

# Strategic Plan 2021 - 2026



# Mission

We're on a mission to equip young people with the skills to overcome barriers and succeed in education, employment, and in life.

# Vision

We envision a Michigan where every young person is educated, employed, and career-bound.



# Dear Partners:

We started this strategic planning journey 15-months ago with one driving question: “How do we plan boldly on behalf of Michigan youth while simultaneously narrowing our focus to dig in deep?” The process challenged us to think bigger, change quicker, and fight the status quo. Tackling the problems surrounding education and employment for Michigan’s most vulnerable youth requires big and bold approaches with measure and focus.

When the COVID pandemic struck on month nine of our planning, everything about our world (and our plan) shifted. The state funding we had built our organization on disappeared overnight. Youth disconnection rates from education and employment soared to unprecedented levels. Students left schools, uncertain as to their return date. Employers who had been desperate for a talent pipeline were no longer returning calls. And the virtual world became the new normal.

COVID-19 is undeniably bad. The pandemic will forever be synonymous with incomprehensible death and economic devastation. Yet, disruption of such significant magnitude lends towards bold visions and sharpened focus. Our planning moved from nice-to-have to make-or-break. Michigan’s youth could no longer wait for a conveniently timed solution, and our organization might not be able to wait either for fear of insolvency without decisive action.

So, here you have it: our bold, focused plan to change Michigan’s education and workforce development landscapes in service to vulnerable youth populations. This plan is pandemic-tested and partner-approved. With success in execution, it will move our organization and all our actions dramatically closer to delivering on the vision that all Michigan youth are educated, employed, and career-bound.

We cannot wait to get started. In fact, we already have.



*Jeff Swears*

Jeff Swears  
Board Chairperson



*Kristin Harrington*

Kristin Harrington  
Executive Director

# Strategic Plan 2021-2026

## Table of Contents

Introduction to Youth Solutions, Inc.	Page 4
Executive Summary	Page 5
The Planning Process	Page 6
Our Organizational Values	Page 7
The Environmental Scan	Page 8
Strategic Priorities	Page 9
Strategic Priority #1	Page 10-11
Strategic Priority #2	Page 12-13
Strategic Priority #3	Page 14-15
Organizational Health Indicators	Page 16-17
Acknowledgments	Page 18-19

# Introduction to Youth Solutions

A statewide nonprofit that offers opportunity pathways to education and employment success for Michigan's vulnerable youth.

The organization was legally established as a 501(c)3 organization in March 2017, but has been operating Jobs for Michigan's Graduates (JMG) programming since 2008.

In 13 years of JMG programming, we have served as both a direct service provider and intermediary partner, focusing on in and out-of-school youth, ages 14-26.

Since 2008, JMG has served

**16,000** vulnerable youth 

In 2019 - 2020, served 3,200+ youth across every region of Michigan, all of whom have significant barriers to education and employment success

**85%+**

of graduates go onto



Employment



Post-Secondary Education



Military

Eight Years of graduation rates that are



**90%+**

## Critical Partnerships

**65+ PARTNERING ORGANIZATIONS**

Michigan Works! System  
Jobs for America's Graduates ("JAG")



School Districts

Non-Profits

Adult Education Providers



# Executive Summary

At Youth Solutions, young people are the center of our mission. A great many of our state's youth are subject to potentially poor outcomes relative to other same aged-peers, and thus are deserving of services that help them succeed in education, employment, and in life. To expand our impact and help more youth succeed, our strategic plan has three priorities:

**Go All-In on Partnerships:** Partnerships are a hallmark of our success and will define our organization into the future. These partnerships will vastly expand the network of organizations working together under the same vision, mission, and outcomes. Our "collaboration" value will guide all work, bringing new national partners, widening our network, and aligning previously disparate organizations in support of vulnerable youth.

**Accelerate Post-Graduation Pathways & Sustainable Employment.** The Jobs for Michigan's Graduates (JMG) model for 9-12 grades has decades of solid results. To expand impact, we will create an open-entry, open-exit model that expands the continuum down to middle school and up to 24 months post-graduation. This will allow us to support medium-term outcomes that demonstrate success beyond high school, such as postsecondary persistence and credential attainment.

**Employers will be a core partner in this work.** Utilizing the JAG "Employer Engagement Framework," youth will gain personalized, hands-on experience within a job or industry. With widespread private sector commitments to diverse talent pipelines and new engagement opportunities afforded by virtual work, there has never been a better time for a strategic commitment to employer partnerships.

**Diversify Funding and Build a Trusted Brand.** Lastly, we will ignite the resource engine that supports the above work. Youth Solutions has historically relied on the State of Michigan for appropriated funding. For long-term sustainability, it is essential to diversify funding. Our efforts will prioritize the private sector, philanthropic community, earned revenue and leveraged funding through new and existing partnerships. Moreover, we will widen our state partnership to include diversified public sector funding, including federal and community-based resources. In addition, building awareness of our organization through marketing and communications will drive development efforts.

With the above accomplished, the Youth Solutions organization will be the go-to experts for vulnerable young populations. The brand will be trusted and there will be a growing network of vocal brand ambassadors and alumni who are actively engaged in our efforts. **We will be the living embodiment of our name, offering proven solutions for Michigan's most vulnerable youth.**

# The Planning Process

## PHASE 1

### Strategic Plan Preparation

July 2019 - October 2019

The Youth Solutions Board of Directors launched the planning process and staff leadership contracted with Lansing-based firm Public Sector Consultants (PSC) to facilitate all board sessions.

## PHASE 3

### Environmental Scan / Stakeholder Engagement

October 2019 - January 2020

The Youth Solutions staff conducted external environmental scanning which included stakeholder interviews and a review of workforce, education, general, and economic indicators.

## PHASE 5

### Writing of Draft Plan

April 2020 - August 2020

Additional JMG staff were enlisted for organizational visioning and further refinement of the plan. The draft plan was presented for requested feedback and refinement.

## PHASE 7

### Adoption of Final Plan by Board of Directors

October 2020

The Board of Directors adopted the final plan at the October 16th board meeting.

## PHASE 2

### Strategic Planning Session Facilitation

October 2019

The Board of Directors and Youth Solutions staff reviewed the organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats and aligned on slight modifications to the vision, mission while reinforcing the values and customer.

## PHASE 4

### Phase 4: Strategic Planning Session Facilitation - Part 2

January 2020 - April 2020

The Board of Directors and staff leadership identified key goals and strategies and started the prioritization process for the five-year plan. In addition, stakeholders provided feedback which resulted in organizational mission and vision refinement.

## PHASE 6

### Phase 6: Finalization of Plan

August 2020 - October 2020

The plan was designed for visual enhancement and high quality communication. Plan implementation for 2020 - 2021 program year started.

# Our Values

## Collaboration

We've never worked alone, and we never will. We deliver wider-reaching and more sustainable impact when we work together. That's why we value collaboration, not competition. In the classroom, we're a family – we build each other up and have each others' backs.

## Excellence

From achieving excellent outcomes on behalf of young people to delivering excellent customer service to our partners, we focus on excellence in all that we do. Good is never good enough when young people's lives are on the line. We don't stop until our young people are successful.



## Leadership

Michigan's education and workforce systems need strong leaders to drive transformational change. That's why we continually invest in the growth of our people with the goal to inspire others. Moreover, we're always developing the next generation of youth to lead Michigan's economy into the future.

## Solution Focused

We're always searching for new opportunities that will lead to more young people graduating, gaining employment, and beginning down the path towards a career with self-sustainability. When someone says it isn't possible, we pride ourselves on being the team that figures it out.



# The Environmental Scan

The data and stakeholder input from our research and 500+ stakeholders fell into **four primary areas** of opportunity and focus:

**#1** Address the rising rates of youth disconnection from education and employment.

Each year over 10,000 young people drop out of high school in Michigan. Without this foundational degree, they face an increased likelihood of:

**93%**

Unemployment

**88%**

Poverty

**63x**

Incarceration

**#2** Expand youth awareness of the career and postsecondary pathways available.

**50%**

of disconnected youth ages 16-24 contribute

**25% or more**

of their total household income

Often, vulnerable youth drop out of school to accept low paying jobs in order to provide for their families. Staying in school greatly increases lifetime earning potential as each year of college typically raises earnings by at least **9%**.

With the highest level of educational attainment youth earn:

**24%** more with a diploma

**50%** more with a vocational certificate or associate degree

**123%** more with a bachelor's degree

**#3** Place a concentrated effort on empowering youth to create their individual pathways to employment and success.



Across the state, youth grades 9-12:

**44%**

are economically disadvantaged

**15%**

live in areas of concentrated poverty

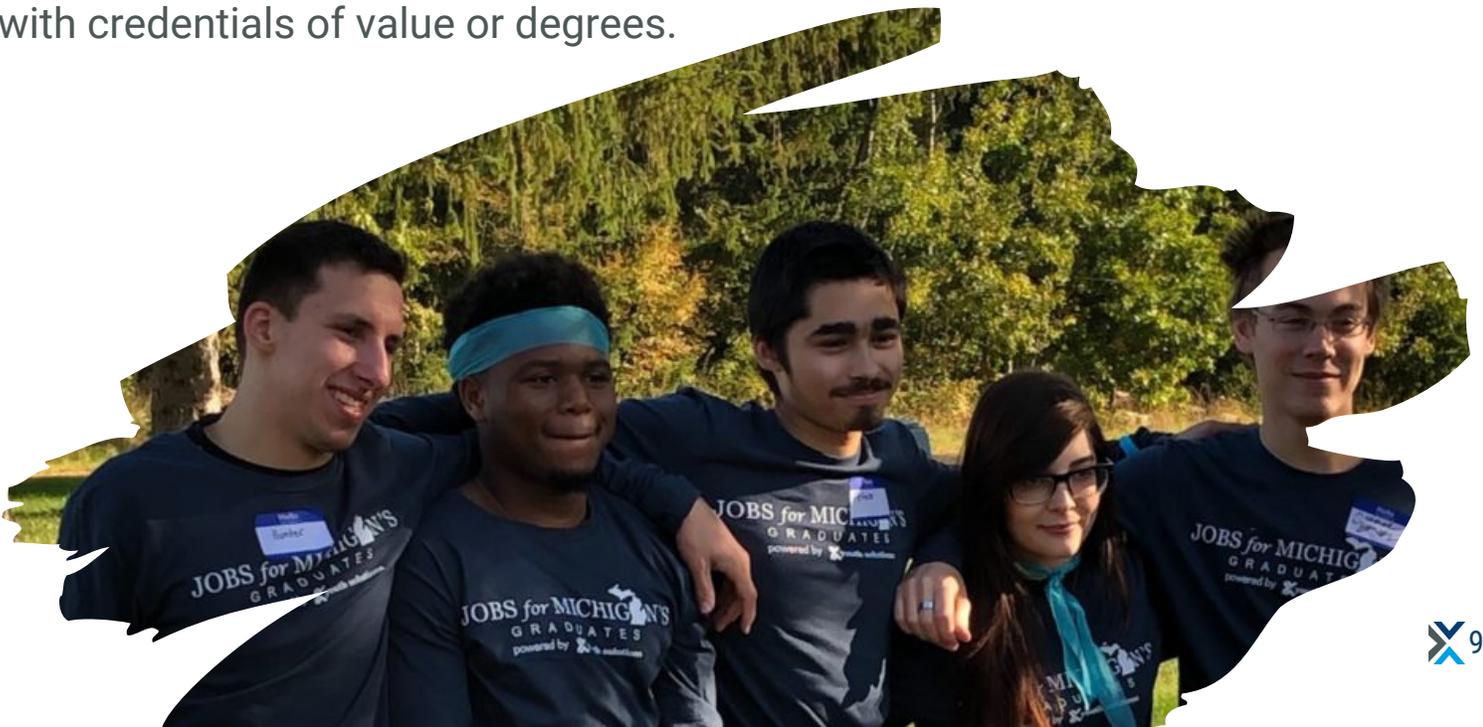
**#4** To ensure long term sustainability of the Youth Solutions organization, continue to expand fund diversification efforts and build awareness of Youth Solutions as a leading organization for positive youth education and employment outcomes.

# Strategic Priorities

Through the strategic planning process, Youth Solutions identified three priorities that will be the primary focus of its efforts over the next five years. The three priorities are:

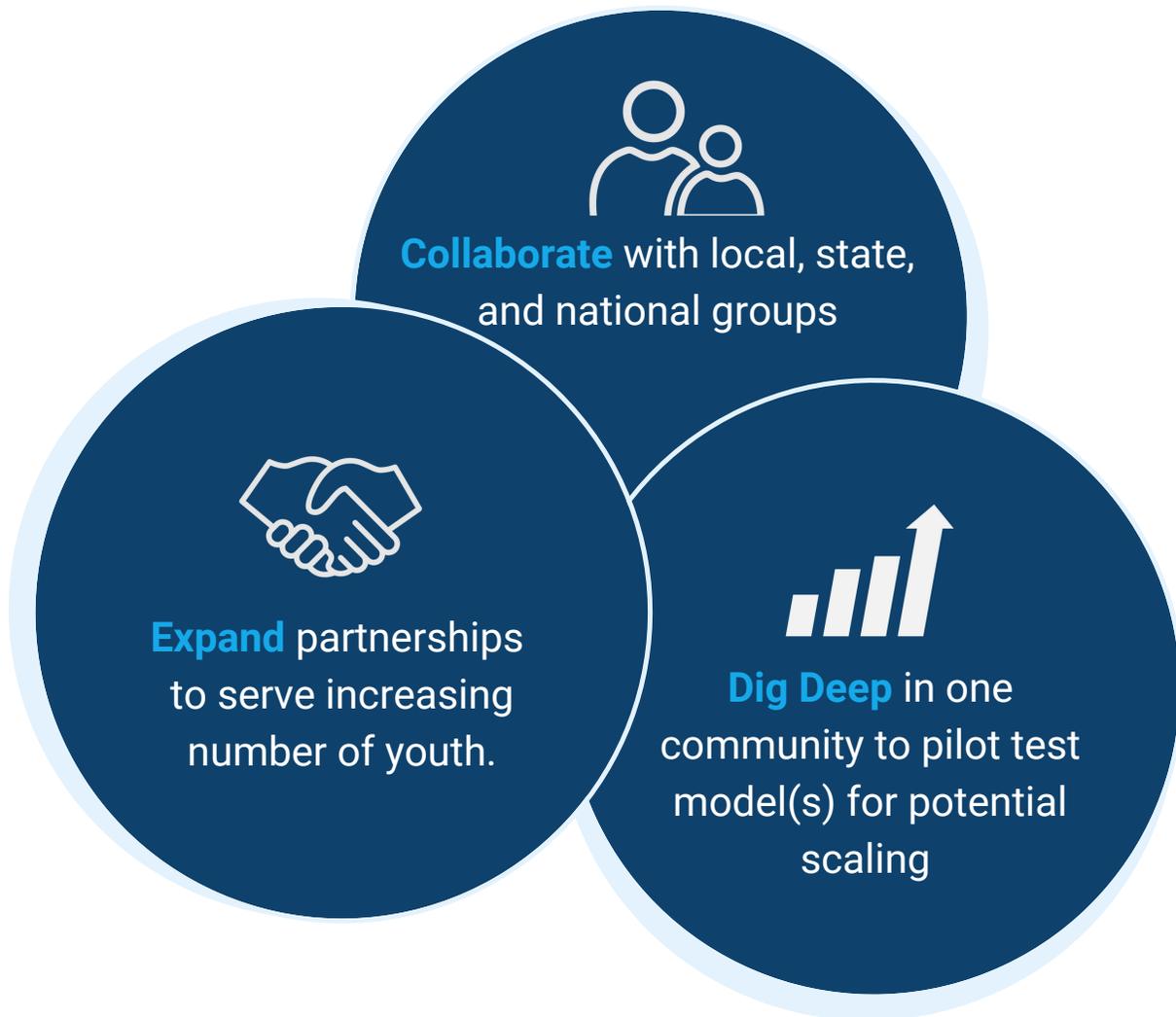
- **Priority #1: Go all-in on Partnerships that Expand and Deepen Services leading to Community-Level Impact for Vulnerable Youth**
- **Priority #2: Build an Open-Entry, Open-Exit Model that Accelerates Postsecondary and Career Pathways and Leads to Sustainable Employment**
- **Priority #3: Sustain the Organization through Diversified Funding Sources and a Trusted Brand**

These strategic priorities will position Youth Solutions to make a sustainable impact on the number of vulnerable young people in Michigan who are graduating from high school, obtaining post-secondary credentialing or degrees, and entering meaningful employment opportunities or the military with credentials of value or degrees.



# Priority #1: Go All-In On Partnerships

**Five-Year Vision:** Through innovative partnerships and collective work, Youth Solutions is leading community-level changes in education for Michigan's vulnerable youth.



Our unique partnership model is the hallmark of our continued success. We've never worked alone, and we never will.

# Priority #1: Go all-in on Partnerships

**Establish New and Maintain Existing Partnership Agreements to Serve 10,000 Youth Annually by 2026 (200% increase)**

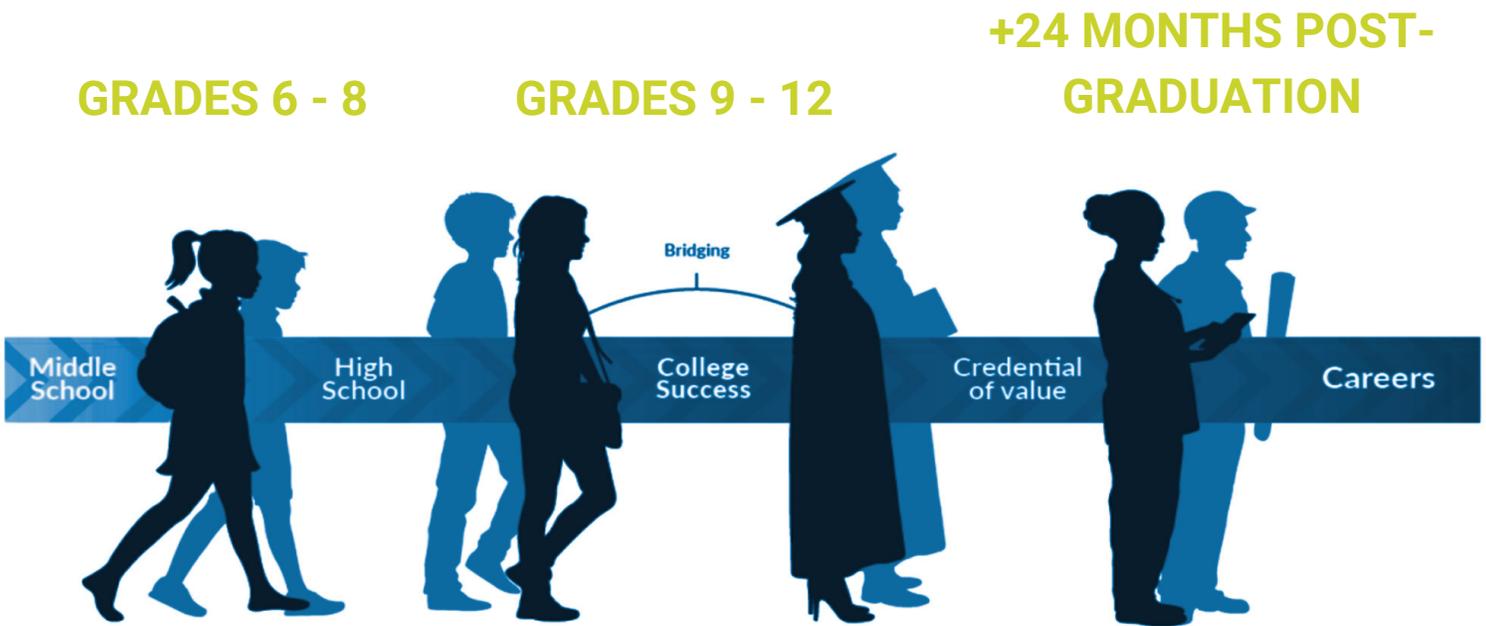
**Expand Services through the Establishment of Robust Partnerships with Local, State &/or National Organization(s)**

**Launch Collective Outcomes Model aimed at High School Graduation & Post-Graduation Success within one Community; Pilot and Position Model for Statewide Scaling**

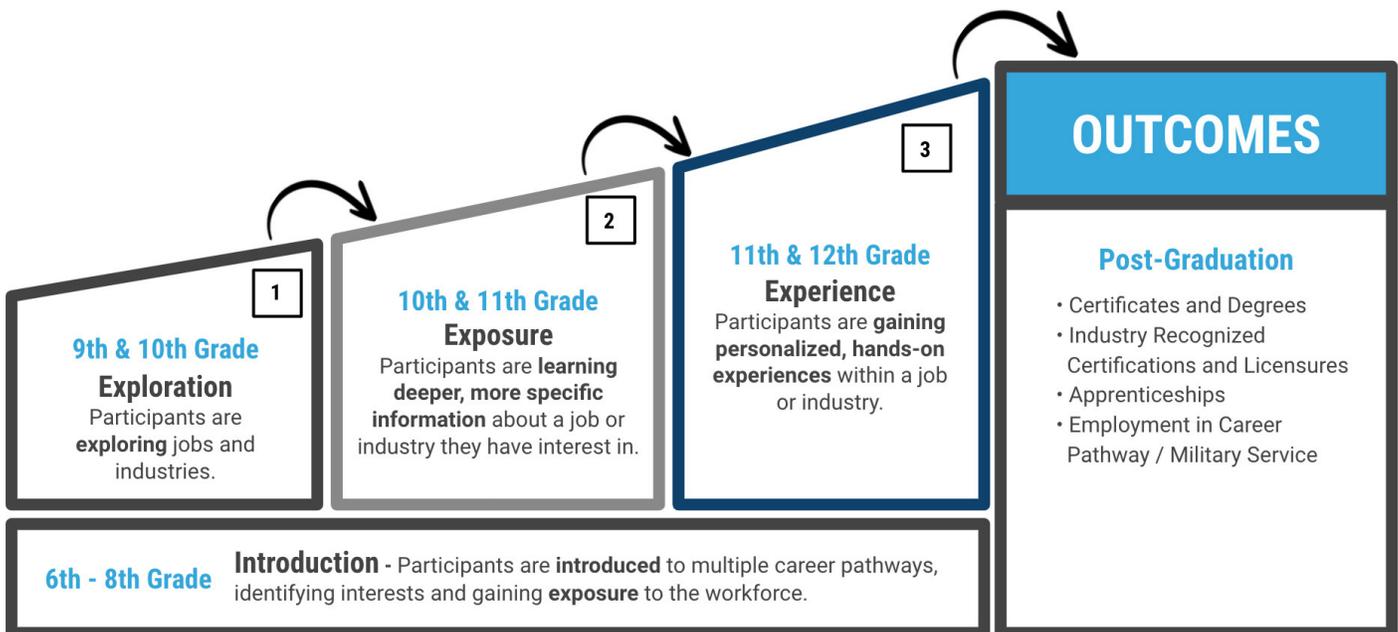
<p><b>Level I</b></p>	<p>Youth Solutions services are the mechanism whereby all Michigan Works! youth-focused programs are delivered with intentional focus on vulnerable and disconnected youth populations.</p>	<p>Increase collaboration with JAG National Network, identifying other JAG National states with aligned plans to pursue collaborative network initiatives, build multi-state coalitions, and support fund development.</p>	<p>Define and establish Collective Outcomes Model in one community to include: common agenda, shared measurement systems, reinforcing activities, communication, and shared infrastructure</p>
<p><b>Level II</b></p>	<p>Transition away from Youth Solutions-employed program staff with emphasis on contracted services and prioritization of partnerships.</p>	<p>Identify and partner with other non-profits with mission alignment to fill gaps and services aimed at Michigan youth.</p>	<p>Pivot aspects of Youth Solutions funding model to grantmaking in support of Collective Outcomes Model and partnership emphasis.</p>
<p><b>Level III</b></p>	<p>Expand contractual partnerships with school districts, governmental entities, non-profits, and intermediate school districts with no or minimal cost burden to Youth Solutions, emphasizing value-add services.</p>	<p>Add at least one new national partner to the portfolio of services; consider a focus on middle school and/or post-graduation services to offset weaknesses of JAG National model(s).</p> <hr/> <p>Establish partnerships with the private sector through chambers of commerce, trade unions, trade organizations, or other employer-driven convening or consortium organization</p>	<p>Replication and statewide scaling of proven Collective Outcomes Model components.</p>

# Priority #2: Accelerate Post-Grad Pathways and Employment

**Five-Year Vision:** Enable all youth to graduate, prepared for postsecondary training and/or employment with supported pathways to success.



## Employer Engagement Framework



# Priority #2: Accelerate Post-Grad Pathways and Employment

Extend Program Models to Serve Youth from 6th Grade through 24 Months Post-Graduation

Establish a comprehensive employer-based mentoring structure for youth where participants gain personalized, hands-on experience within a job or industry

Post-graduation, youth secure employment in jobs that require a minimum of a postsecondary certificate or industry-recognized credential

Deepen service delivery with the aim of creating / collaborating, testing, and proving model(s) for long-term youth outcomes in education and employment

	Extend Program Models to Serve Youth from 6th Grade through 24 Months Post-Graduation	Establish a comprehensive employer-based mentoring structure for youth where participants gain personalized, hands-on experience within a job or industry	Post-graduation, youth secure employment in jobs that require a minimum of a postsecondary certificate or industry-recognized credential	Deepen service delivery with the aim of creating / collaborating, testing, and proving model(s) for long-term youth outcomes in education and employment
Level I	Secure approval of high school curriculum under the Michigan Merit Curriculum legislation for core academic credit.	By the completion of high school or equivalent credentialing, all youth have participated in the "Explore, Expose, Experience" model of employer engagement.	Develop and deepen partnerships with post-secondary institutions who have demonstrated success with our population and programs with direct ties to industry.	All curriculum is available in traditional 6-12th, Alternative Education, and Dropout Recovery modifications with in-person, virtual, or hybrid delivery mechanisms.
Level II	Structure a 24-month post-graduation period with robust service delivery, outcomes tracking, and extensive partnerships for youth education/employment success	Achieve 75% FAFSA completion for all eligible youth.	Implement a data tracking system that allows for effectively capturing the employer engagement model, including mentoring-specific ("experience") data.	All YS-generated curriculum or services are packaged for partner usage and/or earned revenue with rigorous intellectual property protections.
Level III	Pilot a Middle School Model application and evaluate pilot effectiveness for potential statewide scaling.	Establish mutually reinforcing partnerships with mentoring-focused organizations to leverage strengths and build on existing infrastructure.	Establish comprehensive industry maps and/or leverage partner mapping for each of Michigan's identified in-demand industries to include robust career mapping.	Model(s) are complementary and establish a pipeline from middle school to 24-months post graduation, inclusive of youth who have dropped out and are being re-engaged into education.
Level IV	Implement a new and expanded data tracking system that allows for the capturing of data from 6th grade through 24-months post graduation, inclusive of the employer engagement and all post-grad outcomes.	Structure a formal mentoring program to include youth / employer-mentor "fit" and one (or more) of the following: job shadow, internship, pre-apprenticeship, volunteer opportunities, and/or informal mentorship.		

# Priority #3: Diversify Funding and Build a Trusted Brand

**Five-Year Vision:** Youth Solutions has a sustainable, diversified funding mix of public and private sector funds, has a community of committed supporters and leverages every available dollar through extensive partnership models. YS is recognized as the go-to experts in the youth education and employment space within Michigan.

## Diversifying Funding Sources

- Private Sector
- Philanthropic Community
- Earned Revenue
- Leveraged Funding
- Diversified Public Sector Mix



## Building a Trusted Brand

We will be the living embodiment of our name, offering proven solutions for Michigan's most vulnerable youth.

# Priority #3: Diversify Funding and Build a Trusted Brand



Diversified public sector revenue accounts for 55% of annual YS budget

Private sector & earned revenue accounts for 45% of annual YS budget

Contracted partners leverage additional revenue in support of YS-related services equal to or in excess of corresponding 70% of annual YS budget

Support achievement of Youth Solutions strategic priorities through high impact marketing and communications tools, approaches and activities

	Diversified public sector revenue accounts for 55% of annual YS budget	Private sector & earned revenue accounts for 45% of annual YS budget	Contracted partners leverage additional revenue in support of YS-related services equal to or in excess of corresponding 70% of annual YS budget	Support achievement of Youth Solutions strategic priorities through high impact marketing and communications tools, approaches and activities
Level I	Diversify public sector investments through state and local vendor agreements that serve targeted / niche youth within the broader vulnerable population.	Engage the philanthropic and corporate community through proven and comprehensive development strategies that target foundation, corporate, and individual investors with a passion for our mission.	Partner with organizations operating federally funded program(s) that target vulnerable populations, prioritize education and employment outcomes, and serve ages 12-26.	Consistently seek out and use best in class technology platforms and tools (digital, collateral materials, story telling) for optimal engagement by range of stakeholders in support of organization's goals.
Level II	Increase state appropriated funding through demonstrated success in outcomes that serve Michigan's vulnerable youth. Pursue diversified public sector funding mix in tandem with legislature and Administration.	Build a private sector-led Board of Directors who are committed to diversified funding sources with a private sector-majority mix and actively engage both personally and through their networks to contribute to this goal.	Increase school district, partner, and/or philanthropic contributions to affiliate organizations through formalized contracting and established fee structures.	Expand network of vocal advocates and engaged brand ambassadors. Amplify the youth voice to represent a network of current and alumni active advocates.
Level III	Pursue competitively-awarded federal funding through grant solicitations and/or in tandem with state department(s).	Increase earned revenue through new partnerships and value-add services.	Employer partners pay affiliates for new hires after retaining program graduates in employment for a specified length of time.	Utilize platforms that position Youth Solutions staff as thought leaders and the "go-to" experts in the youth education and employment space.
Level IV		Implement a new fundraising and donor management software solution that streamlines data, reporting and related processes.		Hold thought leadership meetings/convenings with array of stakeholders to uncover service opportunities and make a broader impact, consistent with shared goals.

# Organizational Health Indicators

Youth Solutions, Inc. will maintain a common set of expectations for organizational health indicators, benchmarking on a year-to-year basis throughout this five-year strategic plan.

## #1. Commitment to Outcomes & Impact

We will expand and deepen service delivery aimed at longer-term outcomes. Despite this outcome's focus, we remain ever mindful that the ultimate goal of our work is to change structures, organizations, communities, and systems. Achievement of our mission requires transformative impact. With our commitment to never work alone, we will build a culture of effective partnerships. Organizational partners will be a secondary customer and partnerships will be cultivated, prioritized, and nurtured to ensure long-term success.



## #2. Quality

Quality must remain a hallmark strength and is a commitment to our talented staff, partners, service offerings, and Board. We will:

- Seek talent and actively develop staff using best practices in talent management. Trauma informed care will be infused into training to care for the needs of our team.
- Partner with best-in-class organizations who share in our mission. Quality will remain front-and-center. We will complement, not duplicate.
- Ensure consistent service delivery with demonstrable outcomes. Trauma informed care will be an aspect of all youth service delivery.





### #3. Diversity & Inclusion

We must act in a manner that is inclusive, with acceptance, welcoming, and equal treatment for individuals of every background, culture, and societal trait. We must also model diversity - from our Board of Directors to our staff leadership to the young people we serve.

### #4. Fiscal Oversight and Resource Development

We will champion an excellent level of stewardship for company resources and partnerships, maximizing assets, attracting new resources, and building and sustaining a culture of effective partnerships.





# Acknowledgements

This strategic plan would not have been possible without the participation, leadership, and support from the 500+ individuals and organizations who devoted their time and talents to this process. Your insight and candor were instrumental in crafting a bold and focused plan on behalf of Michigan's vulnerable youth. Our gratitude to the organizational investors, partners, employers, and philanthropic leaders who participated in this planning process, including:

The Michigan Works! System • The Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity (LEO)

The State of Michigan Legislature • The Michigan College Access Network

The Department of Health and Human Services • AT&T of Michigan

Strada Education Network • America's Promise Alliance • The Annie E. Casey Foundation

The Vera and Joseph Dresner Foundation • Business Leaders for Michigan

Bill Marsh Auto Group • DTE Energy • Operating Engineers 328 •

Detroit Regional Chamber of Commerce • Lake Michigan College • Henry Ford College

# Thank you

To Kinexus Group, Lead Star, JMG (Jobs for Maine's Graduates), and Public Sector Consultants for lending your consultative expertise to this process. Appreciation to our talented staff, affiliates, students, and alumni. Your voices laid the foundation for this plan and will be at the heart of this work for years to come.

Lastly, extensive gratitude to our Board of Directors for your visionary leadership and support throughout this process. Special thanks to each of you:

- **Jeff Swears** (Board Chair): Chief Financial Officer at Alma College
- **Elaine Wood** (Board Vice Chair): Principal and Founder at Woodside Strategies Consulting
- **Barbara Anderson** (Board Secretary): Retired Legal Counsel at Dow Corning
- **Sam Singh** (Finance Committee Chair): Chief Executive Officer at Public Policy Associates
- **Roger Curtis**: Vice President of Public Affairs at Consumers Energy
- **Dr. Sarah Elmouchi**: Owner and Pediatrician at Cascade Pediatrics
- **Vail Harding**: President of Vail Rubber Works, Inc.
- **Kevin Stotts**: President of Talent 2025
- **John Kaczynski**: Director of Governmental Affairs at Saginaw Valley State University
- **Tarence Wheeler**: Director of Corporate and Community Affairs at River Rouge Community Schools
- **Edythe Copeland**: Retired Chief Executive Officer of Capital Area Michigan Works!
- **Vicky Kruslemsky**: Chief Talent Officer at Commonwealth Associates, Inc.
- **Todd Gustafson**: President and Chief Executive Officer at Kinexus Group
- **Orrin Bailey**: Chief Financial Officer at Kinexus Group
- **(Emeritus): The Honorable Maura Corrigan**: Retired Chief Justice of the Michigan Supreme Court