

WHAT IS YOUTH NAVIGATION?

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Youth navigation describes a range of services that equip young people with the resources and relationships needed to realize their potential. Absent these services, the very bureaucracies, systems and community programs that are geared toward helping young people can seem confusing and unwelcoming.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation, which focuses on improving the well-being and prospects of teenagers and young adults ages 14 to 24 through its [Thrive by 25 effort](#), considers effective youth navigation a critical service.

“Youth are urgently seeking [real avenues to support](#), income and careers,” says [Patrice Cromwell](#), vice president of the Foundation’s Center for Economic Opportunity. “Fostering deeper student connections to services and supportive adults and peers may make educational environments more supportive of and relevant to them in this complicated moment.”

WHAT DO YOUTH NAVIGATORS DO? Sometimes called “walkers and talkers,” “promotoras,” “peer ambassadors” or “buddies,” youth navigators help young people access educational, employment and health services and provide supportive spaces for youth to build self-efficacy. Research suggests this kind of guidance is more powerful when delivered by someone with similar experiences. A variety of organizations — schools, nonprofits, government agencies, etc. — provide youth navigation services. Some examples of how Foundation grantees and partners have deployed youth navigation services include:

- **[The Baltimore City Schools Navigator Center](#).** City residents ages 18 to 24 pair with coaches that help them apply for postsecondary opportunities, find work or enter a trade.
- **[Miami Dade College’s Mission North Star](#).** Success coaches help student parents identify sources of basic services and juggle the demands of school, work and family.
- **[The Credible Messenger Mentoring Movement](#).** Trained mentors with justice system experience collaborate with trusted adults to identify opportunities and support services for youth with similar experiences.
- **[The Nebraska Children and Families Foundation](#).** A statewide, cross-sector partner network helps higher education staff understand, anticipate and meet the needs of youth in foster care.

WHY ARE YOUTH NAVIGATION SERVICES IMPORTANT? Successfully navigating the transition from adolescence to adulthood can be challenging — particularly for young people of color, those in low-income families and youth with experience in the child welfare or juvenile justice systems. Guidance counselors or job placement staff are often limited in their capacity and reach. As a result, a young person may need to connect with multiple organizations to pursue support — a process that can be stressful and time consuming. The ideal youth navigation system bridges multiple organizations and settings to help young people make informed decisions that fit their unique identities and cultural backgrounds and better position them for success.

ELEMENTS OF QUALITY YOUTH NAVIGATION The Foundation used data from Casey grantees, the broader field of youth navigation and focus groups with young people to identify four elements of effective youth navigation:

- **caring, consistent adults** who have experience working with youth and young adults;
- **assessment, guidance and coaching tools** to better understand each young person’s needs and interests;
- **knowledge of the systems and settings** young people must navigate to build skills, relationships and income; and
- **connections to peer and social networks** to reduce barriers to success and access basic needs.

WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE NEED FROM YOUTH NAVIGATION? When asked what youth navigation looked like in practice, feedback from young parents and young people with experience in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems fit into three categories:

- **Meeting basic needs** — support for securing safe places to live, obtaining legal identification, receiving referrals for mental health services and accessing transportation.
- **Developing life skills** — strategies to fulfill responsibilities associated with adult behavior, networking and money management.
- **Accessing education and employment opportunities** — developing the skills needed — understanding how to write a resume or complete a college application — to pursue goals.

A central point of contact who actively reaches out young people is also critical, according to the participants surveyed.

RESOURCES FOR CREATING EASIER TO NAVIGATE SYSTEMS

- Blog post: [Evaluating LEAP’s Early Years](#)
- Report: [Beyond Bars: Keeping Young People Safe at Home and Out of Youth Prisons](#)
- Report: [The Road to Adulthood](#)