



Learn and Earn to Achieve Potential (LEAP) is a five-year, \$24 million initiative to increase employment and educational opportunities for young people facing some of the greatest challenges on the path to adulthood. Partially funded by the Corporation for National and Community Service's Social Innovation Fund and the Annie E. Casey Foundation, this effort also involves four national organizations — Jobs for America's Graduates, Jobs for the Future, MDRC and School and Main Institute — and 10 local partnerships. We seek co-investors to join us in learning and building evidence on what best serves young people.

About the Initiative

LEAP aims to help youth and young adults ages 14–25 — particularly those who have been involved in the child welfare and criminal justice systems, or who are homeless — succeed in school and at work by tailoring two evidence-based models to address their specific needs and challenges. Research shows that youth transitioning from foster care, for example, are less likely to complete a postsecondary degree or find and keep stable jobs.

The Jobs for America's Graduates model helps youth earn a high school degree, develop professional skills and gain employment or enroll in postsecondary education. Jobs for the Future's Back on Track model provides a range of academic enrichment and other support programs to help young people prepare for and enroll in postsecondary education and, ultimately, build paths to careers by earning a degree or credential. Through LEAP, we will explore adaptations of these models that focus on the distinct challenges facing young people who are involved in systems or who are homeless, including support to address the trauma they may have experienced in their lives.

Our partnership with the Social Innovation Fund will build further evidence on the effectiveness of these two models in creating stronger pathways to postsecondary education and employment for young people, lifting up high-performing organizations doing just that. It also will promote the broader adoption of these models among public systems so that even more youth and young adults throughout the nation can reach their full potential.



Learn and Earn to Achieve Potential at a Glance

Who: The Casey Foundation, Jobs for America's Graduates, Jobs for the Future, MDRC, School and Main Institute and 10 local partnerships

What: A Social Innovation Fund initiative to connect young people with postsecondary education and employment

Focus: Young people ages 14–25 in the child welfare or juvenile justice system, or who are homeless

Why: To improve educational and economic opportunities for youth and young adults

Budget: \$24 million over five years

LEAP Local Partnerships

The 10 local partnerships participating in this effort will each receive up to \$200,000 annually to employ adaptations of the Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG) or Back on Track models for youth in their respective areas. The partnerships represent a very diverse portfolio in terms of youth served (over 80 percent youth of color), geography, model selected and systems involved.

The partnerships:

- **Center for Alternative Sentencing and Employment Services** (New York) will use JAG's model for youth who are not in school to help young people involved in the criminal justice system further develop their work experience and advance professionally. The organization and its partners will focus on youth in Harlem and Brooklyn.
- **Coalition for Responsible Community Development** (Los Angeles) will apply the JAG and Back on Track models to help youth in and transitioning from foster care earn their high school diploma or GED, enter the job market or successfully move into postsecondary education. The organization and its partners will focus on young people in South and East Los Angeles, where almost half of youth in foster care have not completed high school.
- **Covenant House Alaska** (Anchorage, Alaska) will use JAG's model geared toward youth who are not in school to provide mentoring, coaching and community-based learning opportunities to foster career readiness among Anchorage and rural Alaskan youth involved in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, or who are homeless.
- **The Door** (New York) will use the Back on Track model to bolster its existing college-access and employment and training programs at its Lower Manhattan and Bronx locations, for New York City youth involved in the child welfare or juvenile justice system.
- **Jobs for Arizona's Graduates** (Phoenix) will team up with a local dropout prevention program to expand the reach of its JAG program to young people who are involved in the child welfare or juvenile justice system, or who are homeless, in Phoenix and Tucson.
- **Jobs for Michigan's Graduates** (Benton Harbor, Michigan) will focus on youth who are involved in the child welfare or juvenile justice systems, or who are homeless, in Benton Harbor, Detroit and Flint. The organization and its partners will expand an established JAG model that helps young people who are not in school earn their high school diploma or GED, find a job or enroll in postsecondary education or a training program.
- **Nebraska Children and Families Foundation** (Lincoln, Nebraska) will provide an array of support services to Lincoln and Omaha youth in foster care to successfully move into postsecondary education, using the Back on Track model.

- **Project for Pride in Living** (Minneapolis) will apply JAG’s model in seven of Minneapolis Public Schools’ alternative schools, focusing on youth involved in the foster care and juvenile justice systems in Hennepin County. The organization and its partners will integrate several newly launched programs to more effectively help young people earn a high school diploma, enter the job market or move into postsecondary education.
- **South Bay Community Services** (San Diego) will weave Back on Track’s preparation and first-year support for postsecondary education into its programming focused on education and employment for San Diego County youth exiting foster care or being released from juvenile justice facilities.
- **University of Southern Maine** (Portland, Maine) will use the JAG and Back on Track models to provide support for completing high school and preparing for postsecondary education and employment for Maine youth transitioning from foster care.

The partnerships will receive coaching and technical assistance on designing and implementing their local program. In addition to conducting a national evaluation throughout the initiative, we will bring them together to learn from one another and further strengthen system and policy work in the field.

Learning and Evaluation

The goal of the Social Innovation Fund is to evaluate and grow innovative community-based solutions that work. To that end, we will work with our local and national partners to track progress toward achieving program outcomes; collect and share data to support a national evaluation; promote continuous improvement throughout the initiative; and ensure participants receive the strongest services possible. National and local partners will come together periodically to share lessons and identify areas for practice and system improvement throughout implementation and evaluation.

The national evaluation will involve a two-phase process to build evidence on what it takes to help youth involved in systems earn credentials and develop careers. MDRC will lead the first phase, assessing and describing the early implementation of each model and, drawing from this formative work, identifying the most appropriate design to measure the impact on youth outcomes. The second phase will involve measuring the impact of the two models on youth outcomes, emphasizing education and employment, and will be led by an evaluation consultant chosen through a competitive process.

LEAP offers a unique opportunity to identify effective strategies for enabling youth and young adults involved in systems to make a successful transition to adulthood, equipped with the education and skills they need to not only get a job but build lifelong careers.

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