

## Introduction and Background

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An affiliate and flagship of the YouthBuild national model, YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School (YBP) delivers tailored programming to students who, for a variety of reasons (whether academic or personal), require a more intimate, supportive, alternative school environment. The Philadelphia Public School District has struggled with budget cuts that have impacted teachers' ability to provide individualized support to students, while constraining their classroom resources such that, in some schools, children lack access to basic educational materials and other resources. Consequently, a growing percentage of today's youth are deficient in the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills that are so highly valued in the workplace and at institutions of higher education.

For over two decades, YBP has served as a champion and advocate for these youth by giving them a second chance to pursue higher education and postsecondary employment through a range of programming that addresses students' academic, social, emotional, and professional needs. In addition to helping high school dropouts earn their diplomas, YBP supports students with workforce development training, community service opportunities, and case management. The organization is also committed to supporting YBP alumni for one year after graduation to make sure they are prepared to successfully transition into adulthood.

In YBP's recent history, leadership worked to refine the mission and expand the values of the organization, while placing a priority focus on graduates' "life after YouthBuild". This prior planning effort, which culminated in 2013, served as a strong foundation for the current planning process, the objectives of which were to focus on the **infrastructure and internal capacity** needs of the organization (including leadership and financial sustainability), increase the **quality** of the programming, and more strategically **engage partners**. Ultimately, YBP intends to use this plan to move the organization to the next level of program outcomes and student success.

## The Planning Process

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Following an initial diagnostic conducted by TCC Group- a management consulting firm specializing in nonprofit strategy and capacity building retained by YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School in December 2013 to guide the planning process- the following priorities surfaced and were explored through the planning process:

- Agreement on vision statement and whether it should encompass **larger, societal systems' change**;
- Definition of outcomes, including decision about whether to **tier expectations in accordance with students' socioeconomic status and academic performance**;
- Accountability for achievement of outcomes, including the **role of partners**, particularly related to YBP alumni;
- Articulation of strategic priorities grounded in **understanding of resource tradeoffs** implicit in each potential future direction; and
- Alignment of internal capacity with mission/vision and external environment to **maximize mission impact**.

Led by a strategic planning committee, inclusive of select members of the Board and YBP's senior leadership team, the process included:

- I. **Planning to Plan Phase** (December 2013 – January 2014) during which TCC Group worked to (1) clarify the scope of work, roles, expectations, and timeline; (2) to identify critical issues and questions to explore during the formal data collection process; and (3) to ensure an efficient and tailored approach that focused on the relevant concerns at hand. Data collection included a document review; introductory session with staff; and a preliminary organizational assessment using the Core Capacity Assessment Tool (CCAT). This data collection culminated in a three-hour kick-off meeting with the strategic planning committee during which participants engaged in discussion to further investigate and augment the findings from the introductory session with staff about aspirations for the organization, opportunities, strengths, and potential threats. TCC Group also identified individuals and stakeholder groups to be included in the formal data collection process.
- II. **Data Collection and Analysis Phase** (January – March), during which TCC Group conducted primary and secondary research to understand YBP's internal and external operating environments from the perspective of a variety of key stakeholders. Data collection activities in this phase included *focus groups* with staff, Board members, students and alumni, and postsecondary partners; *interviews* (five) with staff and Board members; a *survey* of volunteers and Friends of YBP; *external interviews* (four) with representatives from the School District of Philadelphia, YouthBuild USA, the Community College of Philadelphia, and Philadelphia Works; (two) *organizational logic model sessions*; and *external research*, including benchmarking of Juma Ventures, the Doe Fund, Posse, and Young Women's Leadership Network on the following variables: success metrics, partnership models, selection criteria, and program expenditures.

- III. **Situational Analysis Meeting-Defining the Direction Phase** (March) during which TCC Group synthesized the data gathered in the previous phase into a situational analysis report, the purpose of which was to present the strategic planning committee with the information necessary to make informed decisions about the organization’s future direction. The contents of the report were shared at a six-hour planning retreat, which was facilitated by TCC Group. Results from this meeting included the first iteration of a revised vision statement and draft strategic programmatic goals.
  
- IV. **Plan Development Phase** (April – Dec) that included a series of discussions with committee members and key staff, building on decisions made at the planning retreat to agree on the goals, objectives, strategies, and metrics necessary to operationalize and accomplish YBP’s strategic priorities for the next three years.

## Overview of the Strategic Plan

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Throughout this highly engaged planning process, it became apparent that **YBP is filling a critical gap**, giving young adults who are not well served by the public education system a second chance to finish high school, prepare for postsecondary opportunities, and receive the social and emotional support they need to thrive as independent, active, and engaged members of their communities. YBP's services are highly valued, as is the culture and climate of the organization, which promote **excellence, perseverance** and **respect**. While the growing size and increasing diversity of YBP's student population reinforces the need for alternative education and workforce development programs serving out-of-school youth in Philadelphia, through the planning process, YBP considered the implications of this trend on its internal capacity and resource needs. Committed to serving a broad student population with tailored services and individualized supports, YBP used the planning process to facilitate decision making about its **program design and performance metrics** with the goal of **better aligning this expansive vision and limitless demand with the realities of its internal capacity**. In this vein, the following key priorities emerged for the organization and are reflected throughout this plan:

- Better articulate and refine YBP's program model;
- Improve YBP's ability to collect and use data to drive decision making;
- Define priority outcomes for YBP;
- Ensure YBP's programs align with its priority outcomes; and
- Share accountability for YBP's priority outcomes with its valued partners.

This plan builds on the following vision and mission statements, which were developed and reaffirmed over the course of the planning process:

**Vision:** *YouthBuild Philadelphia's demonstrated and recognized success inspires more holistic and integrated approaches in education and social programs nationally.*

**Mission:** *YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School's mission is to provide out-of-school youth in Philadelphia with the broadest range of tools, supports, and opportunities available to become self-sufficient, responsible and contributing members and leaders in their community.*

# Goals

This plan has the following major goals:

## PROGRAMMATIC GOALS

- I. **GOAL ONE: YBP will articulate and refine its model to increase its impact on a community and systems level**
- II. **GOAL TWO: YBP will strengthen the delivery of its programs and services for students during the program year**
- III. **GOAL THREE: YBP will strengthen its ability to deliver postsecondary (education and career) supports**

## ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS

### LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

- IV. **GOAL FOUR: YBP will be bolstered by a highly capable and engaged Board and council/committee members to ensure the organization's continued strategic growth**

### OPERATIONS

- V. **GOAL FIVE: YBP will invest in the recruitment, retention, and development of its staff**
- VI. **GOAL SIX: YBP will establish the technology systems necessary to access and learn from organizational, programmatic, and environmental data**

### FUNDRAISING AND EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

- VII. **GOAL SEVEN: YBP will effectively message its brand, value proposition, and program impact to attract and retain partners, students, and supporters**
- VIII. **GOAL EIGHT: YBP will raise revenues to support the strategic priorities of the plan and ensure the long-term sustainability of the organization**

### FINANCE

- IX. **GOAL NINE: YBP will optimize its financial management and accounting functions to support staff in managing to outcomes and reporting to internal and external stakeholders**

## Conclusion

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YBP has been steadfast in its commitment to serve some of Philadelphia’s most vulnerable youth or, as Executive Director Simran Sidhu characterizes them in her March 2014 TEDx Talk, “opportunity youth.” These are individuals who have struggled to reach their full potential and are in need of YBP’s competency-based academics, vocational training, service learning experiences, and social and emotional supports not only to finish high school, but also to successfully transition into post-graduate opportunities. In addition to quality programming, YBP boasts a team of dedicated and passionate staff, a culture that fosters creativity and personal transformation, and a commitment to caring for the whole person.

Unfortunately, today Philadelphia’s “opportunity youth” are facing increasingly complex obstacles in their homes, in their communities, and in their schools. As these students continue to seek a second chance within the walls of YBP, the organization has had to come to terms with the tradeoffs inherent in its promise to serve a broad student population in a holistic and individualized way. Through the planning process, the leadership of YBP engaged in deep reflection (facilitated by the insights collected from internal and external stakeholders) about the organization’s internal capacity needs to be able to carry out its expansive mission.

Ultimately, the strategic planning committee came to consensus around the goals set forth in this three-year strategic plan, which were informed by findings about the need for YBP to define its **desired outcomes**, to **share accountability** for these outcomes with strategic partners, and to invest in its **internal capacity** to track progress and improve programmatic and operational oversight. Building on the momentum of this planning process, and the conversations begun among peers and partners in the sector about the important work that lies ahead, YBP will also work toward accomplishing its longer-term organizational vision to *inspire more holistic and integrated approaches in education and social programs nationally through its own demonstrated and recognized success.*