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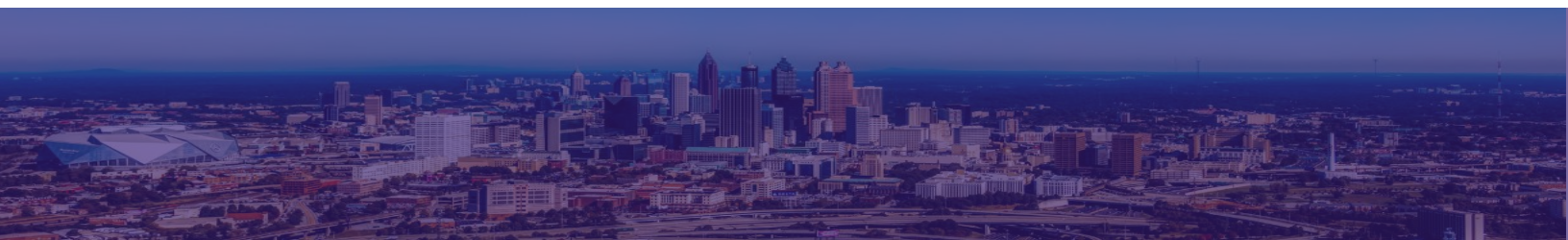
Engaging Atlanta's Youth and Young Adults in Economic Opportunity - Strategic Planning Research

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Disclaimer: The two-page overview of the focus groups below was provided by the Youth Leadership Council (YLC) after the final report was completed. The overview, immediately following this disclaimer, does not reflect the views of Creative Research Solutions, LLC (CRS) as CRS was not involved in the YLC focus group discussions or creating the content presented on the following pages.

The Atlanta Youth Leadership Council helped to develop and implement a survey of young people in Atlanta. After the final publication of the report, the YLC wanted to understand in more depth some of the report results by talking with young people directly. This is their report on those discussions.

The Atlanta YLC hosted two focus groups during June 2022 with the purpose of gaining more interpersonal insight about survey-related topics from young people in Atlanta. The focus groups were separated by age group. The first one included high schoolers from ages 14-18. The second one included youth aged 19-24. Both focus groups had ~10 participants. Focus group participants mostly aligned with the sentiments included in the report and survey, despite them not completing the survey themselves.

Discussion on Figure 3, Percentage of Youth and Young Adults Who Are “Very” or “Extremely” Interested In Youth Workforce Program Services, for Atlanta-Area Respondents Only, yielded vastly different responses from the report. In both focus groups, there was a general disinterest in community service, despite community service being high on the survey list. 14-18-year-olds were most inclined towards work opportunities like job shadowing, job placement, and internships. These young people placed extreme emphasis on being paid. They also suggested that they wanted some type of pipeline leading from job shadowing to job placement. For 19-24-year-olds, training and education were not so much desired, but access to basic capital was spoken about frequently. These young people need access to contract work, transportation, and other start-up capital to expand their already-existing businesses.

Both groups agreed that everything listed in Figure 3 could be useful to someone, depending on what their trade or personal journey to entrepreneurship was. Those interested in going to college all said that scholarships were important to them. Most participants agreed that community service was very low on their list of needs and priorities. Many agreed that community service would be something they’d be more interested in if their professional lives were flourishing more. “Looking at it from a business standpoint, at the end of the day, community service is still service.” was a direct quote from the 14-18 focus group.

Referring to Figure 4, Desire to Start a Business Now or In the Future, most participants showed some degree of interest in starting a business (all except one in each group). This was similar to the results of the report, but we were able to extract deeper meaning from this data through these results. Marketing was a major entrepreneurial roadblock for many already existing or aspiring business owners 14-18. Participants said they had the skills and basic knowledge of how to market their business, but lacked the capital to do so. One participant is a hairstylist and said that she’s ready to do hair, but has found herself having to do styles for free in order to create social media content that will attract new clients. She said she’s already begun this process by saving money from her 9-5 to be able to pay for materials to do these services for free on her hair models and influencers. However, she says that costs do make the process more rocky and inefficient; she agreed that more capital would allow her to market much quicker and easier. Marketing was a main cause for doubt in 14-18-year-olds that would otherwise start their business ideas; they did not want to start businesses and have them stall.



Transportation came up as an issue again for 19-24-year-olds in this section. These individuals felt mostly confident already in their business ideas, execution, and foundation. However, things like access to basic capital, loans, contract work, and transportation were expressed as roadblocks to those trying to grow their businesses further.

Figure 10, Type of Education Needed for Atlanta Youth's Chosen Career Path by Zip Code and Age (in Appendix), garnered a similar response from the 14-18 group. Most of them agreed that college was not paramount but could be an asset to those that want to get technical skills and network. The 19-24 group synonymously agreed that high school was the highest level of education an entrepreneur would ever need; all of the respondees had graduated high school and only one was currently in college. She proposed that college would benefit her, but said nothing to explicitly defy the notion that college wasn't *needed*. This mimicked the findings of the report by showing that different age groups felt differently about necessary education but exaggerated the statistics quite a bit. Participants agreed that college might not be necessary if skills were acquired in high school. Trade schools were a viable option for many participants. Participants agreed that on-job training would be enough for them post-high school.

Citing Figure 11, Most Important Goals in Life for Atlanta Youth by Zip Code and Race/Ethnicity (in Appendix) Participants often felt like money was their gateway to being able to attain other goals; they believed that money is their most imminent goal, and they may refocus after they've achieved that. Many people felt money and success overlap, in both age groups. However, older respondees placed a higher emphasis on spiritual wellness and leisure time. One of them even had a child, so having a good-family life was important to him. These individuals cared more about balance and being able to reel back from their hustler lifestyles. Participants all agreed that they strive for passive income so they can have more leisure time. Participants that are working care about having workers' rights and benefits in cases that they are unwell or unable to perform work tasks for certain amounts of time. Participants agreed that they want to give back, but also agreed that "you can't give what you don't have," citing the earlier disinterest in community service.

The pandemic was cited as a major game-changer for those in the 14-18 age group, specifically. Most individuals 19-24 said they'd already decided on entrepreneurship before the pandemic began; however, 14-18-year-olds cited the pandemic as a time where they decided against 9-5s and acquired new skills that could translate to businesses. "It made me realize I need a backup because entrepreneurship can be beneficial in times of economic crisis," one participant said. Many participants said that the pandemic made them more aware of entrepreneurship as an option, and thus, some participants decided they didn't want to attend college after the pandemic hit.

The YLC concluded that the data from the survey is largely reliable and accurate, but humanizing the data and asking for further elaboration and explanation was paramount to the integrity of the study as well. Participants in the focus groups largely aligned with sentiments in the survey, however, the focus group allowed them a little more time for deeper introspection on some of these figures. This was important for understanding the motivations and true needs of young people in Atlanta, and understanding the distinctions between teenagers and young adults.



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Engaging Atlanta’s Youth and Young Adults in Economic Opportunity

Executive Summary

Introduction and Background

The City of Atlanta is one of the most diverse metropolitan areas in the southeast United States and continues to grow faster than other densely populated metropolitan areas in America.¹ Although Atlanta ranked in the top 15% of cities to find employment in 2022,² Atlanta also ranked second in the nation for income inequality in 2022.³ In response to these inequities, the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s Atlanta Civic Site (ACS) partnered with Creative Research Solutions (CRS) to design a youth and young adult **participatory research project to inform Casey and its partners as they develop a comprehensive plan for youth and young adult economic opportunity in Atlanta, Georgia.**⁴



Above: YLC members pose for a photograph.

In May 2021, Casey formed the Youth Leadership Council (YLC), consisting of five young leaders from Southwest Atlanta, Georgia. The YLC leveraged their point of view and lived experiences to develop a research strategy to better understand their peers’ educational and career aspirations and the barriers that stand in their way. Driven by YLC, **the main objective of this project was to develop a strong, data-driven plan for increasing education, employment, and entrepreneurial opportunities in Atlanta with actionable findings and recommendations.**

Research Overview

Throughout the project, the CRS Team used a participatory, culturally responsive and equitable research approach⁵ to ensure the strategic plan was responsive to the actual interests and needs of opportunity youth and young adults. The participatory research process included (1) building youth leadership

¹ Source: <https://www.metroatlantachamber.com/economic-development/featured/metro-atlanta-by-the-numbers>

² Source: <https://wallethub.com/edu/best-cities-for-jobs/2173>

³ Source:

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/andrewdepietro/2022/03/31/20-cities-with-the-worst-income-inequality-in-america-in-2022/?sh=2da3d83f608b>

⁴ The Annie E. Casey Foundation's Atlanta Civic Site works to create and preserve affordable housing, promote entrepreneurship and wealth-building strategies, strengthen local organizations to galvanize community involvement and promote high-quality early childhood education and child development.

⁵ According to Expanding the Bench®, “Culturally responsive and equitable evaluation requires the integration of diversity, inclusion, and equity in all phases of evaluation. CREE incorporates cultural, structural, and contextual factors (e.g. historical, social, economic, racial, ethnic, gender) using a participatory process that shifts power to individuals most impacted.



through supporting skill building while developing research questions and the survey questionnaire, (2) working with staff from Our Turn (a youth development organization) and ACS interns to support the YLC to recruit 381 Atlanta youth and young adults to participate in the online survey in early 2022, and (3) sharing the analyzed data during sensemaking sessions, where the YLC members shared their insights on the data collected from the survey and developed recommendations based on the results.



Research Questions, Key Findings, and Recommendations

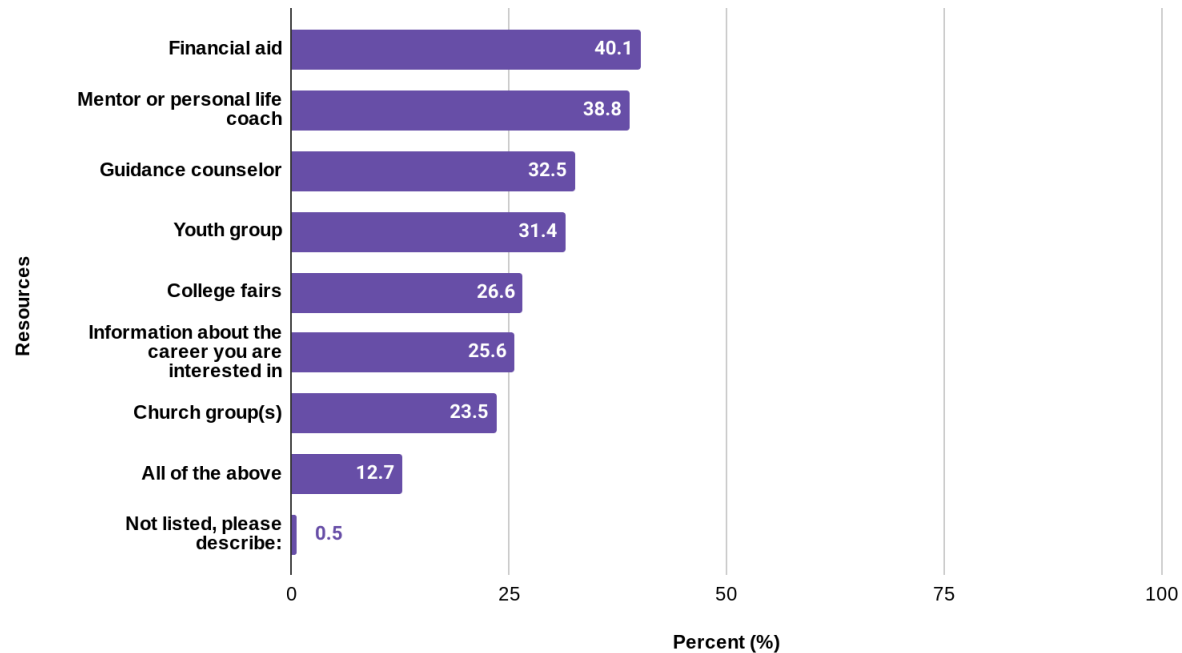
The findings in the table below are organized by the research questions developed by the YLC. Please note that findings are for the entire sample of 381 youth and young adult respondents, except for findings disaggregated by race/ethnicity, age, or education which are for youth that provided an Atlanta ZIP code only (n=137).

Research Question	Key Findings	YLC Recommendations
What are Atlanta youth's and young adults' future plans and dreams related to education, employment, and entrepreneurial opportunity?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the next 5-10 years, the majority of youth and young adult respondents see themselves owning their own business. Overall, youth and young adult respondents most frequently reported "salary/pay" as the main value they are looking for in a future job but this varied by race/ethnicity. 	<p>In April 2022, YLC members shared their insights on the survey results and developed the following recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider focusing more financial resources (i.e., loans, grants, scholarships, etc.) on capital for youth and young adults who want to start and sustain a business in Atlanta. Invest in Atlanta youth and young adults early into their careers by offering easily accessible financial literacy courses, mental health resources, entrepreneurship courses, and diverse career perspectives through internships, job shadowing, and apprenticeships. Prioritize increasing the availability of and awareness about financial aid for Atlanta youth and young adults in pursuit of a college education (e.g., increasing awareness of financial aid
What resources would support them to accomplish their plans and dreams related to education, employment, and entrepreneurship?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overall, the top three resources that youth and young adult respondents shared they needed to accomplish their goals were, in order of importance based on the proportion of youth and young adults selecting each option: (1) financial aid, (2) a mentor or personal life coach, and (3) a guidance counselor (please see Figure A below this table). Overwhelmingly, the top reason shared by youth and young adult respondents when asked why young people in Atlanta might decide to not apply to college was due to a lack of financial resources or poverty. 	
What support systems do Atlanta area youth and young adults have access to (or would be interested in accessing) related to education, employment, and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overall, the large majority of youth and young adult respondents agreed that they have support for their dreams and life goals and agreed that their environment is preparing them for their future careers. Reflecting on this, one YLC member shared: <i>"I think [youth] feel like we have support where it counts and that people are able to give. A lot of us, our families don't have money to support our goals. I think what people are saying is that they have symbolic support or people in their corner in general."</i> 	

<p>entrepreneurship?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although youth and young adult respondents expressed a high level of interest in a wide variety of workforce program services, YLC members highlighted that while interest in these services is high, disparities in access created by racism mean that youth and young adults of color do not enjoy the same level of access to similar services as their White peers. 	<p>options, providing education about the financial aid process, and making applications easy to understand and complete).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider funding, supporting, or partnering with organizations that are advocating for increased funding in low-income schools with limited resources to help address the structural racism at the root of the issues facing Atlanta youth and young adults on the South and Westside. • Explore youth and young adult entrepreneurship beyond formal business ownership to specify resources to their needs.
<p>What are Atlanta youth and young adults' motivations, knowledge, skills, and interests related to entrepreneurship?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth and young adult respondents want to own a business to achieve personal or familial financial gain and security. Other reasons youth and young adults cited for included wanting to start a business included freedom or independence and a desire to contribute to a cause or community. One YLC member shared that <i>"[m]aking a contribution being high on the list is affirmation that we have big dreams and want to make a contribution but need the resources. Most young people have big dreams and lack the resources but the passion is there."</i> • Overall, most youth and young adults believed they had access to services, resources, and locations that could support their work within the area they lived. 	
<p>What challenges do young or aspiring entrepreneurs in Atlanta face?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Black or African American youth and young adults and Hispanic or Latino/Latina/Latinx youth and young adults cited a lack of stability in life outside of entrepreneurship as the most frequent challenge they faced as young entrepreneurs. The most frequently reported challenge among White youth and young adults was a lack of a supportive environment. Additionally, a lack of experience managing others was frequently reported across all groups. 	

Note: From January to February 2022, we collected data from 381 youth and young adults in the Atlanta area. The survey data were disaggregated by race/ethnicity, age, and education among respondents who provided a ZIP code in the Atlanta area (n=137). Sixty percent (60%) of respondents identified as Black or African American, 78% were between 19-24 years old, and 53% were in college or had obtained an Associate's or Bachelor's degree at the time of the survey.

Figure A. Resources Youth and Young Adults Reported Needing to Accomplish Their Goals (n=381)



Conclusions

The Casey Foundation formed the YLC to improve workforce and entrepreneurial opportunities for Atlanta’s youth and young adults in the South and Westside. Although we only know for sure that Atlanta youth and young adults represented a little more than one-third (36%) of the total surveyed youth and young adult respondents,⁶ much can be learned about the career needs of Atlanta youth and young adults.

Ultimately, we hope that these research findings will serve as a springboard for local partners to further their impact in Atlanta’s South and Westside communities and continue to support the future careers and entrepreneurial ventures of Atlanta youth and young adults.

⁶ Since ZIP code was not required to complete the survey, only 35.9% of youth and young adult respondents provided a ZIP code for the survey; 64.1% did not provide a ZIP code. It is likely a higher percentage of surveyed youth and young adult respondents reside in Atlanta than what is represented in the data.

Foreword

Creative Research Solutions (CRS) served as the research partner for the Engaging Atlanta's Youth in Economic Opportunity Strategic Planning Research project.

Founded in 2009, Creative Research Solutions, LLC is an award-winning research and evaluation firm located in the Atlanta Metropolitan Area. Through culturally responsive evaluation and authentically engaged and rigorous data collection and analysis, we help clients critically evaluate their work to support and refine their approaches. When evaluating outcomes and impacts, we ensure that our approach, refined and sharpened over time, is aligned with local values while being directly coordinated with initiative and portfolio-level design and data collection activities. This approach enables us to generate strengths-based evaluation findings, demonstrate impacts, and provide actionable suggestions for addressing gaps and future growth.

The Youth Leadership Council (YLC) members led this project along with Nataria Ellis and Brittney James, interns with the Casey Foundation's Atlanta Civic Site who helped manage the YLC.

This report was prepared by the CRS research team, including Amanda Tyler (Project Lead), Adrian Glover (Project Co-Lead), Dr. Keyondra Brooks (Youth Engagement Task Lead), and Dr. Osa Maiyanne Adaján (Senior Advisor).

We would like to acknowledge and thank our partners including Ade Oguntoye and Kristina Sales of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Erika Smith who formerly worked at the Casey Foundation, Sarah Griffin, a Casey Foundation consultant, Crystal Prater and Tiffany Patterson at Our Turn, and Jomal Vailes and Keren Cadet at STRIVE who provided valuable guidance and support throughout the research. We express our appreciation to Kirsten Allen and Huey Blake, young adult leaders who acted as consultants on this project after helping to pilot the research and youth and young adult engagement pilot developed by Casey's Baltimore Civic Site on which this project builds.

We would finally and most importantly like to express our appreciation for the Atlanta youth and young adults who shared their future hopes, dreams, and future aspirations with us through participating in the survey.



Acronyms

Key Term	Definition
CRS	Creative Research Solutions
ACS	Atlanta Civic Site
YLC	Youth Leadership Council



Definitions

Key Term	Definition
Economic Opportunity	The Casey Foundation’s Economic Opportunity strategy focuses on “[d]eveloping pathways for parents to become financially stable and support their children’s healthy development and academic success.” ⁷
Entrepreneurship	There is no universally accepted definition of “entrepreneurship.” Narrowly defined, entrepreneurship is “[t]he process of setting up a business is known as entrepreneurship.” ⁸
Capital	According to Investopedia, “Capital is a broad term that can describe anything that confers value or benefit to its owner, such as a factory and its machinery, intellectual property like patents, or the financial assets of a business or an individual. While money itself may be construed as capital, capital is more often associated with cash that is being put to work for productive or investment purposes.” ⁹
Disaggregation	According to the American Psychological Association, disaggregation is “the process of breaking down data into smaller units or sets of observations.” ¹⁰
Side Hustle	According to Dictionary.com, a side hustle is “a job or occupation that brings in extra money beyond one’s regular job and main source of income.” ¹¹
Institutional Review Board (IRB)	According to the American Psychological Association, an Institutional Review Board (IRB) is “a committee named by an agency or institution to review research proposals originating within that agency for ethical acceptability and compliance with the organization’s codes of conduct. IRBs help protect research participants and are mandatory at any U.S. institution receiving federal funds for research.” ¹²
Culturally Responsive and Equitable Evaluation	According to Expanding the Bench®, “Culturally responsive and equitable evaluation requires the integration of diversity, inclusion, and equity in all phases of evaluation. CREE incorporates cultural, structural, and contextual factors (e.g. historical, social, economic, racial, ethnic, gender) using a participatory process that shifts power to individuals most impacted. CREE is not just one method of evaluation, it is an approach that should be infused into all evaluation methodologies. CREE advances equity by informing strategy, program improvement, decision-making, policy formation, and change.” ¹³

⁷ Source: <https://www.aecf.org/work/economic-opportunity>

⁸ Source: <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/e/entrepreneur.asp>

⁹ Source: <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/c/capital.asp>

¹⁰ Source: <https://dictionary.apa.org/disaggregation>

¹¹ Source: <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/side-hustle>

¹² Source: <https://dictionary.apa.org/institutional-review-board>

¹³ Source: <https://expandingthebench.org/about/terms/#CREE>



Introduction and Background

The City of Atlanta is one of the most diverse metropolitan areas in the southeast United States and continues to grow faster than other densely populated metropolitan areas in America.¹⁴ With 29 Fortune 500/1000 companies headquartered in Atlanta that together generate about \$429 billion worth of revenue, Atlanta is a place where residents can grow their business and thrive in a renowned business climate.¹⁵ Although Atlanta ranked in the top 15% of cities to find employment in 2022,¹⁶ Atlanta also ranked second in the nation for income inequality in 2022.¹⁷

In response to these inequities, the Annie E. Casey Foundation's (also known as Casey, the Casey Foundation, or the Foundation throughout this report) Atlanta Civic Site (ACS) partnered with Creative Research Solutions (CRS) to design a youth and young adult **participatory research project to inform Casey and its partners as they develop a comprehensive plan for youth and young adult economic opportunity in Atlanta, Georgia.**¹⁸

This research project builds on the research and youth and young adult engagement work done in 2017 by Casey's Baltimore Civic Site (BCS) team in partnership with seven young-adult community leaders. One of the main goals of the BCS participatory research pilot was to ***“demonstrate the feasibility of bringing young adults and other community voices into the institutional decision-making process — not just for this project, but as a standard practice for Casey and other peers in the field.”***¹⁹

In May 2021, Casey formed the Youth Leadership Council (YLC), consisting of five young leaders from Southwest Atlanta. The YLC leveraged their point of view and lived experiences to develop a research strategy to better understand their peers' educational and career aspirations and the barriers that stand in their way. The YLC hopes that what they learned will be used to help youth-serving organizations, policymakers, funders, and city leaders expand economic opportunities for young people.²⁰

Driven by YLC, **the main objective of this project was to develop a strong, data-driven plan for increasing education, employment, and entrepreneurial opportunities in Atlanta with actionable findings and recommendations.** Throughout the project, we aimed to build youth leadership through significant engagement in the research process and ensure the strategic plan was responsive to the actual interests and needs of opportunity youth and young adults and rooted in racial equity analysis and historical contexts. In the following section, we provide a high-level overview of the research methods used to engage Atlanta youth and young adults in understanding their needs and interests related to economic opportunity.

¹⁴ Source: <https://www.metroatlantachamber.com/economic-development/featured/metro-atlanta-by-the-numbers>

¹⁵ Source: <https://www.metroatlantachamber.com/economic-development/featured/metro-atlanta-by-the-numbers>

¹⁶ Source: <https://wallethub.com/edu/best-cities-for-jobs/2173>

¹⁷ Source: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/andrewdepietro/2022/03/31/20-cities-with-the-worst-income-inequality-in-america-in-2022/?sh=2da3d83f608b>

¹⁸ The Annie E. Casey Foundation's Atlanta Civic Site works to create and preserve affordable housing, promote entrepreneurship and wealth-building strategies, strengthen local organizations to galvanize community involvement and promote high-quality early childhood education and child development.

¹⁹ Source: <https://www.aecf.org/blog/young-people-help-to-reshape-workforce-development-in-baltimore>

²⁰ For additional information, please see:

<https://www.aecf.org/blog/atlanta-youth-seek-to-survey-peers-about-economic-opportunities-and-obstacles>



Research Overview

Throughout the project, the CRS Team used a culturally responsive and equitable research approach²¹ to build youth leadership and ensure the strategic plan was responsive to the actual interests and needs of opportunity youth and young adults. The participatory research process is included in the following steps:

- **Survey Questionnaire Development:** CRS developed and facilitated a series of six survey development workshops between June 2021 and December 2021 to build youth leadership through supporting skill-building around identifying and developing research topics as well as developing a survey aligned with the identified research topics.
- **Data Collection, approved by an independent Institutional Review Board (IRB):** Following the completion of the survey development workshops, CRS supported the YLC to develop an online survey for Atlanta youth and young adults to answer the research questions shared above. With support from staff from Our Turn (a youth development organization) and ACS interns, the YLC members recruited 381 Atlanta youth and young adult respondents ages 14-24 years to participate in the online survey in early 2022.
- **Data Analysis and Sensemaking:** CRS analyzed the quantitative and qualitative survey data. Following our analysis, we presented the results to the YLC members through a series of “sensemaking sessions.” During the sensemaking sessions, the YLC members shared their insights on the results and developed recommendations based on the results. These recommendations are shared in this report.

Research Questions

- What are Atlanta-area youth and young adults’ future plans and dreams related to education, employment, and entrepreneurial opportunity?
- What resources would support them to accomplish their plans and dreams related to education, employment, and entrepreneurship?
- What support systems do Atlanta area youth and young adults have access to related to education, employment, and entrepreneurship (e.g., workforce programs, school or educational programs, and support from friends or family)?
- What additional support systems related to education, employment, and entrepreneurship would Atlanta-area youth and young adults be interested in accessing?
- What are Atlanta-area youth and young adults’ motivations, knowledge, skills, and interests related to entrepreneurship?
- What challenges do young or aspiring entrepreneurs in Atlanta face?

We share the survey’s key findings and recommendations below. Please note that with the exception of findings disaggregated by race/ethnicity, age, and education, findings are for the entire sample of 381 youth and young adult respondents. While the survey did ask for respondents’ ZIP codes, to protect their privacy, youth and young adult respondents were not required to provide it and many (n=244, 64.0% of total youth and young adult respondents) chose not to provide a ZIP code. The recruitment materials and language within the survey stated that it was intended for youth and young adults in Atlanta, and recruitment partners invited youth and young adults living in Atlanta to respond to the survey. However, because the survey was also distributed and promoted via social media, we were not able to fully verify the extent to which all youth and young adult respondents lived in Atlanta ZIP codes.²² This being said,

²¹ According to Expanding the Bench®, “Culturally responsive and equitable evaluation requires the integration of diversity, inclusion, and equity in all phases of evaluation. CREE incorporates cultural, structural, and contextual factors (e.g. historical, social, economic, racial, ethnic, gender) using a participatory process that shifts power to individuals most impacted.

²² In the handful of cases where we observed substantial differences, we have noted this in Appendix A.



the findings resonated with YLC members who have contextualized their recommendations within the background of their lived experience in Atlanta.

In consultation with the YLC, to ensure that the findings reflect Atlanta youth and young adults we chose to disaggregate findings by race/ethnicity, age, or education for youth and young adult respondents who provided an Atlanta area ZIP code only (n=137 respondents). The decision to disaggregate by Atlanta area ZIP code only was due to the fact that we did observe some differences in demographics between youth and young adults who provided Atlanta ZIP codes as compared to those who did not provide any, and we cannot say for certain that disaggregating the survey findings for those who did not provide a ZIP code would be representative of the target population (please see Appendix D). We encourage caution when interpreting any differences across groups, especially for making comparisons across age groups and race/ethnicities due to the differences in sample size for the various subgroups. Additionally, please note that for findings across age groups, we have split youth and young adults into two groups: “youth” ages 14-18 years and “young adults” ages 19-24 years.

It is also important to note that the recommendations offered in this report have been primarily developed by the YLC. We have used the term “YLC suggest” to frame direct recommendations from the YLC and the term “CRS suggests” for recommendations made by the CRS team based on feedback from the YLC members.

Key Findings



Sociodemographics of Atlanta Youth and Young Adult Respondents

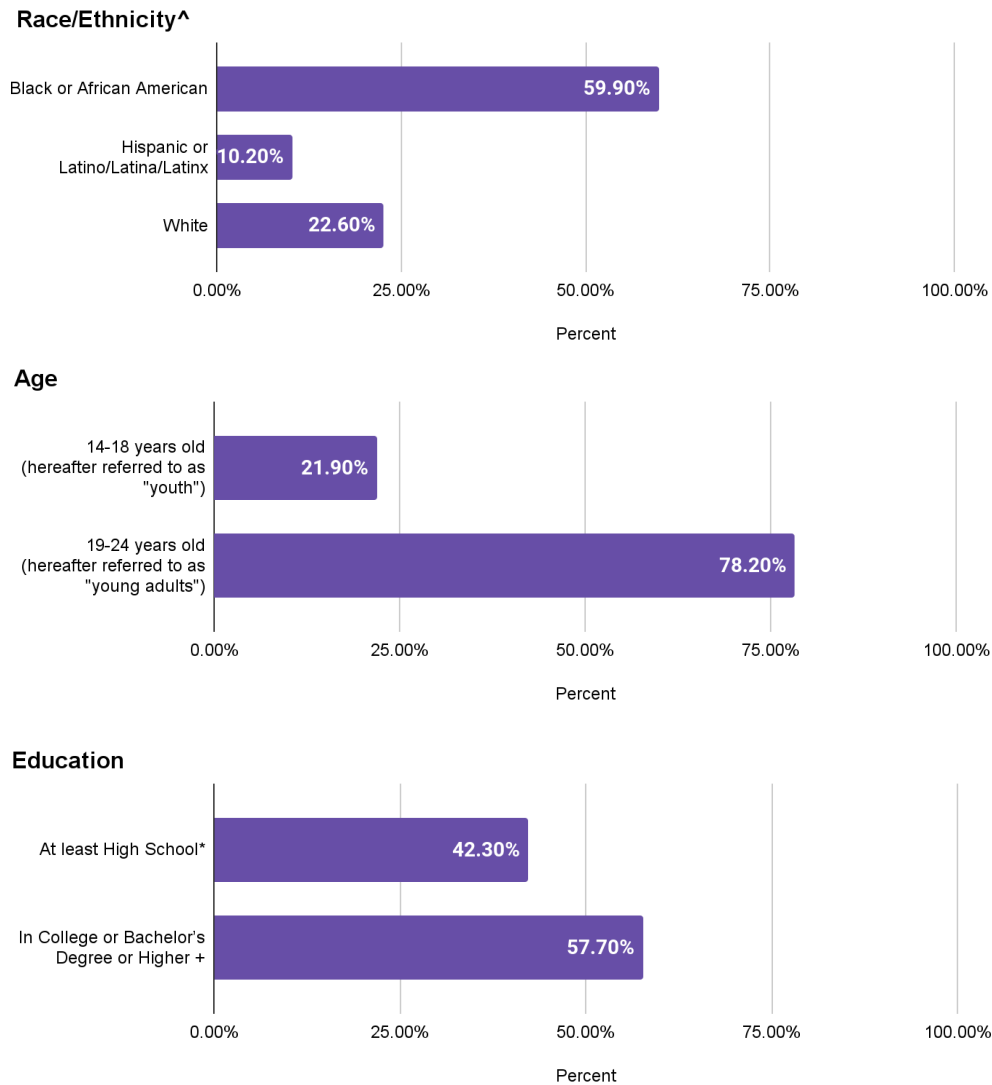
Figure 1 displays the sociodemographics for youth and young adult respondents who provided a ZIP code in the Atlanta area (n=137), for the sociodemographics by which we disaggregated (race/ethnicity, age, and education). In addition to the data displayed in Figure 1, key sociodemographics include employment and disability status:

- **Employment:** Across all youth and young adult respondents, youth and young adults most frequently reported being unemployed (41.5%). Approximately 32.5% reported being employed part-time and 25.9% full-time or self-employed.
- **Disability Status:** Approximately 89.8% of survey respondents who live in Atlanta reported that they are not living with a disability. Of the remaining Atlanta youth and young adult respondents, 1.5% did not want to answer the question while 8.8% reported having a disability.²³

²³ Disabilities that youth shared they live with include (for youth that shared they have a disability): a condition that limits physical activity (32.3%), a learning difficulty (20.0%), blindness or severe visual impairment (13.8%), a long-standing psychological or mental health impairment (13.8%), deafness or severe hearing impairment (12.3%), or did not wish to specify (7.7%).



Figure 1. Sociodemographics for Youth and Young Adult Respondents Who Provided a ZIP Code in the Atlanta Area (n=137)



[^] Additional Race/Ethnicity not included above represent 12.4% of the Atlanta ZIP code survey respondents: Native American/Indigenous or Alaskan Native (8.0%), Asian or Asian American (3.6%), and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (0.7%). Please note that a small number (n=3) of youth and young adult respondents in the race/ethnicity groupings in the table above reported being multi-racial and are counted in more than one category.

* Includes those currently in high school, those with a high school degree, and those with a GED

+ Includes those with an Associate or Master's degree



Atlanta Youth and Young Adults' Future Plans and Dreams Related to Education, Employment, and Entrepreneurial Opportunity

- In the next 5-10 years, the **majority of youth and young adult respondents see themselves owning their own business.**
- **Youth and young adult respondents most frequently reported preferring to start their own business** rather than working for a public, private, non-profit, or family business.
- Among Atlanta youth and young adult respondents, **Black or African American respondents most frequently reported wanting to start their own business**, while **Hispanic or Latino/Latina/Latinx respondents want to work for a company or corporation**, and **White²⁴ respondents want to work for a non-profit organization.**
- Overall, a **bachelor's degree was the most common degree type that youth and young adult respondents felt they needed** for their chosen career path (please see Figure 2).

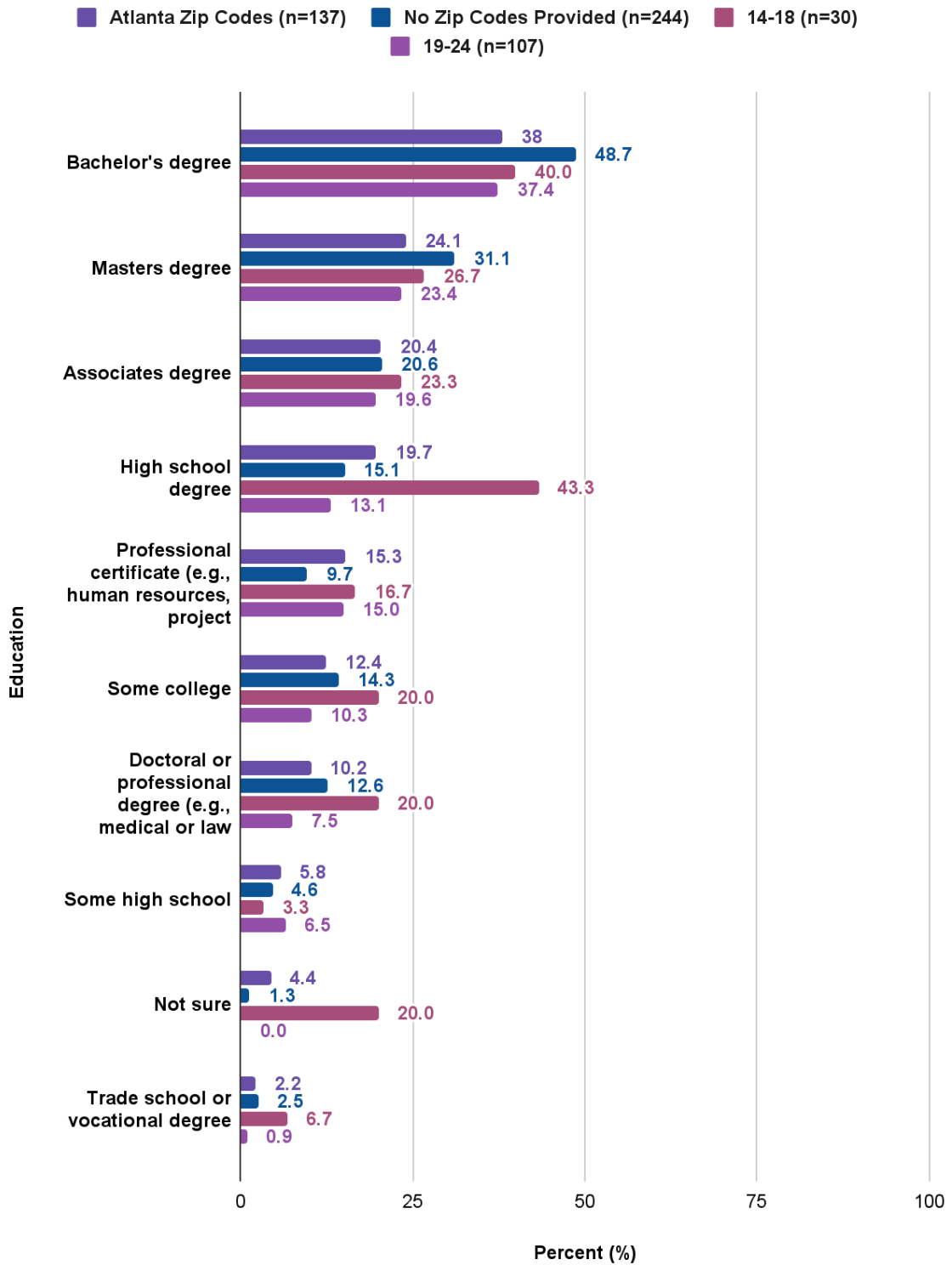
“A lot of Black people bolt into entrepreneurship and then “crash” due to lack of funding. For Latino and White people, generation-wise, a lot of Hispanic friends want to work for a corporation because their parents work there. A White friend of mine wants to work for a nonprofit because his dad works there. So generational buildup is cool. Personally, my family doesn’t have any generational wealth and there is generational debt so breaking out of that 9-5 or warehouse job seems more under our generation’s control.”

- YLC Member

²⁴ Although we used the race/ethnicity of “White or Caucasian” on the survey, we will be using only the term “White” throughout the report because “Caucasian” is an antiquated term and is inherently imprecise and inaccurate, as it encompasses a huge breadth of possible genetic ancestry and cultural influences. Source: <https://med.umn.edu/news-events/time-phase-out-caucasian>



Figure 2. Type of Education Needed for Atlanta Youth’s Chosen Career Path by ZIP Code and Age



Note: Respondents were able to select more than one option when asked what type of education they would need for their chosen career path.

- Overall, the **most important goal in life among youth and young adult respondents is “being successful in work,”** but this varied by race/ethnicity (please see Figure 3) and education level.
 - Among Atlanta youth and young adult respondents, Black or African American respondents most frequently reported “being successful in work,” Hispanic or Latino/Latina/Latinx respondents most frequently reported both “having a good family life” and “having a lot of different experiences,” and White respondents most frequently reported “making a contribution to society.”
 - Respondents with at least some high school reported “being successful in work” as their most important goal in life while those with at least some college education reported “making a contribution to society” as their most important goal in life.

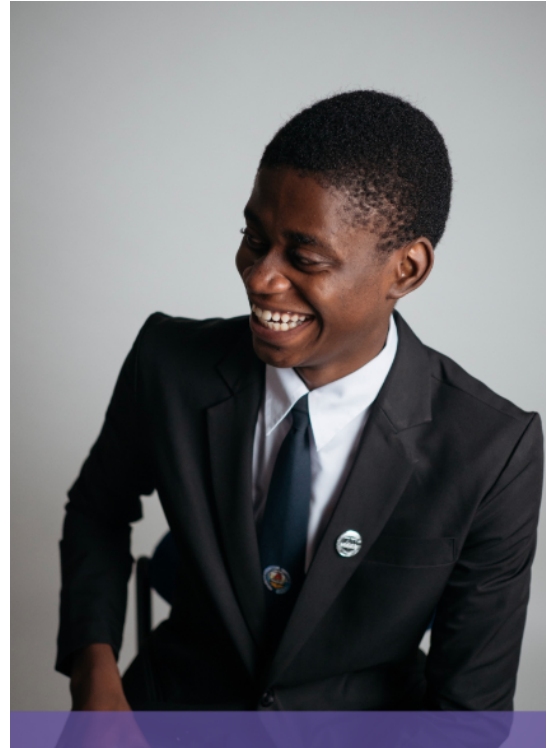
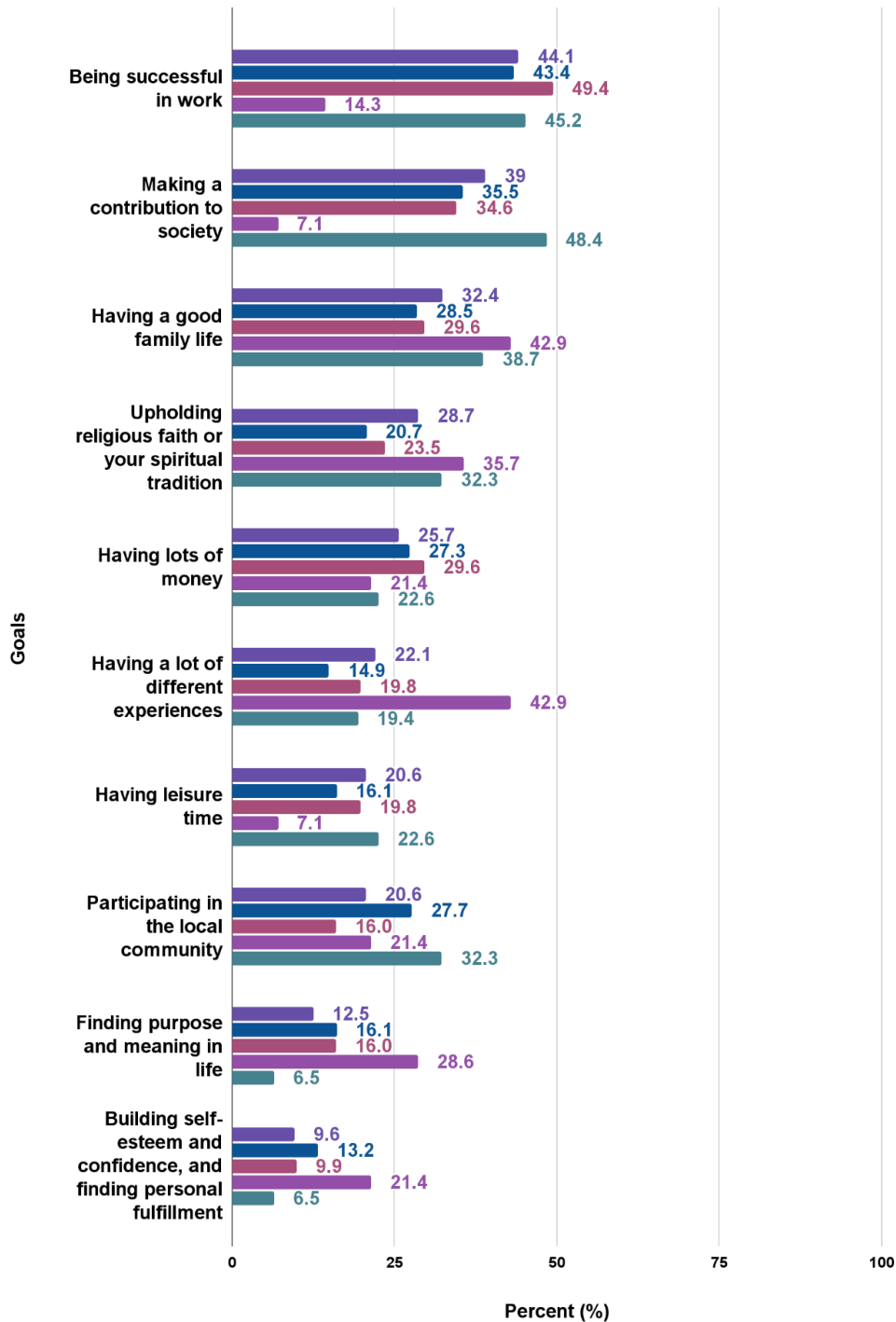


Figure 3. Most Important Goals in Life for Atlanta Youth by ZIP Code and Race/Ethnicity

■ Atlanta Zip Codes (n=137)
 ■ No Zip Codes Provided (n=244)
 ■ Black or African American (n=82)
 ■ Hispanic or Latino/Latina/Latinx (n=14)
 ■ White (n=31)



Note: Respondents were able to select up to 3 options when asked what are the most important goals in their life.

- Overall, **youth and young adult respondents most frequently reported “salary/pay” as the main value they are looking for in a future job but this varied by race/ethnicity.** While Black or African American youth and young adult respondents most frequently reported salary/pay as the top value, Hispanic or Latino/Latina/Latinx respondents most frequently reported having a good title, location, and networking opportunities, and White respondents most frequently reported having a good team and diversity and inclusion.

Recommendations Related to Atlanta Youth and Young Adults’ Future Plans and Dreams Related to Education, Employment, and Entrepreneurial Opportunity

- YLC members suggest having **a center that can disperse information about career opportunities** to youth and young adults in Atlanta.
- YLC members suggest **increasing access to different careers** because people can feel discouraged when they do not have access to what they need to pursue a particular career interest. YLC members also suggest **increasing the representation and visibility of Black or African American folk in diverse careers so that youth can see they are represented.**
- YLC members suggest **getting more Black or African American youth and young adults loans for capital to start their own business.** These loans can potentially help the 65.9% of Black or African American youth and young adults who indicated they would prefer to start their own business to do so.
- YLC members note that Atlanta’s youth and young adults want to make a contribution to society but may lack the tools and resources needed to make a difference. Based on this, CRS suggests Atlanta schools and other **organizations consider having more resources tailored to youth and young adults from under-resourced and low-income communities early into their careers** when they may be most passionate about the work.
- CRS suggests that **Atlanta organizations consider incorporating self-care and mental health into their organizations’ values,** because youth and young adults reported a need to build self-esteem and find meaning in their careers. Additionally, organizations can incorporate paid volunteer days or events so youth and young adults can know the organization they work for values community service and is making a direct contribution, even if it is outside of the formal job description.
- **YLC members suggest organizations be transparent about salary information on job postings** so youth and young adults know how much money they should be making compared to others in their fields and ensure they are equitably compensated. CRS additionally suggests that organizations provide youth and young adults with tools and resources to be able to understand fair market rates for job positions and business services.
- YLC members suggest **schools and organizations offer financial literacy courses and workshops** to students and Atlanta youth and young adults (or work to increase awareness of these resources if they are already in place) so they can learn how to manage their money (i.e., to cover the cost of rent or mortgage, food, etc.).
- YLC members suggest **organizations offer assistance to youth and young adults regarding how to advocate for themselves during salary negotiations** to ensure young people are earning the salary they deserve with a hiring manager and not getting stuck with the lowest



bid.

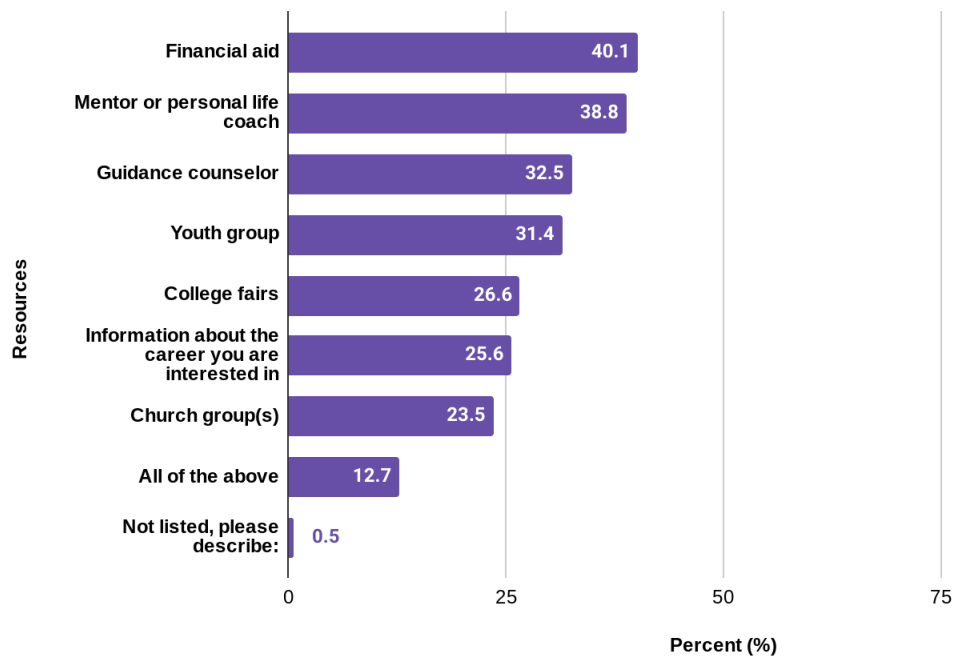
- YLC members note that **youth and young adults have been conditioned to go to college** because it is the easiest way to make more money but some cannot continue pursuing their degrees because they **cannot afford the cost of an education**. Based on this, CRS suggests that **Atlanta organizations and other higher learning institutions make increasing the availability of and awareness of existing financial aid resources a priority** for Atlanta youth and young adults in pursuit of a college degree to retain the talent that lives here and provide more opportunities for those working to make a contribution to society.



Resources to Support Atlanta Youth and Young Adults' Plans and Dreams Related to Education, Employment, and Entrepreneurship

- Overall, the **top three resources that youth and young adult respondents shared they needed to accomplish their goals were, in order of importance based on the proportion of youth and young adults selecting each option: (1) financial aid, (2) a mentor or personal life coach, and (3) a guidance counselor** (please see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Resources Youth and Young Adults Reported Needing to Accomplish Their Goals (n=381)



Note: Percentages will not total 100% as youth and young adult respondents could select more than one option.

- Overall, **over a quarter of youth and young adult respondents shared that their schools**



provided career preparation programs like Distributive Education Clubs of America (DECA) or Future Business Leaders of America, vocational education/trade or technical courses, or financial literacy classes.

- Overall, **most youth and young adult respondents agreed that (1) they had attended a class or course that aligned with their future work goals, (2) they and/or their parent(s) know how to fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), and (3) their school or university prepared them for entrepreneurship.**
 - Among Atlanta youth and young adult respondents only, a somewhat higher proportion of young adult respondents agreed with the statements listed above as compared to youth respondents. Most youth and young adult respondents also reported that they often find themselves needing assistance completing educational activities.
 - Among Atlanta youth and young adult respondents only, the large majority of White youth and young adult respondents felt their school or university has prepared them for entrepreneurship compared to somewhat lower proportions for Hispanic or Latino/Latina/Latinx youth and young adult respondents and Black or African American youth and young adult respondents that felt this way.
- Overall, **the top resources shared by youth and young adult respondents in addition to those above were financial aid or scholarships, access to money or capital, and language access support.** Youth and young adult respondents also shared a wide variety of other resources²⁵, although none of these other resources were shared by more than 1.0% of youth and young adult respondents, which may suggest the need for individually-tailored support for some youth and young adults who express unique needs.
- Overwhelmingly, **the top reason shared by youth and young adult respondents when asked why young people in Atlanta might decide to not apply to college was due to a lack of financial resources or poverty.** For example, one respondent shared that *“Young people in Atlanta may not apply to college because of a lack of financial support. Some may also struggle in finding transportation to and from school.”* Other reasons shared included but were not limited to feeling discouraged or unmotivated, lacking knowledge about college or financial aid, choosing not to attend, lacking support, having other financial prospects or dreams not tied to college, drug or substance use, outside influences that discourage youth and young adults to attend college, and low school achievement.
- Overall, **just over two-thirds of youth and young adult respondents shared that they “probably” or “definitely” know where to look for scholarships,** while one in ten youth and young adult respondents “did not at all” know where to look. Among Atlanta youth and young adult respondents only, White youth and young adult respondents were the most likely to feel like they “probably” or “definitely” knew where to look for scholarships, followed by Hispanic or Latino/Latina/Latinx youth and young adult respondents and Black or African American youth and young adult respondents.

²⁵ Additional resources shared by less than 1% of total youth and young adult respondents included access to reading material, access to insurance, financial services or classes, mental health resources, disability support services, access to technology or digital support, access to food, security services, support from family and friends, advice, or unclear responses.



Recommended Resources to Support Atlanta Youth and Young Adult's Plans and Dreams Related to Education, Employment, and Entrepreneurship

- YLC members suggest the need to **match more young people with mentors**. One example is finding ways to connect older, successful people from similar racial or ethnic backgrounds with youth and young adults who want support to advance their careers.
- YLC members suggest the need for **information on financial aid that is provided in a way that is digestible and easy to understand** for people who do not understand or have less experience with the U.S. educational system.
- YLC members do not feel that high schools are providing enough resources to students, particularly students who are interested in entrepreneurship. YLC members suggest that **schools invest more into clubs and similar programs to help young people develop into future business leaders**.
- YLC members note that school cultures in Atlanta are focused on a) White or b) Black or African American cultural norms. This can make it harder for Hispanic or Latino/Latina/Latinx and Asian students to find networks where they can feel safe at school. YLC members suggest the **need for schools to implement clubs (e.g., language clubs, ethnic group student unions, etc.) where students can discuss issues that are important to them and get involved in the student community in a way that supports them and their culture**.
- YLC members highlight that completing FAFSA can be challenging for students whose parent(s) are immigrants. The YLC members suggest that **schools provide tailored support in navigating the financial aid application process** to these students and their families.
- YLC members suggest that schools **incorporate scholarship essay writing into the curriculum for high school seniors** to help students feel more comfortable with scholarship application essays.
- YLC members suggest that **high schools and universities help students learn about scholarships earlier in the academic year** so that they have time to prepare their applications.
- YLC members suggest that **high school-aged youth need support in finding schools with majors in fields they are interested in entering**, as well as finding professional networks within those fields.
- YLC members emphasize the **structural racism and inequality** that is at the root of many of the problems youth and young adults raised through the survey. YLC members suggest that **increased funding in low-income schools could solve the majority of issues facing youth and young adults**. Based on this, CRS suggests that organizations might consider funding, supporting, and/or partnering with organizations that are engaged in advocacy work in this area. YLC members additionally assert that increasing funding of any kind around deconstructing structural racism in Atlanta schools is imperative. YLC members further highlight the inequitable distribution of resources and funding in different schools around and in Atlanta and note that this makes it “harder for everyone to get that educational equity that is needed to keep the community up.”
- YLC members suggest the need for **high schools to provide more vocational coursework in schools (e.g., cosmetology classes, financial literacy classes, Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education [CTAE] pathways)** so that students can graduate high school with technical skills that increase the ability to earn income after high school graduation.





Support Systems for Atlanta Youth and Young Adults Related to Education, Employment, and Entrepreneurship

- Overall, the **large majority of youth and young adult respondents agreed that they have support for their dreams and life goals and agreed that their environment is preparing them for their future careers.**
- Overall, **most youth and young adult respondents were familiar with youth workforce programs** (defined as “programs that help youth to gain the knowledge and skills they need for their future career paths”). However, a lower proportion of Hispanic or Latino/Latina/Latinx youth and young adult respondents reported being familiar with such programs when compared to Black or African American and White youth and young adult respondents.
- Overall, **youth and young adult respondents expressed a high level of interest in a variety of youth workforce program services**, and more than six in ten youth and young adult respondents said they were "very" or "extremely" interested in every service listed (please see Figure 5).²⁶ YLC members highlighted that while interest in these services is high, there remain large **disparities in access created by racism, which in turn mean that youth and young adults of color do not enjoy the same level of access to similar services as their White peers.**

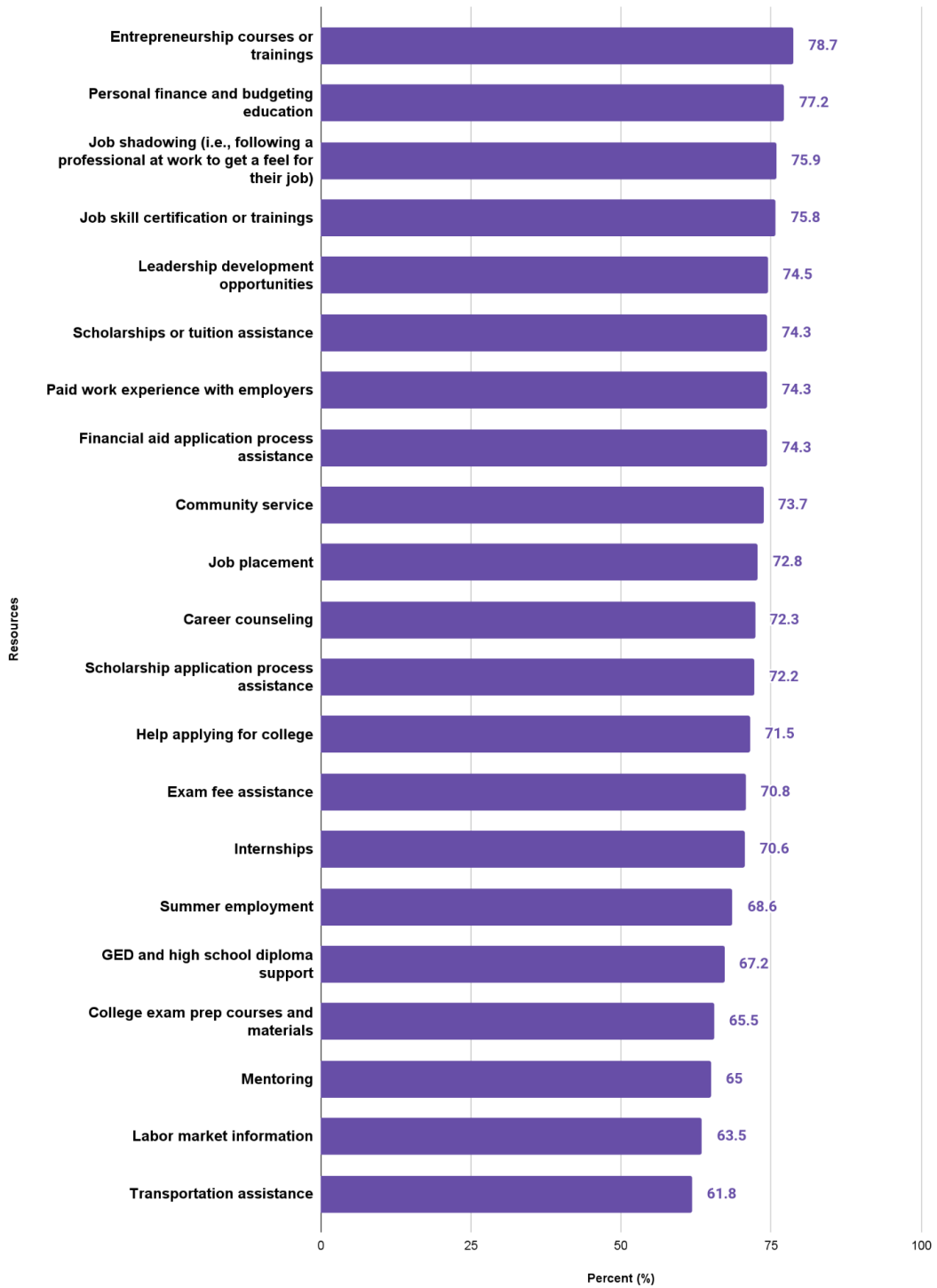
“With my own lived experience, I didn’t know anything about shadowing or internships because my mom didn’t graduate high school [...] When I finally got it, it clicked. I felt like I needed to hyperfixate on that and get internships. White people have the resources—my school doesn’t even have teachers like that, their schools have the resources that we lack.”

- YLC Member

²⁶ Services listed included (in order of the proportion of youth expressing interest in each service): entrepreneurship courses or trainings, personal finance and budgeting education, job shadowing (i.e., following a professional at work to get a feel for their job), job skill certification or trainings, leadership development opportunities, scholarships or tuition assistance, paid work experience with employers, financial aid application process assistance, community service, job placement, career counseling, scholarship application process assistance, help applying for college, exam fee assistance, internships, summer employment, GED and high school diploma support, college exam prep courses and materials, mentoring, labor market information, and transportation assistance.



Figure 5. Percentage of Youth and Young Adults Who Are “Very” or “Extremely” Interested In Youth Workforce Program Services, for Atlanta-Area Respondents Only (n=137)



- Overall, approximately **two-thirds of youth and young adult respondents felt they “definitely” or “probably” had close friends or relatives they could go to for entrepreneurial advice.**
 - A higher proportion of Hispanic or Latino/Latino/Latinx youth and young adult respondents reported they “definitely” or “probably” had close friends or relatives they could go to for entrepreneurial advice as compared to White and Black or African American youth and young adult respondents, respectively.
 - A higher proportion of young adult respondents ages 19-24 felt that they "probably" or "definitely" had close friends or relatives that they could go to for entrepreneurial advice as compared to youth respondents ages 14-18.

Recommendations Related to Support Systems for Atlanta Youth and Young Adults Related to Education, Employment, and Entrepreneurship

- YLC members suggest the **need for youth and young adult workforce programs to provide internships, entrepreneurship courses, job shadowing, and/or apprenticeships** because the YLC members feel that there is a current lack of these services available to Atlanta youth and young adults.
- YLC members suggest the **need to invest in and explore barriers related to increasing access to transportation for families with young people.** YLC members suggest that the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) and local government work to understand and raise awareness of family knowledge and usage of already-existing public transit services. YLC members also raise access to cars as a systemic issue that creates barriers to transportation for young people.
- YLC members **highlight the challenges posed by inequities in intergenerational wealth;** noting that it is hard for young people to start businesses if their parent(s) do not have stable work or income or young people need to support their families.
- YLC members highlight **racist inequities in access to information on jobs and career fields.** To help address this, YLC members suggest that **organizations hold career fairs focused on helping young people not only connect with recruiters but also to become more knowledgeable about different types of careers.**

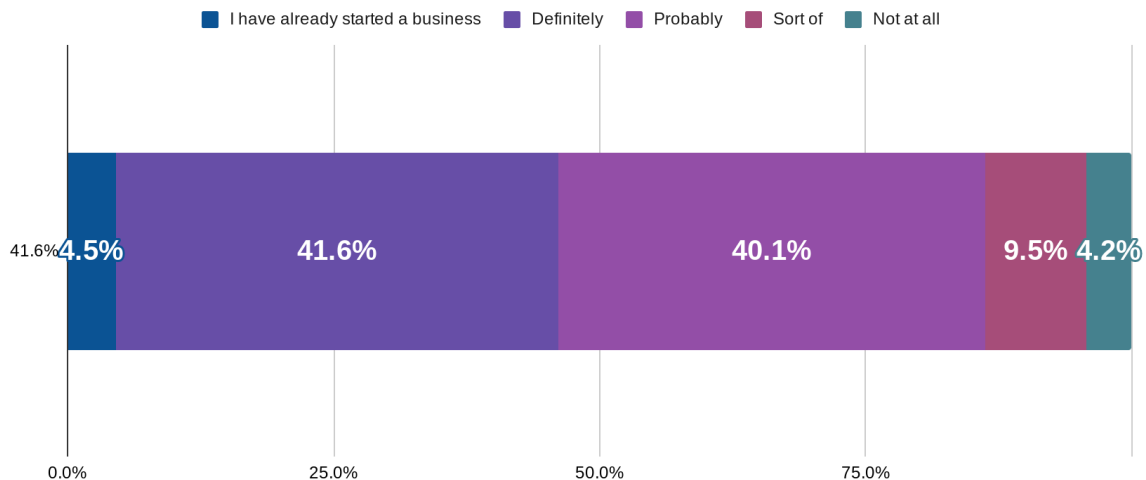




Motivations, Knowledge, Skills, and Interests of Atlanta Youth and Young Adults Related to Entrepreneurship

- **Over 80% of youth and young adults surveyed “definitely” or “probably” wanted to start a business now or in the future** (please see Figure 6). This finding aligns with the above finding that most youth and young adults saw themselves owning a business in 5-10 years.

Figure 6. Desire to Start A Business Now or In the Future



- In qualitative analyses of data related to youth and young adults’ motivations for starting a business, a **common theme emerged of youth and young adults wanting to own a business to achieve personal or familial financial gain and security**. Other reasons youth and young adults cited for included wanting to start a business included **freedom or independence** and a desire to **contribute to a cause or community**.
- **The majority of youth and young adult respondents stated they would need funding to start a business.**
- Overall, the majority of youth and young adults agreed that they felt comfortable starting a business and managing the financial aspects of their business. **Most youth and young adults also agreed that they knew the value of their work and knew how to find information about starting a business or entrepreneurship.**
- **Almost all youth and young adults indicated that they had a mentor or someone who could help them with becoming an entrepreneur** and 74.2% stated that they have the support they need to develop a business plan. **However, the majority of youth and young adults also indicated that they**

“I think interest in entrepreneurship spiked over [the COVID-19] pandemic, the pandemic was the first time I stuck the landing. People had time to find skills. I learned how to make fonts and got into graphic design. I think the answers would look a lot different pre-pandemic. People had nothing better to do with their time, and realized that none of this even matters. And taking school less seriously, and what matters is how can I make money and feed myself over the next few years...”

- YLC Member



would be interested in having a mentor. This gap may indicate a need for specialized or improved mentorship opportunities for youth and young adults.

- Overall, **most youth and young adults believed they had access to services, resources, and locations that could support their work within the area they lived.** They endorsed that they could access platforms to sell their products, that they were aware of venues where they could share their products or services, and that they could get support from their neighborhoods to shop in their stores and generate sales.

Recommendations Related to Motivations, Knowledge, Skills, and Interests of Atlanta Youth and Young Adults Interested in Entrepreneurship

- During a sensemaking session, YLC members discussed the **impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic and social media had on their beliefs about starting a business and going to college.** Some saw more opportunities for earning money. They were also surprised that other Black youth and young adults had already started businesses and said **culturally-specific skills like hair braiding, nail tech, etc. are done as side hustles (i.e., gig-based supplemental jobs) to earn additional income and pay for bills.** Based on this finding, CRS suggests that **it could be beneficial to investigate and support youth and young adult entrepreneurship beyond formal business ownership.** Investigating how the youth and young adults conceptualize running or owning a business may benefit researchers and program developers to specify resources to their needs.
- The YLC members note that some of the **side hustles that Black or African American youth and young adults start are culturally important.** Based on this, CRS suggests that **organizations also ask youth and young adults from other cultures about culturally-relevant business practices** to identify and provide culturally-specific support and funding for youth and young adult entrepreneurs.
- YLC members highlight **social media as a viable avenue for capitalizing, or gaining income, from their talents.** Based on this, CRS suggests that **providing youth and young adults with access to training or mentors who are adept at marketing via social media** may benefit the Atlanta youth and young adults interested in promoting their businesses via social media.
- YLC members note that youth and young adult entrepreneurs are confident in their ability to start a business but often find it difficult to find resources, funding, and information about starting a business. CRS suggests that **organizations further investigate youth and young adult knowledge of available funding for starting businesses and identify gaps in funding support** provided in Atlanta. YLC members additionally suggest that organizations prioritize supporting youth and young adults to identify gaps in access to entrepreneurial resources, funding, and information in their communities that can be filled.
- YLC members emphasize that there are **personal and structural barriers that may impede the career success of youth and young adults** including parental income, lack of access to relevant classes, etc. Since some youth and young adults may already be under-resourced and many are entering entrepreneurship-based careers to build financial stability, CRS suggests that **it may be important to provide a variety of resources to ensure that the risk of starting a business does not further diminish their access to resources.**





Challenges Faced By Young or Aspiring Entrepreneurs in Atlanta

The following findings are for youth and young adults who indicated they wanted to start a business now or in the future only:

- **Black or African American youth and young adults and Hispanic or Latino/Latina/Latinx youth and young adults cited a lack of stability in life outside of entrepreneurship** as the most frequent challenge they faced as young or aspiring entrepreneurs. **The most frequently reported challenge among both White youth and young adults was a lack of a supportive environment.** Additionally, a lack of experience managing others was frequently reported across all groups.
- **Youth ages 14-18** indicated that the top challenges they faced as young or aspiring entrepreneurs were
 - lack of experience managing others
 - lack of stability in life outside of entrepreneurship
 - lack of leadership experience
 - lack of relevant skills related to creating a new business
- **Young adults ages 19-24** indicated that the top challenges they faced as young or aspiring entrepreneurs were
 - lack of stability in life outside of entrepreneurship
 - lack of a supportive environment
 - ineligibility (due to age) to receive a Small Business Administration (SBA) loan to fund or start a business²⁷
 - lack of relevant skills related to creating a new business
- Youth and young adults with at least **some high school were less likely to endorse that they lacked a supportive environment** than those in college or with bachelor's degrees.

Recommendations Related to Challenges Faced By Young or Aspiring Entrepreneurs in Atlanta

- YLC members believe that a **lack of transportation, lack of capital, entrepreneurship issues, and personal issues may keep youth and young adults from committing to entrepreneurship.** Further, YLC members notice that the lack of stability outside of entrepreneurship is a concern and suggest that they could investigate the cause(s) of this finding in a focus group. Based on this, CRS suggests that **organizations supporting entrepreneurs in Atlanta could explore providing (where not available), or expanding or increasing awareness of existing financial support for young entrepreneurs in Atlanta** (e.g., through a grant program for young entrepreneurs, incubator or accelerator programs for young entrepreneurs, relief funding for businesses run by young people who are not covered

²⁷ SBA loan requirements vary by lender. Some lenders, such as SmartBiz, require applicants to be at least 21 years old. (Source: Robinson, S. (2018). *Small Business Loans for Young Entrepreneurs*. SmartBiz. Available at: <https://resources.smartbizloans.com/more-sba-articles/small-business-loans-for-young-entrepreneurs/>)



through SBA loan programs, or a centralized repository for information about available funding). YLC members specifically highlight the need to have grants and youth and young adult programs that have been founded by or have had input from youth and young adults who have faced the issues on which the grant or program is focused.

Conclusions

The Annie E. Casey Foundation formed the YLC to improve workforce and entrepreneurial opportunities for Atlanta's youth and young adults in the South and Westside. As a first step, the Casey Foundation partnered with CRS to design a youth and young adult participatory research project with the YLC to better understand Atlanta youth and young adults' needs and interests related to entrepreneurship and economic opportunity. Although we only know for sure that Atlanta youth and young adults represented about one-third (35.9%) of the total surveyed youth and young adult respondents,²⁸ much can be learned about the career needs of Atlanta youth and young adults. .:

With the learnings and recommendations from this participatory research project, the Casey Foundation and other funders can begin further exploring the best way to prepare Atlanta youth and young adults for their future careers and entrepreneurial ventures. **Please note that while we (CRS) provide high-level recommendations for funders below, the YLC's recommendations specific to the learning questions are presented throughout the report above. We recommend that readers interested in acting on the recommendations in this report focus on the YLC's recommendations.** We also encourage public and private investors to consider the findings from this research and identify what is already available to address the YLC recommendations listed throughout the report. Specifically, funders could explore the following:

- Supporting or partnering with organizations working towards providing financial literacy and financial resources for Atlanta youth and young adults.
- Pooling resources with youth and young adult-focused organizations in the Atlanta area could help expand Casey's reach as it works to decrease inequity and increase economic opportunities for youth and young adults in the South and Westside neighborhoods of Atlanta.
- Additionally, a number of youth and young adults indicated wanting a mentor. Investing time to develop a database or repository to connect youth and young adults to available mentors in Atlanta could help the youth and young adults get guidance and experience in different career areas early in their careers.

²⁸ Since ZIP code was not required to complete the survey as explained in Section 2, only 35.9% of youth and young adult respondents provided a ZIP code for the survey; 64.1% did not provide a ZIP code. It is likely a higher percentage of surveyed youth and young adult respondents reside in Atlanta than what is represented in the data.



Ultimately, we hope that these research findings will serve as a springboard for local partners to further their impact in Atlanta's South and Westside communities and continue to support the future careers and entrepreneurial ventures of Atlanta youth and young adults.

