Ready by 21® Bolder Actions Toolkit

What this is
Ready by 21® is a set of innovative strategies developed by the Forum for Youth Investment that helps communities and states improve the odds that all children and youth will be ready for college, work and life. The Forum organized those strategies and the related tools under “the four B’s”: Broader Partnerships, Bigger Goals, Better Data and Bolder Actions. The Bolder Actions toolkit helps strong partnerships create change. It guides them to improve systems and settings by increasing quality, coordination and reach; aligning policies and resources to be more consistent and effective; increasing demand for improving effectiveness and reducing gaps in services; and engaging youth, families and community members in solutions.

How this Connects to Collective Impact
This toolkit helps partners establish and maintain a process of mutually reinforcing activities by aligning their work with each other and with the community’s collective plan. This alignment process requires continuous communication among the partners, both directly with each other and through the backbone organization.

How this tool is used
After building a strong backbone organization, agreeing on a shared set of goals and collecting the best possible baseline data, partnerships use this toolkit to implement strategies to create change. It includes field-tested tools for assessing and improving the quality of programs that serve youth, and readings and resources to carry out community change.

Most of the tools in this kit are carried out as a group activity, at least initially, often with in-person facilitation by the Forum for Youth Investment. The tools and worksheets were created for partnerships working on child and youth issues, but they can be (and have been) used by partnerships focused on other populations or on specific community issues.

To find out more
See the Bolder Actions toolkit. Some of the tools require free registration in the Ready by 21 Leadership Network or are available only to partnerships working directly with the Forum.
The resources highlighted in this toolkit are available at www.readyby21.org/toolkits

Ready by 21 is meeting leaders where they are across the country to reach the goal of having all youth ready for college, work and life. Ready by 21 is a set of innovative strategies developed by national experts at the Forum for Youth Investment based on decades of experience and the knowledge to make a measurable difference in young people’s lives.

Ready by 21 helps leaders to build broader partnerships, set bigger goals, collect and use better data, and take bolder actions. Within these four Building Blocks for Effective Change, the Forum has identified 14 standards that leaders consistently cite as important to improve youth outcomes. To help you learn more about the Building Blocks, their related standards and ways that you can apply them to your work, the Ready by 21 Partnership offers this toolkit series.

For more information about Ready by 21, please visit www.readyby21.org. To speak to someone about how Ready by 21 strategies can align with your efforts, contact ReadyLeader@ReadyBy21.org.

Ready by 21 Toolkits © 2011 Forum for Youth Investment | Ready by 21 and the Ready by 21 Logo are registered trademarks of the Forum for Youth Investment
Ready by 21® Bolder Actions Toolkit

For links and more information, please visit www.readyby21.org/toolkits/bolder-actions

“That’s what Ready by 21 is about: We want passion with precision. We want to understand what works, what doesn’t work. If it works, we want to replicate it.”
— Tom Ridge, former governor of Pennsylvania, former director of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security

**Bold:** Mirriam-Webster defines it as “showing an ability to take risks; confident and courageous.” By following the Ready by 21 Building Blocks, you’ve seen the importance of being bigger, broader, better. That isn’t just for alliterative effect; it’s to challenge you to go one step further.

Now – after building broader partnerships, setting bigger goals and using better data – leaders get to take bolder action. The Forum for Youth Investment has developed four standards to guide you to:

- **Improve systems and settings** by increasing their quality, coordination and reach.
- **Align policies and resources** to be more consistent, effective and aligned to maximize return on investments.
- **Increase demand** for improving effectiveness, scale and sustainability, and for reducing gaps in services.
- **Engage youth, families and community members in solutions** – building their capacity in the full range of action strategies.

Here’s a quick self-assessment to help you get a sense of your community’s or state’s capacity to take bolder actions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>BOLDER ACTIONS</strong></th>
<th>DOING THIS WELL</th>
<th>DOING OKAY</th>
<th>DON’T HAVE BUT NEEDED</th>
<th>NOT A PRIORITY NOW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improve systems and settings</td>
<td>Are significant efforts underway to improve alignment and coordination of services within the various systems and settings that support youth? Are efforts underway that improve the quality of these services, supports and opportunities?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Align policies and resources</td>
<td>Are there efforts to review and improve policies? Are policies aligned so that they are more consistent and effective? Are resources assessed and reassigned to maximize the return on investment? Are clear sustainability plans in place and activated?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase demand</td>
<td>Is there strong demand for change from young people, families, providers, business leaders, funders, advocates and policymakers? Is an effective communications strategy in place?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage youth, families and community members in solutions</td>
<td>Are young people and families involved in meaningful ways? Are they involved in decision making? Trained in policy and data analysis? Are there mechanisms for them to collectively identify and represent the perspectives of their peers?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To learn more about bolder actions, check out these resources:

**Implementing Bolder Strategies 101 Webinar Recording:** This webinar offers an introduction to the Bolder Actions standards and offers several examples of carrying them out. Broadcast on Aug. 30, 2011, the session was led by Danielle Evennou and Emily Jensen, senior policy associates, and Kiley Bednar, program manager, at the Forum for Youth Investment.

**Petaluma, CA: Improving Systems and Settings:** Learn about how a town’s network of youth providers took action to improve both caring relationships and youth, family and community engagement.
The resources highlighted in this toolkit are available at www.readyby21.org/toolkits

Ready by 21 is meeting leaders where they are across the country to reach the goal of having all youth ready for college, work and life. Ready by 21 is a set of innovative strategies developed by national experts at the Forum for Youth Investment based on decades of experience and the knowledge to make a measurable difference in young people’s lives.

Ready by 21 helps leaders to build broader partnerships, set bigger goals, collect and use better data, and take bolder actions. Within these four Building Blocks for Effective Change, the Forum has identified 14 standards that leaders consistently cite as important to improve youth outcomes. To help you learn more about the Building Blocks, their related standards and ways that you can apply them to your work, the Ready by 21 Partnership offers this toolkit series.

For more information about Ready by 21, please visit www.readyby21.org. To speak to someone about how Ready by 21 strategies can align with your efforts, contact ReadyLeader@ReadyBy21.org.

Ready by 21 Toolkits © 2011 Forum for Youth Investment | Ready by 21 and the Ready by 21 Logo are registered trademarks of the Forum for Youth Investment

Standards Toolkits

You can explore bolder actions further through these toolkits.
Each set of tools is designed to help you fulfill a specific standard.
**Take Bolder Actions:**

**Improve systems and settings by increasing their quality, coordination and reach.**

Healthy behavior, staying in school, problem-solving skills – these are among the outcomes we all want to see in our young people. It is always encouraging to be able to point to a new mentoring initiative, a great after-school program or a really innovative school, but to achieve community- and state-wide impact, you need to do something bigger. You need to make high-quality interactions between young people and adults routine.

How? By improving entire systems across the variety of settings where children and youth spend their time. Approaching quality improvement from a community-wide perspective helps to ensure that the good work done in one corner of a community – such as a school, afterschool program or gymnasium – is complemented by work done elsewhere in the community.

**Here are resources that address common questions:**

**How do we improve program quality?**

We know that program quality is measurable and malleable. The Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA) is one tool to assess and improve settings where young people have fun, work and learn with adults. The tool is administered by the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality, a division of the Forum for Youth Investment. The Youth Program Quality Intervention Technical Assistance brief outlines the process for taking action to improve program quality in your city, county or state. See the Youth Program Quality Sample Assessment for school-age children to better understand what factors influence program quality and what the YPQA measures.

**Show us some places that have improved quality and coordination.**

Through the Forum’s Quality Counts initiative, seven communities and five states took on the challenge of building out-of-school time systems devoted to higher quality. The communities focused on improving program quality and workforce skills, increasing information available about the out-of-school time sector and supporting leaders in making quality improvement a priority. Read the results in Making Quality Count: Lessons Learned from the Ready by 21 Quality Counts Initiative.

Any parent will tell you this: Over the past 50 years, the transition to adulthood has grown longer, more complex and less orderly. That increases the need to improve supports not only for adolescents, but for older youth making that transition. This issue brief, Credentialed by 26 Series: High Expectations & Strong Supports Yield Postsecondary Success, shows how leaders from YouthBuild Brockton, Massaolit Community College and the Institute for Higher Education Policy are taking on that challenge. They’re broadening their thinking beyond high school to implement systemic improvements that help teenagers become successful adults.
Take Bolder Actions:
Align policies and resources to be more consistent, effective and aligned to maximize return on investments.

Do you ever feel like well-intentioned people around you are working hard but, to borrow a cliché, it looks like the left hand doesn’t know what the right hand is doing? Sometimes, the left hand even holds the right hand down.

That’s because policies, practices and funding streams that have been instituted over many years by many different people aren’t aligned – and young people suffer. Teachers don’t realize that a struggling student needs glasses, because they focus on test scores, not eye tests. A homeless youth spends nights in a hospital waiting room because the staff doesn’t know about a transitional living program nearby. Some children receive foster care, but not health care; shelter without education; counseling but little adult supervision.

This is where leaders make an enormous difference by bringing fragmented policies and practices together. They do this by implementing policy language, allocating resources and steering collaborations that promote the shared goals that the community or state has established for young people.

Here are resources that address common questions:

We create new policies all the time. What are some ways to align them with existing efforts?

You want to make sure your polices create a seamless system of supports. The Ready by 21 Policy Alignment Series Overview can inform any policy that creates a funding stream related to children and youth – no matter what topic it addresses (such as education or youth employment) and no matter what form it takes (be it a legislative statute, an executive order or a foundation Request for Proposals).

This paper, Align New Policies with Existing Efforts to Collaborate, in the Ready by 21 Policy Alignment Series, explains what can go wrong when policy language does not encourage new efforts to blend with existing collaborations – and provides examples of language that does.

Show us places that have done this.

Try Louisville, Ken., which traced its myriad funding streams that help youth, and used the results to create a new plan to coordinate services and map out new strategies. This presentation, Developing Strategies from Fiscal Mapping, will help you brainstorm about how to maximize disparate funding streams and ensure that the right services get where they are most needed.

Leaders at Kingsborough Community College (New York) made it their mission to align policies and resources to reach one vital goal: improve student success. The results: retention rates went from 54 to 70 percent, and the graduation rate increased by 40 percent. See how they did it in the Credentialed by 26 Series: Changing the Odds for Students- Spotlight on Kingsborough College.
Take Bolder Actions:
Increase demand for improving effectiveness, scale and sustainability, and for reducing gaps in services.

In times of funding cuts or a crisis involving youth and youth services, you can count on this: Loud voices will demand better supports for young people. That’s laudable. But demanding higher quality supports for young people should not be relegated to crises. To achieve long-term, systemic change, that demand has to become part of the norm. To make that happen, you need:

- Public and private will (from businesses, for instance) to compel action.
- Political and bureaucratic will to create systemic change. An ongoing conversation – one that routinely promotes public awareness and the voice of young people and the community.
- A way to cross traditional dividing lines – such as geography, ages and outcome areas – in order to achieve a big-picture vision for all young people.

Here are resources that address common questions:

Where can we learn about using advocacy to change youth policies?

SparkAction, managed by the Forum for Youth Investment, is a resource for advocacy by and for children and youth. Its Action Center provides tips and toolkits for reaching legislators, tracking bills, communicating your message and funding your efforts.

Use the Spitfire Strategies Smart Chart to develop and communicate the value of your organization or initiative to key audiences. Go to the website, provide basic information about your work and learn how you can improve your messaging.
**Take Bolder Actions:**

**Engage youth, families and community members in solutions – building their capacity in the full range of action strategies.**

We've all heard youth and parents voice their opinions at public gatherings – a youth summit, a school board meeting, a protest. That's admirable, but what changed because of their involvement?

Usually, not much. For the kind of fundamental change that you are seeking now, you need true engagement.

That means youth, families and community members having meaningful, regular involvement. That involvement goes beyond providing input, to being active in the work: brainstorming, identifying goals and carrying out solutions.

This kind of engagement ensures that solutions are crafted with the voices of those who are affected, that the efforts take deeper root, and that a wider range of players develop their leadership skills – be it a local business owner, a parent looking to improve safety or a teenager who wants to improve her neighborhood.

**Here are resources that address common questions:**

**We'd like to involve youth, but don't know how.**

Start out by reading *Core Principles for Engaging Young People in Community Change*. The principles are important but simple concepts for putting the idea of youth engagement into practice. They can be implemented in a wide range of organizations, including schools, youth organizations, community centers and groups already focused on community change.

We know this work is easier said than done. This study, *Youth-Adult Partnerships in Public Action: Principles, Organizational Culture and Outcomes*, takes youth engagement from theoretical to practical. Learn effective organizational and management practices that can help any organization or collaboration advance their youth engagement efforts.

SparkAction’s *Youth Voices* page highlights young people’s experiences and ideas, and keeps the youth field informed of ways that young people can be a voice for change. Check this site regularly for inspiring stories and ideas on ways to promote youth engagement in your community.

The Forum for Youth Investment has helped several communities convene youth panels to discuss school reform, and used that experience to write a *Primer on Creating Effective Youth Panels*. The report takes you through a series of steps in considering and convening youth panels, which can be applied to any issue of youth concern.

You can also form a permanent youth council: a body made up of youth who advise high-level decision makers and elected officials. Such councils, says the National League of Cities, are “a popular and effective way to get more youth involved in solving local problems and more actively engaged in the community.” This report from the Forum, *Building Effective Youth Councils*, explains the rationale behind them and the keys to making them effective.

**How do we get parents involved?**

Try the *Parent Engagement Toolkit*, developed by America's Promise Alliance (a Ready by 21 National Partner). Designed to engage parents in dropout prevention, you can apply the ideas and examples in this toolkit to organize effective parent engagement for a broad range of child and youth issues.

**Tell us more about community involvement.**

United Way Worldwide (the Ready by 21 Signature Partner) put community engagement front and center in *Voices for the Common Good: America Speaks Out on Education*. The report tells of aspirations, concerns and actions in communities across the country, gleaned from covenings held in local United Ways, focus groups and a national poll.