues affecting opportunity youth

Membership

COYN *membership is organizational*, and membership is open to all organizations wishing to join the network. That said, COYN intends to be a network of networks. COYN's current members include:

- Alliance for Children's Rights, Opportunity Youth Collaborative - *Los Angeles County*
- Bay Area Community Resources, Roadmap to Peace initiative - *San Francisco*
- Opportunity Youth Partnership - *Santa Clara County*
- OneFuture Coachella Valley, Opportunity Youth & Young Adult alignment team - *Coachella Valley & Palm Desert*
- Urban Strategies Council, Opportunity Youth Initiative - *Oakland/Alameda County*
- Wild Rivers Community Foundation, Building Health Communities initiative - *Del Norte County & Tribal Lands*
- Youth Will - *San Diego*
- YouthBuild Collaborative of Southern California - *collaborative of 10 YouthBuild sites spanning the counties of Los Angeles, Riverside, and Orange*

While the above organizations are the current members, this group aspires to expand the network to include additional organizations/agencies who share COYN's mission and values.

Joining the Network

The existence of membership criteria and associated participation standards is solely intended to establish a clear definition of participation that supports role clarity and good working relationships.

New Members

By attending three meetings in a six month period and completing the Member Commitment Pledge (Appendix B), an organization will have formally joined COYN. Until completing this milestones, an organization is considered a Non-Member Participant (see Non-Member Participants and Allied Organizations section below)

- In the first year - as defined as 12 months from the first meeting of attendance - as a COYN member an organization is not eligible to participate in the Governance Committee as a voting member.
- After the initial 12-month period, a member will be offered a voting seat on the Governance Committee. Participation on the Governance Committee is not required.

Membership is voluntary, and organizations will continue to be considered members so long as they actively participate in the work of the network. Active membership shall be defined as participating in regularly scheduled COYN events (to include conference calls, webinars, or in-person meetings), as well as engaging in advocacy efforts through active participation on-the-ground in a member's own community.

Returning Members

A former member wishing to rejoin after having exited for any reason, including non-participation or other internal changes constraining capacity, must follow the same process as new members to join the network.

Exiting the Network

The existence of the exit process is solely intended to make clear which organizations are formally involved with COYN and thus making decisions with regard to the direction of the network.

Exit by Choice

If a member wishes to leave the network, they should inform one or more of the governance committee members of their intentions in writing.

Exit for Non-Participation

Missing three consecutive meetings or six meetings in one calendar year, without prior notice of reasonable cause provided to the coordinator or governance committee member, will result in a member being considered to have exited COYN.

Non-Member Participants and Allied Organizations

COYN believes many formal and informal organizations and individuals have relevant knowledge and networks of relationships that can contribute to COYN's ability to achieve its goals. COYN recognizes that for individuals and some organizations membership may not be appropriate and thus formally establishes Non-Member Participants and Allied Organizations as designations to ensure open participation, while maintaining clarity on membership.

Non-Member Participants

COYN welcomes non-member organizations to participate in COYN meetings, and at relevant moments may actively seek the engagement and participation of such organizations to inform COYN's work. The

purpose of this type of participant designation is to be clear about how an organization with parallel or intersecting work might join a COYN meeting regularly or on a one-time basis. Additionally, new organizations seeking to become members will be classified as a Non-Member Participant until they have completed the new member milestones defined above.

Illustrative example: Jobs for the Future (JFF) is a Non-Member Participant. JFF has attended COYN meetings and participated in several meetings to inform the COYN approach and invited COYN to members to the Future Ready CA Network events.

Allied Organizations

COYN seeks partnerships and alliance with organizations that have intersecting, similar, or reinforcing goals and activities that support our mission. The purpose of this type of participant designation is to be clear about how an organization with parallel or intersecting work might join a COYN meetings repeatedly and work in deep partnership with COYN work groups or the COYN coordinator. It also establishes a more precise way to understand a mutually beneficial and reciprocal relationship.

Illustrative example: in 2018-19 and again in 2019-20, COYN has worked in alliance with the California EDGE Coalition and GRACE to participate in the policy development and advocacy process.

Current Allied Organizations:

- California EDGE Coalition
- Grace Institute
- John Burton Advocates for Youth
- New Ways to Work

Culture

COYN emerged from a desire to learn together, and with a healthy respect for inclusive process balanced by an intention to get things done. Recognizing that the conditions of effective networks are well defined, and recognizing that strong networks require a shift of mindset that centers the mission and collaborative action, COYN has adopted the four network described in the Stanford Social Innovation Review article: *The Most Impactful Leaders You've Never Heard Of*¹ as our guiding principles for network behavior. Further, COYN recommends all interested parties and prospective members read the article “Five Steps to

¹ https://ssir.org/network_entrepreneurs/entry/the_most_impactful_leaders_youve_never_heard_of

Building an Effective Impact Network” (found in Appendix C) to support context and understanding of our approach to network building.

COYN Guiding Principles for Network Behavior

- **Trust not control.** Strong relationships among network partners and a culture in which actors routinely invest resources into building long-term, trust-based relationships—without the expectation of control or even recognition—is critical to collaborative success. Network entrepreneurs emphasize “return on relationships” above all else. Unless they are built on a foundation of mutual respect and integrity, collaborations are unlikely to succeed, regardless of how much formal structure or strategic planning went into them.
- **Humility not brand.** Unlike social entrepreneurs so often held up as hero-like figures, network entrepreneurs are largely anonymous by design. Early in a network’s development, these leaders are important visionaries, and stewards who help foster a healthy network culture and develop a sustainable structure. But they are deliberate about ceding their power to the collective leadership of the network and developing leadership capacity throughout the network.
- **Node not hub.** Network entrepreneurs are keenly aware that they are few among many working across the larger system, and in this way they embody a special type of system leader, [powerfully articulated by Senge, Hamilton, and Kania in a recent SSIR article](#). Network entrepreneurs not only connect to the larger system around them and foster generative conversation, but also deliberately catalyze and lead action-oriented networks that are aligned around a defined shared purpose and built on the foundation of deep relationships. They develop a culture where no individual or organization seeks to be the brightest star. Partners and peers mobilize a constellation of resources and skills that enables the achievement of a shared vision. The network becomes the primary vehicle for delivering mission impact. Consequently, there is as much focus on engaging trusted peers outside the network entrepreneur’s organization as there is on tasks within the organization.
- **Mission not organization.** Network entrepreneurs are far more motivated to achieve maximum impact than to advance themselves or their organizations. The network entrepreneur acts as a participant, eschewing personal or organizational status in service to the mission. They often put the interests of their peers ahead of their own, as “supporting all boats to rise” actually serves the mission best. Network entrepreneurs, for example, often refer potential donors to peers that can better deliver a program or service; they don’t simply seek to maximize their own organization’s budget. When all network participants adhere to this principle, it becomes self-reinforcing; it greases the wheels of current collaborations and opens the doors to future partnerships.

Network Governance

Governance Committee

Activities of the network will be governed by the Governance Committee.

Composition

The Governance Committee is composed of one individual serving as representatives of each of the member organizations that have met the bar of 12 months of active participation, have completed the COYN Annual Pledge, and which choose to take a seat on the Governance Committee.

COYN holds the intention of adding young leaders to the governance committee when appropriate resources and infrastructure permit. Young leaders are encouraged to participate in all COYN dialogue and meetings, including Governance Committee meetings, as an important stakeholder from each member.

- Over time, COYN's goal is to create one or more dedicated, voting Governance Committee seat(s) for young leaders that ensure autonomous governance participation separate from that of a member organization at which the young leader is currently working or receiving services.

Chair

The Governance Committee will elect a chairperson(s) by two-thirds vote.

- The chairperson will serve for a term of one year with the ability to be re-elected for subsequent terms, but no more than three consecutive terms.
- It will be the chair's responsibility to supervise the network coordinator and work with other Governance Committee members to organize and structure membership meetings.
- The chairperson should expect to give 10-15 hours per month to the work of COYN.

Decision-Making

Decisions will be made by working toward consensus, and require at least two-thirds of Governance Committee members present to establish quorum and conduct business (i.e., make a decisions). Votes can be made via phone or email.

Meeting Frequency

Governance Committee meetings will happen via nine conference calls in the months of January, February, March, April, May, June, September, November, and December. COYN's annual meeting will be hosted by the Governance Committee in February of each year. Due to COYN's current small size, for the 2020 calendar year, Governance Committee meetings will serve as COYN member meetings. Participation in quarterly meetings will be offered via conference call to ensure participation for those unable to travel. The Governance Committee convenes ten times per year on the first Friday of the month from 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM. The committee meetings in all months except December and July.

Responsibilities of the Governance Committee

1. *Adopt and support the mission of COYN.*

“The California Opportunity Youth Network (COYN) works to transform systems, policies, investments, and narratives to ensure all youth and young adults in California have the opportunity to flourish in adulthood.”
2. *Provide strategic guidance, vision, and oversight for COYN including:*
 - Develop and refine the Common Agenda for change, including the problem, goal(s), and guiding principles
 - Track progress of the work using agreed-upon common indicators
 - Review and report the progress of the network to the full membership and all stakeholders
 - Make connections between Work Groups to ensure coordination and efficiency
 - Interacting with the Network Coordinator on strategy, community engagement, and common indicators
 - Identify potential funding sources for the network and solicit funding to meet the needs of the network
 - Creating and monitoring an annual budget, goal(s), and work plan for the network
3. *Provide network leadership:*
 - Consider how individual organizations or those in site-level networks can align to the Common Agenda
 - Serve as a vocal champion of Opportunity Youth efforts in the community
 - Provide input from the communities and organizations that each member represents
4. *Play an active role in the network and model engagement:*
 - Participate at the regularly scheduled meetings both in-person and on calls/video conferences

- Review pre-read materials prior to meetings and come prepared to engage in discussion through active listening and respectful participation.
- Commit to year-long membership of the Governance Committee

Policy and advocacy

Policy issues can and should be surfaced by any COYN member or partner. In general, policy and advocacy positions will be shared through the network, and individual COYN members may opt-in to endorse. COYN will formally adopt a position as a network by two-thirds vote of the Governance Committee. However, as COYN is not a registered lobbying organization, when COYN submits letters of support or develops campaign materials, each member will need to sign on individually.

Should at least half of members choose to opt-in to a policy position not formally approved by the Governance Committee, those sites may request that COYN provide a letter of support noting that it is not a network position, but that specific members that have endorsed.

Further, any member may request that COYN adopt an official position on a given policy matter, in which case the Governance Committee will deliberate and vote.

Committees

COYN has one standing committee:

- **Governance Committee.** Purpose: Provide governance and oversight to the network

From time to time, as deemed necessary and where sufficient interest lies to move the work, the Governance Committee may create committees or work groups to help in carrying out the purpose of the organization. Committees of the membership will be created as needed by the Governance Committee.

Work groups may be formed by members when interest exists to take on specific and time bound projects under the banner of COYN.

Communication

COYN members should expect to receive timely and consistent communication through several channels.

- The COYN coordinator will maintain a public communications calendar and manage all network communication.

- Communication will come through monthly calls and sharing of meeting recordings and notes, notices of relevant state policies as needed, action alerts as needed, and effective summaries of all proceedings and decisions.

Additionally, in preparation for monthly calls, the coordinator will connect with Chair and active work group members to gather site-level information for synthesis and collation prior to the meeting. The notes produced for each COYN meeting will be distributed via email no later than 10 working days after the meeting.

Life Expectancy of the Network

The network will be ongoing until such time as our goals are met. Regardless of funding from the Aspen Institute, this network will continue to share best practices and data in order to continue to align and improve the outcomes for opportunity youth in the state of California.

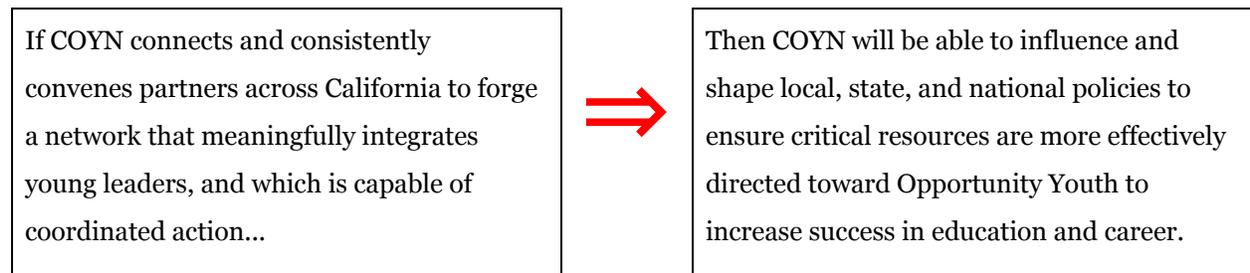
**This COYN Network Charter is a living document, evolution is expected over time as membership grows and the needs of the network change.*

Appendix A

Issue Statement

The Opportunity Youth movement in California is growing, with OY-focused collective impact and policy work occurring in communities across California. However, that work is currently disparate and isolated, leading to limited impact at the state and federal policy level. Additionally, the voices and leadership of young people are not consistently being cultivated and placed at the forefront of the movement despite their position as the people with the most to gain or lose by the result and their expertise of lived experience. To achieve statewide change that is systemic and structural we need to build a united movement capable of acting with a single and focused voice, and which, through a structured developmental process, places young leaders in decision making roles and at the forefront of the movement.

Theory of Change



Logic Model

<p><u>COYN's Purpose</u> COYN will facilitate the sharing of effective practices and information in service of steadily improving the quality of services for Opportunity Youth, as well as statewide organizing and policy advocacy to remedy systemic inequities affecting Opportunity Youth across California.</p>				
<p><u>Inputs</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Financial support for coordination function and youth fellowships - Statewide coordinator - Site level backbone organizations - Support from the Aspen network and advocacy academy - Alignment and coordination with Opportunity Youth United 	<p><u>Activities</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Host structured monthly calls - Semi-annual in-person governance meetings - Develop communication platform and unified messages - Share best practices - Create platform for young leaders to advocate - Build shared policy agenda, linked to Aspen Equity Counts common data - Website maintained - Member conduct align local advocacy 	<p><u>Outputs</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - COYN charter annually reviewed and re-signed - COYN logo used at site level on backbone and core partners website - Map of substantive OY efforts in COYN communities (Bakersfield, Fresno, San Bernardino, and Sacramento) - Established three-year strategic plan and work plan - COYN communications plan - Local advocacy day 	<p><u>Near Term (by June 2022) Outcomes</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 10 members representing all major metro areas in CA - COYN Opportunity Summit draws 100+ participants, codesigned and facilitated by young leaders - Policy agenda established and unanimously agreed upon by all sites - Youth leadership academy established and all sites participate - COYN supports work to create pilot program to increase ADA payments to reengagement high schools 	<p><u>Long Term (by June 2024) Outcomes</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - COYN Opportunity Summit draws more than 150 participants and is codesign and facilitated by young leaders, and attended by state policymakers and funders - COYN influences state workforce policy to better align education and workforce dollars
<p><u>Assumptions, Conditions, and Context</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Current members remain active - Philanthropic resources are secured to grow the work - OYU continues to exist and is interested in formally partnering - There are other regional OY collaboratives or coalitions that can be efficiently connected with 				

Appendix B

Member Annual Commitment Pledge

Dear COYN Members,

ORGANIZATION hereby joins the California Opportunity Youth Network (COYN) for the calendar year 2020.

ORGANIZATION is in alignment with COYN’s mission to transform systems, policies, investments, and narratives to ensure all youth and young adults in California have the opportunity to flourish in adulthood.

Further, ORGANIZATION believes that through a network structure we can behave as a single larger entity increasing our power to affect change and support shared learning in this emerging field.

ORGANIZATION is ready to participate in statewide communication, organizing, and policy advocacy to remedy systemic inequities affecting Opportunity Youth across California.

Lastly, ORGANIZATION understands the key roles of the network with regard to connection and communication, advocacy and action, and youth leadership. We believe these are valuable roles that will add value to our work, and help us to play a role in achieving system change.

ORGANIZATION commits to: attending the nine COYN calls and attending an annual in-person meeting; ensuring ORGANIZATION is formal advised by young leaders and explicitly supports youth leadership; and taking action locally, and, when possible, at the state level to move forward COYN’s priorities.

ORGANIZATION’s designated representative to COYN is:

Name	
Title	
Email	
Phone	

Sincerely,

Name

Title

Appendix C

COYN Guide to Network-Building

https://ssir.org/network_entrepreneurs/entry/five_steps_to_building_an_effective_impact_network

- **Clarify purpose.** Clarifying a network’s purpose—its reason for being—is an ongoing endeavor. It must be clear enough initially to identify the right partners and encourage them to meet. As these individuals and groups convene, the network should refine its purpose. Purpose must also be ambitious enough to require that early network members engage those they would rather ignore or compete with. That’s one reason Dreams InDeed uses the word “dream” to drive its work rather than “good idea,” “mission,” or even “purpose.”

Clarifying purpose requires sense-making: mapping the system, examining the problem from diverse perspectives, finding shared values, and recognizing external forces. It also requires understanding the local context, including the history of the place or system, related efforts, political and power dynamics, and hardwired assumptions. By clarifying purpose and context, each network member becomes keenly aware that they are just one among many participants working across the system. And in the process, they begin to understand and embrace the network principle of acting as a *node, not hub*.

- **Convene the right people.** The “right people”: 1) collectively represent all parts of the system, 2) have the ability to get things done, and 3) are willing to cross boundaries and work with people who may have very different perspectives and priorities. This includes everyone impacted by the issue, even people you may not want to work with. Real progress on complex or “wicked” problems requires uncommon coordination and collaboration across divides.
- **Cultivate trust.** Sustained, authentic relationships are the foundation of all successful collaborative efforts. Cultivating trust intentionally, rather than passively, provides the basis for a culture in which network participants embrace the network principle of *trust, not control*. When a network runs on trust, its potential for scaling impact drastically increases. As Eric Heitz and Barbara Wagner from the Energy Foundation write, “The trust and fluid communication that can move ideas quickly comes through human relationships.”

Building trust doesn’t mean that people have to like each other or agree, but it does mean they have to be willing to engage in authentic and sometimes unpleasant conversations about the

things that divide and challenge them, including gender, race, and power. The objective is to create *trust for impact*. This specific type of trust enables diverse actors to hold the tension through difficult conversations, find a slice of common ground, and work together, despite organizational differences and personal disagreements. Especially in volatile, emerging contexts, trust for impact must be rooted not just in shared purpose, but also in shared values and a shared understanding of how to behave and treat each other when disagreements inevitably arise.

- **Coordinate actions.** By identifying and coordinating work that is already happening, participants can leverage organizational resources, collaborate around common goals, and avoid duplication of efforts. And because emergent collaborative solutions are so dynamic, the most effective networks assign and coordinate roles as well. Network roles may include a “core team” to handle certain governance decisions, a facilitator to design and lead the convenings, and a network manager to serve the network’s emergent needs.

Network entrepreneurs don’t insist that all participants across a network agree on any single issue or project. Wicked problems are constantly evolving; no single action or organization can solve them. Instead of looking for a silver bullet, it’s critical to address the problem from many angles with a smart, coordinated effort.

- **Collaborate generously.** A generous collaborator does not count transactions, giving only as much as they get in return. Instead, they assume positive intent, communicate frequently, and consistently look for opportunities to work with others in support of shared goals, not personal gain.

Generous collaboration results directly from practicing the network principles of *humility, not brand*, and *mission, not organization*. Network members are most likely to embrace a mindset of generous collaboration when they have developed a clear shared purpose, trust for impact, and just enough structure to focus the work.