



Network Charter

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Introduction to COYN

The California Opportunity Youth Network (COYN) is a practice-to-policy network whose mission is to transform systems, policies, investments, and narratives to ensure all youth and young adults in California, ages 16-24, have the opportunity to flourish in adulthood. COYN was born in 2014 out of the Aspen Institute's Opportunity Youth Forum, a national network of urban, rural, and tribal communities seeking to improve education and employment pathways for young people ages 16-24 who are disconnected from school and work. The Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions sought to create a national model for improving outcomes for Opportunity Youth by investing in local collaboratives, rather than boutique programs, to develop community-driven and systemic solutions

Over the past eight years, COYN has grown into a statewide network of eight sites across California, with New Ways to Work as COYN's backbone. New Ways to Work is a 50-year-old advocacy and technical assistance organization with national reach. COYN is convened by a team at New Ways to Work providing coordination, facilitation, communication, and policy support.

COYN is an network that facilitates statewide communication, organizing, and policy advocacy in partnership and collaboration with public systems, young people with lived experience, and community-based organizations to address systemic inequities affecting Opportunity Youth, including youth who experience foster care, juvenile justice and homeless systems across California. COYN intentionally defines Opportunity Youth as youth and young adults 16-24-years-old who are disconnected from school and work, or insufficiently connected to school and work. Including young people impacted by systems: child welfare, justice justice and/or homeless system.

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.

COYN's 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.

Defining the Elements of the Mission

Opportunity Youth: Opportunity Youth as youth and young adults 16-24-years-old disconnected from, or insufficiently connected to, school and work. COYN categorically includes system-impacted youth in our definition of Opportunity Youth, to include young people who have experienced the foster system, justice system, and/or homelessness.

Systems: COYN is primarily focused on the public workforce system. Through work to increase linkages and connections in the workforce system, COYN intends to positively influence the education system, as well as systems of care and support including the child welfare system, the juvenile justice system, the homeless continuum of care, and the behavioral health and mental health system.

Policies: COYN seeks to address both legislative and administrative policies at the state level by developing and sponsoring legislation and partnering with public systems to identify opportunities to replicate best practices and strengthen administrative policy.

Investments: Both public and private resources directed toward Opportunity Youth.

Narratives: The way in which Opportunity Youth and their communities are discussed and considered in the policymaking process, with an intent to ensure the voices of young people are front and center in the conversation.

Flourish: Opportunity Youth are indistinguishable from their more well resourced peers in terms of earnings, education attainment, and their sense of personal well being by age 30.

COYN's Purpose

This document defines the purpose and structure of the network. COYN is a group of legally independent entities working together to achieve COYN's mission and vision.

Purpose of the Network

COYN is convened and supported by the backbone team at New Ways to Work. COYN will work toward its mission by:

- Aggregating the perspectives of communities, young people, practitioners, and system and organizational leaders and infusing them into the policy development process
- Developing and advancing legislative and regulatory policies
- Coordinating and conducting policy advocacy
- Sharing information and disseminating promising practices through communities of practice

In order to achieve equitable economic, educational, and life outcomes for Opportunity Youth, who are mostly young people of color, it is necessary to address structural and systemic issues through policy level solutions. In particular, this includes attention to structural and systemic racism that has historically impacted and excluded specific communities throughout California and the nation. The best solutions are those that are informed by the experience of a variety of perspectives including government partners, community based agencies, young people with lived experience, and local systems leaders.

Core Functions COYN

COYN's core functions are the key actions of the network itself, and as such the core function are what members agree to do, support, or participate in. The core functions are as follows:

- **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.
 - o COYN members attend COYN's quarterly calls, annual in-person meeting, and contribute to shared messaging tools and content.
- **Advocacy and Action:** COYN responds to and promotes state-level legislation and policies that support positive life trajectories for Opportunity Youth. COYN builds relationships with legislators to ensure a well-informed understanding of Opportunity Youth is top of mind for the representatives accountable to our communities. Importantly, COYN's focus is on workforce and COYN will build on its initial success with the system impacted youth WIOA waiver.

- o COYN members advocate for local solutions with local leaders that align to COYN's state policy agenda, and support statewide advocacy through sign ons and opportunities for advocacy.
- **Youth Leadership:** COYN supports the emergence of sustainable and meaningful leadership by Opportunity Youth across the state. We recognize that the sustainability of the work lies in the energy, passion, and leadership of the young people, and we recognize that our solutions must be informed by those most affected by systems and structures that perpetuate inequitable conditions.
 - o COYN members engage young leaders as part of their individual efforts or formally within their coalitions, and at times activate those young leaders for advocacy opportunities aligned to COYN's policy agenda. COYN members are sure to routinely consult with young leaders on matters related to COYN.

Membership

COYN membership is open to all organizations wishing to join the network. COYN aspires to expand the network to include additional organizations/agencies who share COYN's mission and values; specifically groups and organizations that want to simplify, coordinate, and strengthen the interactions among the key elements of the Opportunity Youth-serving ecosystem and improve the policies and resource flows.

There are three primary membership types:

- **Local collaboratives** - Local groups with a general composition of decision making representatives from the public workforce system, reengagement education, a key public system (one serving the key system-impacted populations (probation, child welfare, homeless continuum of care, or social services), a postsecondary education or training provider, and a stabilization and support CBOs.
- **Individual organizations** - any organization may join COYN. In its policy work, COYN will focus on engaging regional or statewide organizations. Additionally, COYN will work with local collaboratives to ensure members join, and all individual organizations will be encouraged to connect with collaboratives.
- **Policy partners** - organizations that focus on policy advocacy in Sacramento (and national as well) with aligned values and priority populations.

Joining the Network

Members join the network by completing the initial information form and submitting a letter of commitment (see appendix A).

Duties of Members

There are four primary duties of COYN members, these include:

1. Participate in quarterly meetings
2. Respond to the annual COYN survey
3. Act in support of the policy agenda through time-sensitive sign-ons and local advocacy as appropriate
4. Share information within the network

Benefits of Membership

Members of the COYN network have access to three primary benefits:

1. Participation in network of like minded peers seeking to strengthen Opportunity Youth-serving workforce ecosystem that facilitates resource sharing and sharing of new and promising practices

2. Access to reports and data produced by COYN
3. Access to technical assistance from the New Ways to Work COYN backbone team for local COYN collaboratives

New Members

By completing the information form and completing the letter of commitment (Appendix A), an organization will have formally joined COYN. 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 quarterly COYN calls, completing the annual survey, and engaging in advocacy efforts through sign-ons and 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 intended to make clear which organizations are formally involved with COYN.

Exit by Choice

If a member wishes to leave the network, they should inform one or more of the steering committee members or supporting staff of their intention via email.

Exit for Non-Participation

A member that does not renew the annual letter of commitment, fails to complete the annual survey, does not join at least 50% of quarterly calls, or is otherwise unresponsive will be removed from membership rolls to ensure an accurate membership list.

Culture

COYN emerged from a desire to learn together and focus on systems change. COYN's culture balances an inclusive process with a bias toward action. 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 Building an Effective Impact Network" (found in Appendix B) 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

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

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.

Governance

COYN is governed by the policies, as well as the necessary rules and regulations of its fiscal sponsor, New Ways to Work. It is important to note that this does mean the New Ways board of directors does have ultimate authority over COYN. That said, New Ways and COYN have established a constructive relationship and New Ways seeks to allow the network to operate with a necessary level of independence. A COYN Steering Committee provides input and advice, and in specific cases holds decision making authority to guide the network, such as approving the COYN Policy Agenda. The New Ways executive director sits on the Steering Committee.

Steering Committee

Activities of the network will be informed and advised by the Steering Committee.

Composition

The Steering Committee is initially composed of nine members, as follows:

- 1 fiscal sponsor executive director
- 1 representative a formally partnered policy organization
- 1 representative from each of four COYN collaborative sites where COYN collaborative is operational
- 1 representative from a statewide nonprofit/network
- 2 young leaders each representing a different COYN collaborative site

This committee can be expanded proportionally to the growth of COYN members in future years and via amendment to this charter.

Chair

- The Chair shall be a representative of one of the COYN sites
- The Steering Committee will elect a chairperson from one of the COYN sites by two-thirds vote of the Steering Committee.
- The chairperson will serve for a term of two years with the ability to be re-elected for one additional consecutive term.
- The chairperson should expect to give 5 hours per month to the work of COYN.
- The chairperson hosts the Steering Committee meetings and helps to set the agenda in partnership with the backbone staff

Decision-Making

Decisions will be made by working toward consensus, and require at least two-thirds of Steering Committee members present to both establish quorum and conduct business (i.e., make a decisions). The scope of the Steering Committee's decisions are advisory in nature.

The Steering Committee is responsible for deciding on the elements of the policy agenda.

Meeting Frequency

- The Steering Committee will meet nine times per calendar year. These meetings will be hosted via Zoom.
 - The meetings will occur in the following months: January, February, April, May, June, September, October, November, and December. The meetings will be held on the first friday of the month from 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM. The committee will **not** meet during the months of March, July, and August
- The Steering Committee will host COYN's annual network meeting in February of each year.
- The Steering Committee will also host quarterly COYN meetings via Zoom for all members.

Responsibilities of the Steering Committee

1. *Provide strategic guidance and vision* for COYN including:
 - Provide input and guidance on, and formally adopt the policy agenda
 - 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 groups and networks to ensure coordination and connection
2. *Provide network leadership:*
 - Serve as a vocal champion of COYN statewide, regionally, and locally
 - Provide input from the communities and organizations that each member represents
 - Identify potential funding sources for the network and solicit funding to meet the needs of the network
3. *Play an active role in the network:*
 - Participate at the regularly scheduled meetings both in-person and on calls
 - 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 Steering Committee

Policy and advocacy

COYN will annually create a Policy Agenda. This will be created based on the annual COYN member survey, and the knowledge and expertise of the Steering Committee.

COYN will formally adopt a position as a network by two-thirds vote of the Steering 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. In order to achieve this expeditiously, COYN will employ an “opt out” system for all items in the approved Policy Agenda. This will allow COYN’s backbone policy team to move quickly, while giving COYN members the opportunity to remove themselves from specific issues.

Should at least half of members choose to “opt-out” to a policy position, it will trigger a Steering Committee reassessment of the Policy Agenda.

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

Committees

COYN has one standing committee:

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

From time to time, as deemed necessary and where sufficient interest lies to move the work, the Steering Committee may create task forces 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.

COYN Sites

What is a COYN site?

COYN believes more is achieved in partnership, and therefore aims to support the formation of local collaboratives. A COYN site is a local collaborative focused on strengthening the local youth-serving workforce ecosystem that includes representation from at least three of the following:

- The local workforce development boards
- A workforce-focused community based organizations
- Opportunity youth focused support and stabilization community based organizations
- A public system of care and support (the child welfare system, the juvenile justice system, the homeless service continuum of care)
- The alternative education system (adult education, local conservation corps, charters serving adult learners)
- WIOA-named workforce organizations like YouthBuild and Job Corps
- Legal advocacy organizations
- Workforce intermediaries
- Youth and young adult leadership groups

The COYN Site Strategic Functions

Though not all COYN members are involved with local collaboratives, we encourage all members to engage in such local ecosystem building efforts. COYN has identified specific functions that *must* be conducted by one or more institutions in a local community if equitable ecosystem building activities are to be effective and sustainable. These functions are:

- **Convene** local leadership to focus on the most important issues facing Opportunity Youth and identify solutions;
- **Identify and encourage** local policies that promote and sustain effective practices;
- **Track and monitor** the Equity Counts (or other similar data) measures disaggregated by race and ethnicity (Equity counts measures: community disconnection, high school disconnection, postsecondary disconnection, and workforce disconnection);
- **Promote, foster, and/or provide** the following:
 - promote career pathways system and integrated service ecosystems;
 - promote quality and services for all Opportunity Youth, including focusing local efforts to connect all youth to appropriate and high quality services;

- promote awareness and buy-in for an integrated approach among educators, youth workers, and community partners;
- provide the communications link among partners; and
- foster a data-driven ecosystem focused on quality, evaluation, and improvement.

Appendix A: Membership

COYN New Member Information Form

- Organization and group name:
- Mailing address:
- Contact person & role:
- Phone:
- Email:
- Alternate contact & role:
- Phone:
- Email:

Region: please, list the county or city where you work (if you operate in multiple jurisdictions please provide in the second box)

☐ Primary county or city of operation: _____

☐ Additional counties and cities: _____

Existence of collaborative: are you a member of a local collaborative?

☐ Yes / No

☐ If yes, please describe your involvement

☐ Leader or convenor

☐ Participant

Type of Organization, primary identification: Please, identify your organization's primary identification. A number of different types of organizations are listed below. Please check the **ONE** that best describes your organization. (You will be asked to select secondary identification next).

- ☐ Adult education consortium
- ☐ Adult education provider
- ☐ Career technical education provider
- ☐ Chamber of Commerce
- ☐ Community-based organization
- ☐ Community college
- ☐ Conservation Corps
- ☐ County Office of Education
- ☐ Education and training provider

- ☐ Local education fund
- ☐ Local school-to-career initiative
- ☐ Industry association
- ☐ Labor union
- ☐ Mental health provider
- ☐ Nonprofit organization
- ☐ Reengagement high school
- ☐ Philanthropic foundation
- ☐ Policy advocacy organization
- ☐ Public system - child welfare
- ☐ Public system - probation
- ☐ Public system - social services agency
- ☐ School District
- ☐ Support & stabilization services provider
- ☐ Workforce Development Board
- ☐ WDB Youth Committee
- ☐ Workforce service provider
- ☐ Youth-led organization
- ☐ Youth leadership and development organization
- ☐ YouthBuild
- ☐ Other, Please specify:

Type of Organization, secondary identification: please check **as many** secondary elements as necessary to best describe your organization.

- ☐ Adult education consortium
- ☐ Adult education provider
- ☐ Career technical education provider
- ☐ Chamber of Commerce
- ☐ Community-based organization
- ☐ Community college
- ☐ Conservation Corps
- ☐ County Office of Education
- ☐ Education and training provider
- ☐ Local education fund

- ☐ Local school-to-career initiative
- ☐ Industry association
- ☐ Labor union
- ☐ Mental health provider
- ☐ Nonprofit organization
- ☐ Reengagement high school
- ☐ Philanthropic foundation
- ☐ Policy advocacy organization
- ☐ Public system - child welfare
- ☐ Public system - probation
- ☐ Public system - social services agency
- ☐ School District
- ☐ Support & stabilization services provider
- ☐ Workforce Development Board
- ☐ WDB Youth Committee
- ☐ Workforce service provider
- ☐ Youth-led organization
- ☐ Youth leadership and development organization
- ☐ YouthBuild
- ☐ Other, Please specify:

Letter of Commitment

Dear Fellow COYN Members,

ORGANIZATION hereby joins the California Opportunity Youth Network (COYN) for the fiscal year 202x-202x (July 1, 202x - June 30, 202x).

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.

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.

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 quarterly COYN calls and attending an annual in-person meeting;
- Completing the annual COYN survey;
- Ensuring ORGANIZATION is advised by young leaders and explicitly supports youth leadership;
- Taking action locally, regionally, and/or at the state level to advance COYN's priorities;
- Sharing effective practices and lessons learned with the network.

ORGANIZATION's designated representative to COYN is:

Name		Title	
Email		Phone	

Sincerely,

Name

Title

Appendix B: COYN Perspective on Network-Building

After eight years of storming and forming, and as is reflected in this revised charter, COYN is in the process of reformatting the network to increase impact and deliver on newly funded projects. As such, we are working in alignment with the five steps of building effective impact networks.²

- **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

² https://ssir.org/network_entrepreneurs/entry/five_steps_to_building_an_effective_impact_network

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.

Appendix C: Collective Impact

COYN originated in the collective impact movement. Specifically, the original five members were local collective impact collaboratives funded by the Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solution's Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund. As such, COYN routinely references the collective impact model. Critically, as the size and scope of California requires organizations that can work in concert to move forward a systemic approach. While explicitly a network, rather than a collective impact initiative, COYN aims to bring people together, in a structured way, to achieve social change³. Therefore, we reference and adhere to key tenets of the collective impact approach.

Stanford Social Innovation Review Collective Impact Conditions⁴



³ <https://www.collectiveimpactforum.org/what-collective-impact>

⁴ https://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective_impact