



IMPACT AREA:
EDUCATION
AND YOUTH

PATH FINDERS

A **CITIES OF SERVICE** BLUEPRINT

Path Finders is a high-impact volunteering strategy in which the mayor's office engages local employers to provide volunteers to help middle school students develop career goals that will inspire them to achieve academically.

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PATH FINDERS

Path Finders is a high-impact volunteering strategy in which the mayor's office engages local employers to provide volunteers to help middle school students develop career goals that will inspire them to achieve academically.

Path Finders is a six-week afterschool program for middle school students that expands their awareness of career options through career mentoring, self-exploration and academic planning. Volunteers who serve as Career Facilitators lead weekly group discussions and activities for middle school-aged youth based on the evidence-based curriculum, *JA It's My Future*, a middle school workforce readiness curriculum designed and copyrighted by Junior Achievement USA (JA). The program curriculum, designed by Junior Achievement of Central Florida, introduces participants to a variety of concepts, including job interview basics and the importance of making short- and long-term academic and career plans. Additional volunteers include local professionals who serve as Career Coaches. Career Coaches speak to students about their careers and potentially volunteer a tour at their workplace for the students. By sharing real world experiences and viewpoints, Career Coaches give students realistic, practical guidance about careers.





BACKGROUND

Career awareness and planning is an important part of youth development.¹ Without career goals (an idea of what kind of jobs youth might want to have as adults and an understanding of how to prepare for these jobs), young people are less likely to pursue rigorous courses, less motivated to achieve, and more likely to fall off track academically and behaviorally.² Nationally, every year, nearly one million students leave high school before earning a high school degree. Many drop out because they don't believe their courses are relevant or understand how education provides a pathway to achieving career goals. Surveys conducted as part of the 2006 Silent Epidemic report prepared by Civic Enterprises in association with Peter Hart Associates, found that 81 percent of dropouts felt that efforts to make school more relevant—including opportunities for real-world learning and connecting school to work—would have encouraged them to stay in school.³

Middle school years are an opportune time for increased career programming.⁴ For middle school-aged youth, career goals may be general and may well change over time. However, youth who are able to see a clear and transparent connection between their academic curriculum and tangible opportunities in the labor market are more likely to continue their education and make good choices about courses, extracurricular activities, and post-secondary education.⁵ Learning about career options can also encourage students to make good choices about their social activities, behavior, and how they spend their out-of-school time.⁶

In particular, youth from low-income families can benefit from career-related programming, as they are less likely to know about many career options, understand the connection between careers and education, or have college-

¹ David Blustein, *The Relationship between Career Development and Educational Development: A Selected Review of the Literature*. Accessed at http://www.pacareerstandards.com/documents/RA-3_Career_Development.pdf.

² William C. Symonds, Robert Schwartz, and Ronald F. Ferguson, 2011. *Pathways to Prosperity: Meeting the Challenge of Preparing Young Americans for the 21st Century*. Cambridge, MA: Pathways to Prosperity Project, Harvard University Graduate School of Education.

³ John M. Bridgeland, John J. Dilulio Jr., Karen Burke Morison, 2006. *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts*. Civic Enterprises and Peter D. Hart Research Associates. For the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

⁴ Leslie Santee Siskin, 2013. *College and Career Readiness in Context*. Education Funders Research Initiative <http://edfundersresearch.com/sites/edfundersresearch.com/files/Edfunders%20Paper%20%231.pdf>.

⁵ William C. Symonds, Robert B. Schwartz and Ronald Ferguson, 2011. *Pathways to Prosperity: Meeting the Challenge of Preparing Young Americans for the 21st Century*. Report issued by the Pathways to Prosperity Project, Harvard Graduate School of Education

⁶ Patrick L. Hill, Anthony L. Burrow, & Rachel Sumner. 2007 Robert H. Baldwin Fellowship Report; "Addressing important questions in the field of adolescent purpose." *Child Development Perspectives*, 7 (2013), 232-236.



educated adults in their lives who can coach them through the college and career planning process.⁷ An intensive effort like Path Finders, to help middle-school youth from low-income families learn about career options and develop their own sense of purpose, can be led by adult volunteers or national service participants, and can be augmented by a range of activities such as job shadowing, speakers, workplace visits, and service-learning projects.

⁷ Mariam Ashtiani and Cynthia Feliciano, "Mentorship and the Postsecondary Attainment of Low-income Youth." Research Brief 5, Pathways to Postsecondary Success, 2012. Accessed Sept. 19, 2014 at http://pathways.gseis.ucla.edu/publications/201209_MentorshipRB.pdf.





REQUIRED ELEMENTS

- 1** The mayor's office meets with the local Junior Achievement (JA) chapter to secure the JA It's My Future curriculum and identify appropriate technical support. The Path Finders program uses JA It's My Future as the leading curriculum because it is focused on the middle school population, evidence-based, and tested. There is also a network of local Junior Achievement chapters to provide curriculum implementation support. Local chapters can be found on this map: <https://www.juniorachievement.org/web/ja-usa/near-you>. (Alternative curriculum options can be found in the Resources section.)
- 2** The mayor convenes a Path Finders task force comprised of representatives from leading local employers and youth-serving organizations to discuss the initiative. The task force could be a stand-alone planning committee or be part of an existing working group focused on youth or workforce development.
- 3** The task force identifies afterschool providers or recreation programs serving middle schools students from low-income families. Additionally, the task force determines goals and metrics for the program. After determining the afterschool provider or recreation program that will implement the initiative, the mayor's office provides coordination and oversight and works with the task force to secure additional resources, including national service resources, if needed.
- 4** Based on the JA It's My Future curriculum requirements, the mayor's office and task force recruits volunteers through local employers and other sources to serve as program facilitators and career coaches. In collaboration with the local JA chapter, the task force arranges for Path Finders training to set reasonable expectations and prepare staff and volunteers for working with middle school students and program implementation.





- 5 **Program implementation, including pre- and post-program surveys of students, occurs over six weeks.**
- 6 **The task force engages program leaders to determine how the program can be improved in future sessions.**

REQUIRED METRICS INCLUDE:

- Number and percentage of youth who complete the program
- Change in career knowledge and personal goals identified (via pre- and post-program surveys administered by program coordinators)
- Number and percentage of students who see a connection between their education and career path (via pre- and post-program surveys administered by program coordinators)
- Number and percentage of students who report an increased desire to graduate (via pre- and post-program surveys administered by program coordinators)
- Number and percentage of students completing an individual career plan with academic goals as part of the Path Finders program

OPTIONAL METRICS MIGHT INCLUDE:

- Number of program sites
- Short-term student outcomes (e.g., attendance, behavior, classroom performance) as reported by schools (via pre- and post-program surveys administered by program coordinators)
- Long-term student outcomes (e.g., grade advancement, graduation rate) as reported by schools
- Number of and diversity of participating employers
- Percentage of participating students who avoid criminal activity or school suspensions
- Percentage of volunteers interested in participating in additional cycles of the program





EXECUTING THE PLAN

SELECTING AND SECURING JUNIOR ACHIEVEMENT PROGRAM MATERIALS

The Path Finders' program curriculum is based on *JA It's My Future*, a middle school workforce readiness curriculum designed and copyrighted by Junior Achievement USA (JA). This is the leading curriculum selected for this blueprint because it is focused on the middle school population, is evidence-based and tested with support from local JA chapters. (A list of additional evidence-based program curricula is included in the Resources section of this blueprint.)

JA is a nonprofit dedicated to giving young people the knowledge and skills they need to own their economic success, plan for their future, and make smart academic and economic choices. JA has 115 offices throughout the country. There is a nominal cost to use the *JA It's My Future* curriculum to help offset the cost for local JA staff to provide training and support to partners, volunteers, and participants. Contact your local Junior Achievement chapter to learn more: <https://www.juniorachievement.org/web/ja-usa/home>.

The task force should identify a funding source to pay for the cost of implementation. The task force can ask all employers that join the effort to contribute a modest amount, apply for funding from a local foundation or philanthropist, or conduct a crowdfunding campaign.

CREATING A TASK FORCE

While the mayor's office can lead a Path Finder's initiative without a task force, having a group specifically devoted to this initiative may make it easier to coordinate the process of engaging stakeholders and securing resources for the program. The task force can be a stand-alone planning committee or can be part of an existing group focused on a similar population, intervention, or focus area. The task force can be any size, but if it is its own entity or very large, a subgroup with expertise in youth programming should lead the program design.

The mayor's office should identify a diverse set of stakeholders to serve on the task force to plan for the initiative alongside the mayor's office and the local JA chapter. Task force members should include representatives from local for-profit and nonprofit





organizations, government agencies, the school district, civic groups (such as the Chamber of Commerce or Rotary Club), hospitals, higher education institutions, organizations serving youth that may be program host candidates (i.e. schools, afterschool programs/providers, youth recreation centers, youth clubs), and parent/caregiver organizations.

Additionally, at least two youth, selected from among youth connected to youth-serving organizations, should also be included on the task force. Alternatively, if the mayor has a youth council or cabinet, those members could provide input to the task force. School or career readiness staff from a local college may also serve as a valuable resource.

Task force staffing and program coordination should be provided directly by the mayor's office or national service member secured by the city or through a nonprofit partner. The program coordinator should hold quarterly coordination meetings with lead partners and keep the task force and any funders informed of the program's progress on an ongoing basis.

IDENTIFYING THE YOUTH TO RECEIVE CAREER COACHING

The mayor's office or task force should conduct a community assessment to identify areas where similar programs may already be operating. Identifying neighborhoods for possible program expansion or communities in need of such programs will help determine the groups of youth to participate in Path Finders. Due to the likelihood that they have fewer career resources available to them, youth from low-income families should be targeted for this program.

It will be easier to execute a program if the youth are of similar ages to one another and already meet regularly through a youth-serving organization. For example, the youth may already be regularly participating in an afterschool program, a recreation center, or a middle school class or club. Leaders of these programs should be members of the task force and closely involved in planning for implementation. Planners should try to bring the program to as many youth as possible, potentially all youth or all low-income youth in a selected community.





SECURING RESOURCES

Depending on the scale of the program, required resources may include staff support, national service stipends, stipends for trainers, printing, funding for background checks, and refreshments for trainings and recognition events. Path Finders can be attractive to donors interested in supporting youth education and career readiness. Partnerships with public and private organizations with local, state, and national reach can be valuable to building this program. Foundation and governmental grants, private funder support and program promotion, sponsors and fundraising events provide community support. Businesses can provide in-kind donations of necessary materials through sponsorship or partnership.

The elements of a funder proposal could include:

- Description of the Path Finders program
- Information on how Path Finders will positively impact the community
- Amount of funding requested, proposed breakdown of grant(s) and how those funds will be used (e.g., paying for supplies, providing a stipend to the trainers)
- Metrics that will be collected to assess progress
- Information on Cities of Service (this is especially helpful for national funders) (<http://www.citiesofservice.org>)
- Description of how the donor will be recognized (e.g., logo on printed materials, branding on city's service website, verbal acknowledgement in training sessions)

The mayor's office can work with its partners to recognize donors and provide follow-up information on the initiative's implementation and impact.

ENLISTING EMPLOYERS

Once the program has been selected and curriculum secured, employer partners may be sought. Large employers in the community should be tapped, as should diverse smaller employers, nonprofits, and local government agencies. Ideally, the final mix of employer partners should reflect a diversity of fields and career training needs. Participating employers may provide speakers, offer workplace tours or job shadowing opportunities, be part of a career fair, and/or provide volunteer facilitators or career coaches to deliver the selected program.





ENGAGING VOLUNTEERS

In addition to employers, faith-based organizations, senior service programs, parents or guardians of enrolled children, higher education institutions, and community groups may be sources of volunteers to serve as career coaches or facilitators. Career Facilitators guide students through the weekly group discussions and activities based on the *JA It's My Future* curriculum. Career coaches are local professionals who volunteer their time by speaking to students about their careers and potentially volunteer a tour at their workplace for the students. Federal Work Study students or students enrolled in service-learning programs in local colleges may be able to volunteer as well.

Volunteers should be screened through a background check prior to contact with students. Once volunteers have been recruited, they must be trained on their roles and responsibilities as either a facilitator or career coach. Program coordinators should encourage clear and concise communication and document all volunteer hours in a timely and accurate manner.

IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING THE PROGRAM

Prior to the start of the first session, program coordinators or volunteer facilitators should administer a pre-program survey to the youth so that it will be possible to determine if the program has an impact on their knowledge, plans, and attitudes.

Regular check-ins with volunteers about the programmatic successes and challenges allow for a continuous feedback system and help volunteers stay connected, so the program can adjust or expand effectively. There are many ways to do this, including pre- and post-program meetings, newsletters, emails, phone check-ins, and tokens of appreciation.

After the completion of the program, the task force should survey stakeholders, hold focus groups, or interview youth, parents, volunteers, and all participating organizations to identify areas of success and areas for improvement. As necessary, the task force can make any needed adjustments before conducting the program with a new cohort of youth.





RECOGNIZING AND THANKING VOLUNTEERS

Volunteer recognition is an effective recruitment and retention tool – retaining volunteers is more cost-effective than recruiting and training new ones. Recognition not only motivates volunteers, but also promotes public awareness in local communities and builds a sense of community within and amongst the coaches. To recognize volunteers, program coordinators should honor them in a way that will resonate with the target community. The task force can help determine the forms of recognition that will be most meaningful for the particular group(s) in question. Some methods to consider are:

- Thanks and recognition from the mayor at a community event that includes students and families
- Personal thank you notes from the mayor with statistics on the impact to-date of the program
- End of session celebrations
- Thank you note to volunteers in a newsletter
- Tickets to city-run venues or events
- Discounts at local retail businesses provided by program sponsors

The mayor's office may also want to recognize the volunteer trainers, as many likely invest a great deal of personal effort into the initiative. In general, the more this recognition can create cachet around being part of the Path Finders career coach community, the better it will be for volunteer recruitment and retention efforts.

RECOGNIZING YOUTH

The mayor's office may want to recognize youth who have successfully completed the program by providing a certificate, inviting youth to tour city hall, participating in end-of-program celebrations, providing recognition in a newsletter, donating tickets for city-run venues or events, or distributing items donated by local businesses. Families may also be included in recognition events.





MEASURING IMPACT

The impact of the program should be assessed through the pre- and post-program surveys administered to the participants at the beginning and end of the program. In addition, participants' school(s) could provide data about students' overall academic performance, attendance rates, and behavior (including suspensions). In order to secure data from participating schools, school principals or representatives from the school district should be part of the initiative planning and implementation process.

The following outcome metrics must be collected:

- Number and percentage of youth who complete the program
- Change in career knowledge and personal goals identified (via pre- and post-program surveys administered by program coordinators)
- Number and percentage of students who see a connection between their education and career path (via pre- and post-program surveys administered by program coordinators)
- Number and percentage of students who report an increased desire to graduate (via pre- and post-program surveys administered by program coordinators)
- Number and percentage of students completing an individual career plan with academic goals as part of Path Finders program

Optional metrics might include:

- Number of program sites and implementations
- Short-term student outcomes (e.g., attendance, behavior, classroom performance) as reported by schools
- Long-term student outcomes (e.g., grade advancement, graduation rate) as reported by schools
- Number of and diversity of participating employers
- Percentage of participating students who avoid criminal activity or school suspensions
- Percentage of volunteers interested in participating in additional cycles of the program





OPTIONAL ELEMENTS

A mayor's office may consider taking the following additional steps to expand and deepen the impact of the initiative.

Contact your Corporation for National and Community Service state office to determine if AmeriCorps VISTA or other national service members can be assigned to the mayor's office to help build the program. Alternatively, if local funding is available, create a service year position through the Service Year exchange.

Engage national programs that aim to increase students' career awareness and STEM industry workforce development (see list in the Resources section).





THE PLAN IN ACTION

 In 2010, **Orlando** Mayor Buddy Dyer and the city's first Chief Service Officer, Marcia Hope Goodwin, coordinated a collaborative community engagement process to develop the city's first high-impact service plan. Through stakeholder meetings and nonprofit partner feedback, the planning team identified youth literacy, education, youth crime reduction, and community safety as the major challenges facing the city that could be addressed by engaging community members in impact-volunteering initiatives. More than 800 stakeholders and partners from all sectors of the community helped to create **ORLANDO CARES** and its initiatives.

Path Finders was an initiative included in that plan and it engaged more than 400 students in one year, using the Junior Achievement curriculum. Volunteers from a variety of professional fields help middle school students identify their interests, explore career options, and create academic plans to support their goals. After-School All-Stars, an afterschool program serving middle school students, has been a strong partner and has allowed the program to rotate every year to different middle school sites so that each school in the district receives the program at least once every three years.

Special focus has been given in Orlando's program to exploring science, technology, engineering, and math careers. For example, a local manager of an airplane maintenance and repair business led tours of his worksite for job shadow field trips for students. After students visited the executive airport where his business was based, several students demonstrated interest in aviation careers.

Metrics from the program in Orlando have shown that 100% of youth participating in Path Finders avoided criminal activity and obtained a 2.5 or higher GPA. Additionally, 100% of students completed an individual academic career plan, 74% reported seeing a connection between their education and career path, and 88% reported an increased desire to graduate from high school.





RESOURCES

WEBSITES

Nepris Inc.

<http://www.nepris.com/>

Connects classrooms with STEM professionals for live online engagement.

Service Year Exchange

<http://www.youserve.org/>

The Franklin Project and the National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC) are launching Service Year. The Service Year exchange will be a dynamic online space where users can search, interact, communicate, partner, and earn academic credit for their service. The exchange will include existing positions in national service programs, such as AmeriCorps, AmeriCorps VISTA and AmeriCorps NCCC and also thousands of other new opportunities.

MentorNet

<http://mentornet.org/>

Connects students with STEM mentors for short-term guided mentoring.

LinkedIn for Volunteers

<https://volunteer.linkedin.com/>

Find volunteer mentors with specific professional backgrounds on LinkedIn.

US2020

<https://us2020.org/>

Connects STEM mentors to high quality nonprofits, including Citizen Schools.

Kids.gov

<http://kids.usa.gov/teachers/jobs/index.shtml>

Offers career information and games for young teens.

CareerZONE

<https://careerzone.ny.gov/views/careerzone/index.jsf>

Offers resume building tools, career information, and self-assessment tools for students.



**Planning My Future**

http://www.i-am-the-one.com/downloads/IAmTheOne_MiddleSchoolPlanner.pdf

Provides a downloadable career planning tool developed for Virginia students.

Myfuture.com

<http://www.myfuture.com/>

Provides a college and career planning tool for secondary school students and older.

College Career Life Planning

<http://www.collegecareerlifeplanning.com/Pages/60%20Second%20Pages/Index%20K-12%20Students.html>

Offers an array of tools, including a series of guided questions to motivate students to think about careers.

Bureau of Labor Statistics Career Exploration

<http://www.bls.gov/k12/content/students/careers/career-exploration.htm>

Matches careers to school subjects.

CareerShip

<http://mappingyourfuture.org/playyourcareer/careership/>

Provides tools for students to explore careers and make plans for the future.

Mapping Your Future

<http://mappingyourfuture.org/collegeprep/mhscstudents.cfm>

Student tool to plan for college.

Classroom, Inc.

<http://www.classroominc.org/>

Offers digital games to reinforce learning through real-world simulations.





CURRICULA

Junior Achievement

<https://www.juniorachievement.org/web/ja-usa/ja-programs>

Junior Achievement offers the curriculum, JA It's My Future. It's My Future is middle school workforce readiness curriculum designed and copyrighted by Junior Achievement USA (JA). It has six 45-minute sessions and includes a pre- and post-program survey.

RoadtripNation.org

<http://roadtripnation.org/programs/>

Roadtrip Nation Exploration is a blended learning curriculum for 6th-8th grade students that facilitates self-discovery, exposure to career pathways, and collaboration with peers. This program guides students through eight online lessons and ends with a Roadtrip Nation Interview of a community leader.

National Association for College Admission Counseling

- <http://www.nacacnet.org/research/PublicationsResources/Marketplace/student/Pages/GuidingEducation.aspx>
- http://www.nacacnet.org/research/PublicationsResources/Marketplace/Documents/SBS_MiddleSchool.pdf

The National Association for College Admission Counseling offers the curriculum Step by Step: College Awareness and Planning for Families, Counselors and Communities. The curricula — presented in three sections, for middle school students (grades 7-8), early high school students (grades 9 through first semester 11) and late high school students (grades 11-12) — offers training for counselors and others who work with underrepresented and underserved students, and provide comprehensive tools for meeting the needs of first-generation students and their families. The free downloadable curricula incorporates career information connected to college planning and is divided into plans for five sessions with multiple activities per session.

Plan Ahead

<http://www.whatsyourplana.com/>

Plan Ahead is a curriculum, geared toward 9th and 10th grade students, developed by four organizations, including the Gap Foundation and the San Francisco Unified School District. Plan Ahead puts students on the path to success by giving them the ability to make informed decisions about what they want out of life and how to accomplish it. Evaluation results have demonstrated that the program is making significant changes in students' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and motivations around college and career planning. The free downloadable curriculum includes sixty-nine sessions of fifty minutes each.





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Cities of Service is a national nonprofit that supports mayors to design and implement high-impact service strategies that can be replicated in cities worldwide. We provide technical assistance, programmatic support, planning resources, and funding opportunities. Founded by Michael R. Bloomberg, Cities of Service supports a coalition of approximately 200 cities whose mayors are committed to engaging citizen volunteers to solve local pressing challenges, from increasing high school graduation rates to improving energy efficiency in buildings. We help coalition cities share solutions, best practices, and lessons learned, as well as spread awareness about their great work.

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