



# Preparing Opportunity Youth for the FUTURE OF WORK

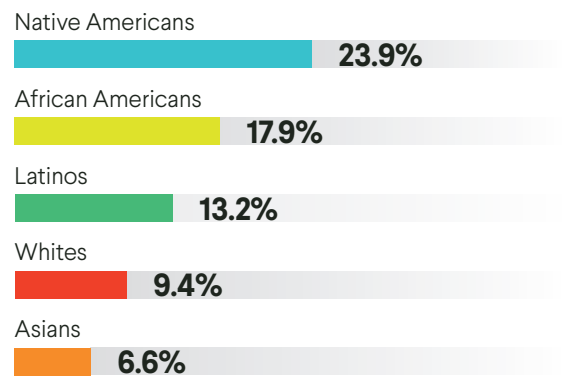
The future of work—resulting from fast-paced changes in technology, artificial intelligence, robotics, and fluctuations in the way we perform work—will create economic growth and new jobs across the country, but only for communities that are prepared and for workers with the necessary skills. Automation alone is expected to result in the elimination of many entry-level jobs that serve as on-ramps to careers for under-prepared individuals, including young workers.

While youth unemployment has fallen in recent years, **the unemployment rate for young people aged 16 to 24 in the United States is still over double that of the general population**—8 percent in September 2019.<sup>1</sup> For “opportunity youth,” the 4.5 million young people between the ages of 16 and 24 who for various reasons are disconnected from school, work, or both,<sup>2</sup> the changes expected in the future of work will be especially challenging unless we provide them with the right supports and skills to navigate this new world of work.

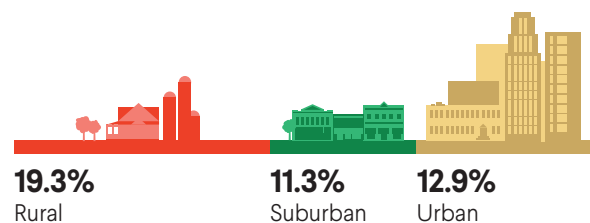
## What Percentage of Young People in the US are Disconnected From School & Work?

Source: <http://www.measureofamerica.org/DYinteractive/>

### By Racial or Ethnic Group



### By Location

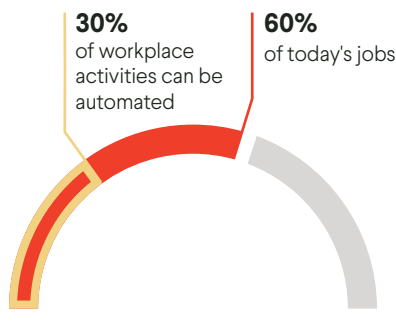


### Key Facts

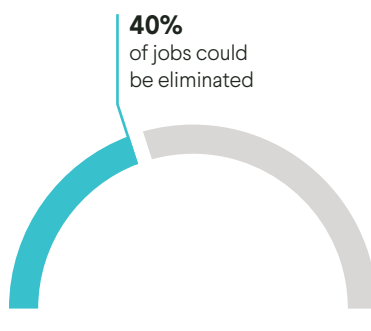
- Disconnected females are nearly **4x more likely to be young mothers** than connected females.
- Disconnected youth are **more likely to live in poverty** than their peers (35.3% compared to 18.9%).
- Disconnected youth are **twice as likely to have no education beyond a high school diploma** than connected youth (50% vs 26.8%).

## The Need to Change and Adapt

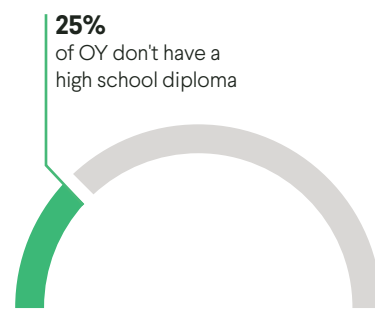
Our nation's education and workforce systems must change and adapt to stay ahead of these economic shifts. Structural reforms must address the needs of our most vulnerable and underserved populations, especially opportunity youth who will face serious challenges as the nature of work evolves.



At least **30 percent** of workplace activities can be automated using current technology in up to **60 percent** of today's jobs<sup>3</sup>



Young people hold almost **40 percent** of the jobs that have the potential of being eliminated<sup>4</sup>



**25 percent of opportunity youth** lack a high school diploma or equivalent credential<sup>5</sup>

## JFF Recommendations



### Improve Career Navigation and Access to Data

Opportunity youth need accurate and timely information about possible career paths and where to get the education and skills they need. Public policy should encourage the expansion of career navigation services that support opportunity youth. Policy should also create data systems that provide easy-to-understand information on the quality of education and training programs, including student outcomes.



### Build on Evidence-Based Models

Policy should emphasize evidence-based strategies for helping opportunity youth keep up with skill demands expected in the future of work. Proven strategies include coaching and support services, on-ramps to smooth transitions, accelerated structures, and programs that focus on in-demand careers.



## Expand Access to Work-Based Learning

Policy should expand work-based learning opportunities so they reach all opportunity youth, who often lack connections to employers or workplaces. High-quality, relevant work-based learning experiences, including pre-apprenticeships, apprenticeships, and work-study opportunities, can enable opportunity youth to earn a salary while gaining valuable on-the-job experience, participate in vital education and training, and build their network and social capital.



## Promote Employability Skills

Research on the future of work shows that employability or foundational skills—such as the ability to think critically, problem solve, work collaboratively, and communicate effectively—are essential in helping prepare all workers for the coming workforce changes. Employability skills are valuable because they can transfer across multiple industries and occupations.<sup>6</sup> Policy should ensure that all federal laws impacting youth stress the importance of instilling these critical skills.



## Increase Public Investment

Current investments in opportunity youth are inadequate, with millions of young people unable to access supports because only a limited number of out-of-school education and training program slots are available. Some estimates suggest that serving just one-fourth of the

opportunity youth population—or 1 million young people—would require an increased investment of \$4.3 billion over current funding levels for federal youth programs.<sup>7</sup> Policy should increase public investment in our nation’s workforce and education systems, which is necessary to give opportunity youth the resources they need to prepare for the future of work.



## Provide Flexible Financial Aid

Opportunity youth need access to flexible financial aid policies that simplify the process of applying and qualifying for aid. Policy should ensure that opportunity youth are able to attend school all year; access “ability to benefit” programs; attain high-quality, short-term stackable credentials; and receive support that covers expenses beyond the cost of just tuition, fees, and books.<sup>8</sup>



## Offer Incentives for Developing New Talent

Employers play a critical role in preparing opportunity youth to succeed in the future of work. Policy should encourage employers to provide work-based learning and employment opportunities for opportunity youth through targeted tax incentives and investments in economically distressed communities with objectives for training and hiring opportunity youth. Policy should also support the establishment of industry sector partnerships and career pathways focused on populations including opportunity youth.

## Endnotes

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1. “Monthly youth (16-24) unemployment rate in the United States from October 2019 (seasonally adjusted),” Statista, November 4, 2019, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/217448/seasonally-adjusted-monthly-youth-unemployment-rate-in-the-us/>.
2. Lexi Barrett, *Making Higher Education Policy Work for Opportunity Youth* (Boston: JFF, 2018), [https://jfforg-prod-prime.s3.amazonaws.com/media/documents/HEA\\_PB\\_081318.pdf](https://jfforg-prod-prime.s3.amazonaws.com/media/documents/HEA_PB_081318.pdf).
3. Susan Lund et al., *The Future of Work in America*, (New York: McKinsey Global Institute, 2019), <https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/Featured%20Insights/Future%20of%20Organizations/The%20future%20of%20work%20in%20America%20People%20and%20places%20today%20and%20tomorrow/MGI-The-Future-of-Work-in-America-Report-July-2019.ashx>.
4. Ibid.
5. Lewis Kristen, *Making the Connection: Transportation and Youth Disconnection*, New York, Measure of America Social Science Research Council, 2019.
6. Fran Kennedy and Matthew Poland, *Developing Future Talent: How We Can Prepare for the Future of Work and Business* (Boston, MA: JFF), [https://jfforg-prod-prime.s3.amazonaws.com/media/documents/Developing\\_Future\\_Talent\\_-\\_11-13-2018\\_-\\_FINAL.pdf](https://jfforg-prod-prime.s3.amazonaws.com/media/documents/Developing_Future_Talent_-_11-13-2018_-_FINAL.pdf).
7. John M. Bridgeland, Erin S. Ingram, and Matthew Atwell, *A Bridge to Reconnection: A Plan for Reconnecting One Million Opportunity Youth Each Year Through Federal Funding Streams* (Washington, DC: Civic Enterprises, 2016) <http://aspencommunitysolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/BridgetoReconnection.2016.pdf>.
8. Rachel McDonnell and Michael Collins, *Framing the Opportunity: Eight State Policy Recommendations that Support Postsecondary Credential Completion for Underserved Populations* (Boston: JFF, 2017), <https://jfforg-prod-prime.s3.amazonaws.com/media/documents/Framing-the-Opportunity-050417.pdf>.