



CALL TO ACTION:

Prioritize Opportunity Youth Employment in Alberta

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The Issue

Youth in Alberta are struggling.

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted young people's training and education, decreased their mental health, and reduced current and future job prospects.

Opportunity Youth (OY) are among those hardest hit. The pandemic on top of an economic downturn have exacerbated existing barriers to employment, training, and education opportunities, such as housing and food insecurity, caring responsibilities, and experiencing disability, among others. However, economic and social prosperity in Alberta depends on OY successfully transitioning into the work world.

Targeted, cross-sector action is required. Currently, Alberta lacks a youth employment strategy. This has led to disjointed cross-ministry collaboration, lack of employer awareness, and missed opportunities to target OY needs. Without strong interventions to stem youth disconnection from school, and address persistent inequities in access to education, housing, food, and other basic needs, OY as a group will continue to grow.



Who are Opportunity Youth?

18-29 year olds not engaged in school or work, often due to structural and social barriers such as housing or food insecurity, involvement in the justice system, experiencing disability, mental health concerns, caretaking responsibilities, and being a new immigrant or refugee.

The Opportunity and Impact

Alberta has the opportunity to lead in addressing inequities faced by OY and improving their employment prospects and outcomes. Policymakers, employers, youth serving agencies, and funders across Alberta all have a role. They can create OY-supportive policies or advocate for policy change. They can collaborate and lead initiatives that support training, education, and ultimately employment for OY. They can build understanding of what supports work best for OY through robust data collection and analysis.

We detail below three calls to action for policymakers, youth-serving agencies, and funders to improve OY employment in Alberta, including:

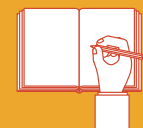
1. Advocacy



2. Leadership and Collaboration



3. Assessment and Monitoring



Now is the time for action to improve education and employment opportunities, reduce inequities, and ensure a bright future for Opportunity Youth in Alberta.

The Call to Action: Advocate



Listed below are advocacy targets and examples of specific activities to undertake in relation to supporting OY employment.

Advocate for the creation and implementation of a provincial youth employment strategy.

- Include OY as a target group.
- Use examples of strategic approaches and success from the federal government, which has made OY a priority in COVID-19 support and recovery.
- Highlight the benefits of a shared strategy to guide cohesive, collaborative action on OY employment.

Advocate for more robust and longer-term preventative supports.

- Build awareness of preventative supports for OY to address early school leaving, and the risk of mental health and other issues.
- Assess alignment of Child and Well-Being Review panel recommendations with OY promising practices. Leverage panel recommendations that align with supports that benefit OY.
- Share key message around OY needs with contacts in Alberta Health, Children's Services, and Education.



The Call to Action: Advocate



Advocate for targeted Opportunity Youth employment supports.

- Leverage Alberta's Recovery Plan and align calls for targeted support with specific activities in the plan.
- Create key messages about structural barriers in rural and remote locations, such as insufficient Internet access, lack of employment opportunities, and lack of transportation. Share messages through the Ministry of Jobs, Economy, and Innovation stakeholder engagement sessions on Alberta's Recovery Plan.
- Develop a follow-up plan to engage provincial government leaders on the importance of an overall OY employment strategy and how OY can support economic development.

Advocate for enhanced career awareness and skill development in high school curriculum.

- Leverage opportunities to influence ongoing and future curriculum development (e.g., for grades 7-10 until 2022; grades 11-12 from 2022 to 2023).
- Advocate for changes to the Career and Life Management (CALM) curriculum that support OY, for example inclusion of labour market information as well as ongoing career and skill development.
- Engage with OY to explore gaps and needs in high school curriculum.
- Engage with employers to contextualize and expand on curriculum options that align with employment prospects and required skills.

The Call to Action: Lead and Collaborate



Listed below are leadership and collaboration targets and examples of specific activities to undertake in relation to supporting OY employment.

Establish a backbone structure for collaboration or network-building across sectors.

- Convene stakeholders to identify areas of alignment for learning and action on OY employment. Share promising practices and test innovations among stakeholders.
- Leverage groups already conducting work in this area for leadership roles.
- Target system-level action. Develop a “made-in-Alberta” approach to enhance alignment and coordination across systems, programs/ services, and stakeholders.
- Build capacity across sectors and specifically among employers to support OY employment.
- Advocate collaboratively toward the targets outlined in the advocacy section.

Integrate Opportunity Youth supports into education and training.

- Leverage the government’s commitment to expanding apprenticeships, work-integrated learning, and broadband internet to target employment barriers for OY.
- Include youth-serving organizations within industry-education partnerships.
- Examine flagship initiatives in the strategy to determine alignment with OY promising practices.
- Engage with OY to create approaches that address their needs, preferences, and priorities.



The Call to Action: Lead and Collaborate



Leverage existing programs, funding, and opportunities.

- Partner with employers to apply for **Alberta Jobs Now** funding. Share responsibilities, like human resources, to reduce risk for the business and increase wraparound support for youth.
- Build employment supports into provincially-funded integrated mental health hubs.
- Develop OY-supporting proposals with the **Labour Market Partnership** program. Target: research on labour market trends; developing strategic plans for future skill requirements; and, sharing best practices in human resource development and career/employment training.

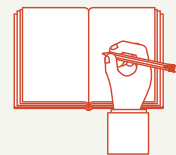
ALBERTA JOBS NOW

- The program pays employers 25% of an employee's salary, for up to 52 weeks for filling a vacant role or creating a new one.

LABOUR MARKET PARTNERSHIPS

- GoA's Labour Market Partnerships program supports regional workforce development projects that involve community partnerships. Priority given to increasing workforce participation of underrepresented groups, including youth.

The Call to Action: Assess and Monitor



Listed below are assessment and monitoring targets and examples of specific activities to undertake in relation to supporting OY employment.

Build a provincial base of Opportunity Youth data.

- Leverage federal funding through the Youth Employment and Skills Strategy (YESS) program to build a provincial data base of OY.
- Convene Alberta-based service delivery organizations that receive YESS funding to highlight and share successes and challenges.
- Encourage funders to use YESS-style evaluation frameworks.
- Use existing provincial data sources and expand these to capture OY and relevant employment outcomes. For example, the Work Outcomes Reporting project through Community and Social Services.
- Collect robust data to facilitate an understanding of equity outcomes, impacts, and issues. For example, demographic and geographic regional data.
- Partner with employers and cross-sectoral stakeholders for data collection. For example, take advantage of the Labour Market Partnership program for data collection to understand OY employment needs.

Leverage Opportunity Youth data for action.

- Share data stories to build cross-sector awareness of best practices, implementation, and impact.
- Use data to demonstrate success and advocate for continued or expanded funding.
- Highlight gaps and opportunities for OY with data.
- Map equity-related outcomes, impacts, and issues among OY.

