



# Youth and Young Adult Navigation Core Practice Brief

## Preview document

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Youth and young adult navigation programs play a critical role in addressing the diverse and complex needs of young people by empowering them to thrive during pivotal transitions such as aging out of foster care, leaving the justice system, or pursuing independent living. These programs offer relationship-centered, culturally responsive, and youth-driven support. This support ensures access to resources, guidance, and advocacy that empower young people to achieve stability, self-sufficiency, and wellbeing. The Annie E. Casey Foundation partnered with the Collaborative for Implementation Practice (CIP) to explore core navigation practices, effective implementation strategies, and replicable approaches to enhance how navigation is provided in community-based settings.

Our goal was to identify the navigation practices and approaches that help young people as they progress toward five goals: 1) effectively transitioning to adulthood; 2) building supportive and family-like relationships; 3) achieving economic and/or academic success; 4) connecting and contributing to their community; and 5) experiencing overall wellbeing. This

**“Our job is to understand the language the youth are speaking and what they’re holding.”**

**—Navigator**

**Navigation is the process of helping young people access and coordinate the services they need to achieve stability, wellbeing, and long-term success within systems that are often fragmented and complex.**

practice brief describes how the core practices and contextual features of effective programs were identified, as well as the methodology, findings, and reflections for applying these learnings to future work in supporting effective navigation programs for youth and young adults.

## Core Youth and Young Adult Navigation Practices

Examining existing navigation approaches across various programs led to the identification of core practices for youth and young adults. Four organizations heavily informed the development of the brief: A Place 4 Me, Covenant House Alaska, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, and Project for Pride in Living. Through interviews with navigators, advocacy staff, and young people who have received navigation services, we identified seven core practices for navigation. Effective navigation involves both youth-facing and community-facing practices, with a strong emphasis on culturally responsive, youth-driven approaches.

**“If I called asking for help, they always had an answer—who to call, where to go, how I could get help.”**

**– Young person**

### Youth-Facing Practices

1. Build trusting relationships with young people and encourage them to build permanent, healthy connections in their lives.
2. Learn together with youth and young adults to develop individualized navigation plans that are informed by their strengths and aspirations and the barriers they have experienced.
3. Provide resources to help meet basic needs—such as assistance for rent, utilities, and other needs—to help stabilize young people so that they can focus on their goals.
4. Provide incremental support to help young people effectively move through and between systems. Navigators provide warm handoff referrals, walking hand-in-hand with youth and young adults throughout the process of connecting with and accessing public and private systems partners.
5. Build and strengthen youth and young adult self-efficacy and capability through intentional, phased skill-building and tailored support that reflect a young person’s readiness, needs, and challenges.

**“Beyond knowing about resources, [we] must really have communication and understanding of barriers and gaps at multiple levels.”**

**– Advocacy staff**

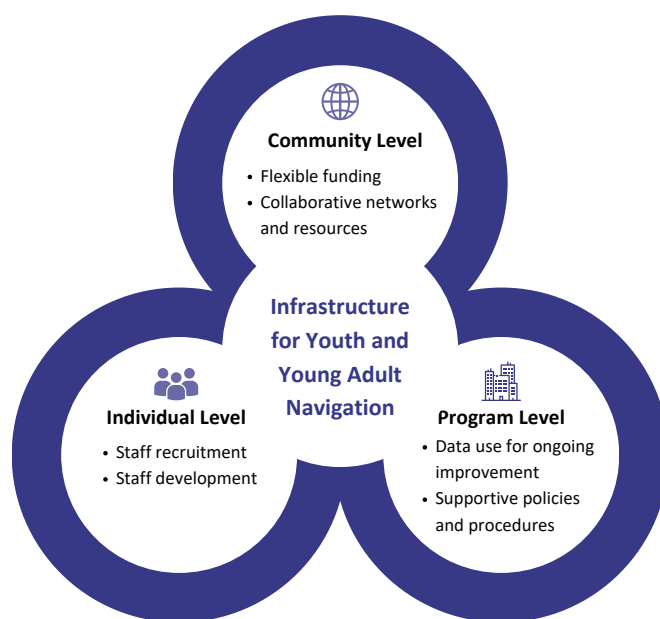
### Community-Facing Practices

6. Build a comprehensive understanding of local resources by sourcing, screening, and vetting resources for factors such as eligibility and cultural responsiveness.
7. Advocate to build and strengthen systems, using feedback from youth and young adults about barriers they commonly encounter.

## Infrastructure

Our findings included the identification of critical infrastructure elements for organizations successfully delivering these services—such as skilled staff recruitment and development, use of data for process improvement, supportive policies and procedures, flexible funding mechanisms, and external partnerships. Furthermore, addressing systemic barriers, such as access to housing, mental health supports, and education, is essential for long-term impact.

As funders consider future investments, the core navigation practices documented in the brief might serve as a blueprint for organizations that seek to implement navigation as a new practice or integrate it into existing services for youth and young adults. With sustained investment and strategic innovations, navigation programs can continue to provide holistic support, ensuring young people transition successfully into adulthood and achieve their fullest potential.



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