



2021-2025 Strategic Plan



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Who We Are

American YouthWorks (AYW) helps young people realize their full potential and effect positive change within their community. Through our two primary education and career training programs, YouthBuild Austin (YB) and Conservation Corps (CC), we provide the building blocks for learning and community engagement that young people can carry forward throughout their lives.

- Our nationally accredited and award-winning **Conservation Corps** connects corps members serving with the Texas Conservation Corps and Louisiana Conservation Corps with opportunities to steward natural landscapes, recreation areas, public lands, parks, and forests in Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Mississippi. Our Disaster Response Teams are deployed locally and nationally to assist communities impacted by natural disasters such as hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, and wildfires. Program participants earn industry recognized certifications and gain hands-on experience to access career pathways in conservation, recreation, forestry, disaster response and emergency management.
- Our award winning **YouthBuild Austin** program connects Opportunity Youth¹ with education and careers in the most in-demand sectors of the local economy: IT, healthcare, and construction. The research-based programming engages youth by combining academics, vocational training, and support services such as counseling, job placement, and post-secondary education. The YouthBuild Austin program provides the opportunity for young people to complete their high school education while simultaneously serving the Greater Austin community.

AYW's YouthBuild and Conservation Corps program participants have access to wrap-around support services (such as onsite childcare), a network of resources, and receive post-graduation college and career guidance. AYW instructors, counselors, and crew leaders provide one-on-one support to every AYW participant.

AYW stands with our community of young people to support them in accomplishing their goals, making a positive impact in the lives of others, and becoming agents of change in their own lives.

Mission Statement

The mission of American YouthWorks is to provide young people with opportunities to build careers, strengthen communities, and improve the environment through education, on-the-job training, and service to others.

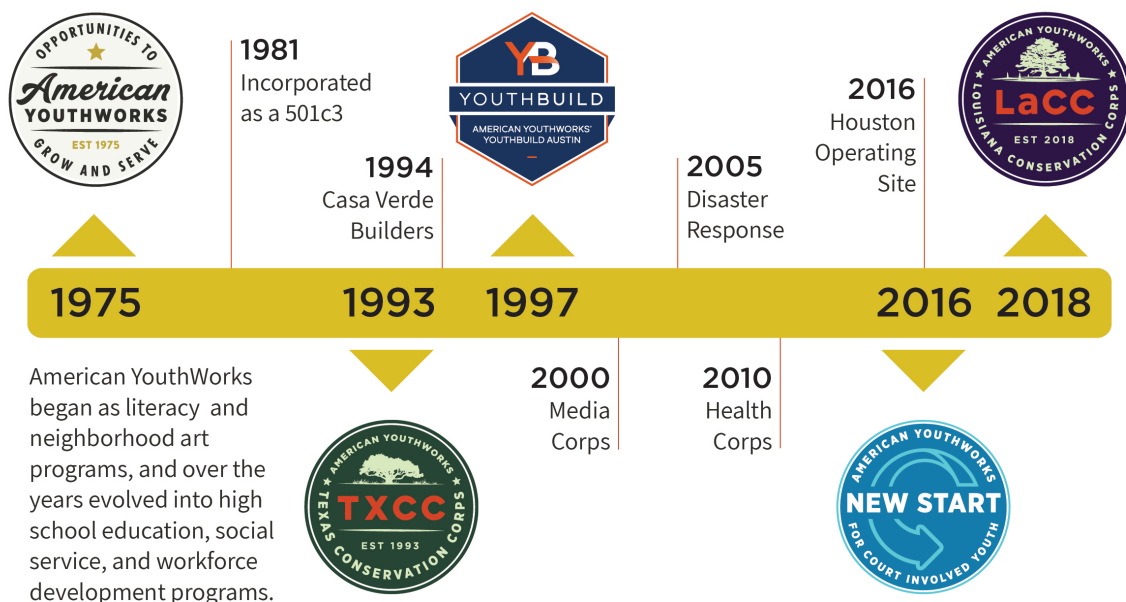
¹ From the [Corps Network](#): "Opportunity Youth are defined as people between the ages of 16 and 24 who are neither in school nor working. While some might refer to these young people as 'disconnected' or 'at-risk', there is a movement to change the narrative. These young people have enormous potential and represent a social and economic opportunity: all they need is a little support to get back on track.

There are millions of young Americans who meet the definition of Opportunity Youth. Many of them are eager to further their education, gain work experience and help their communities. Not investing in the future of these young people means millions of missed opportunities."

Partnerships

AYW has a history of cultivating strong partnerships with a diversity of community organizations and governmental agencies. Since 1998, AYW has had an on-site high school providing access to high school diplomas authorized by the Texas Education Agency. Our Child Development Program is operated in collaboration with Child Inc., with generous support from United Way of Greater Austin. And since 2019, AYW's charter high school partner is Goodwill Excel Center (High School for Adults). Within the YouthBuild program, we also operate a number of initiatives including our New Start program for court-involved youth and a Dual-Generation program to support young parents with an on-site childcare center and access to parenting classes and other support services. All of these YouthBuild services are provided at no-cost to participants.

AYW values these partnerships and recognizes that they are integral to the work that AYW does. This strategic plan is a dual effort to be responsive to and better collaborators with existing partners and to help AYW strategically prioritize new partnerships.



Where We've Been

Over the past 40 years, AYW has sought to address some of the most critical issues in our communities: equitable access to education, homelessness and affordable housing, disaster response, healthcare access, and environmental stewardship by building a diverse portfolio of funding sources that blend federal, state, local, corporate, philanthropic and individual support with fee-for-service projects. In response to community needs over the years, AYW has expanded to connect youth and young adults with opportunities to transform their lives through innovative education, training, and service through YouthBuild Austin and Texas Conservation Corps. These programs deliver education, career training, and supportive services that lay the foundation for socioeconomic stability and promote greater equity for young people. Between 2016-2018, AYW added two new operating sites

in Houston, Texas and Baton Rouge, Louisiana to support workforce development, conservation, and disaster relief needs for communities in the region. Since the beginning, AYW has focused on supporting marginalized communities; AYW is now making a concerted, agency-wide effort to center racial equity and diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging in areas such as hiring, recruitment, communication, and program services.

Where We're Going

In the next five years, AYW plans to expand local, regional, and national partnerships to maximize impact, increase visibility, and more effectively serve Opportunity Youth and local communities. To facilitate sustainable growth, AYW will ensure that the expansion of programs, funding, and partnerships is aligned with program capacity, and the organization will build stronger connections with potential donors, sponsors, and partners to diversify funding streams. AYW will continue to strengthen participant training and commitment to equitable outcomes, considering racial equity and diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (DEIB), in the creation and implementation of programs and services. AYW will also deepen its commitment to growing AYW leadership from within by providing career advancement training and mentorship opportunities to staff. AYW is also investing in new technology and strategies, including a new data management system, to build a stronger and more resilient organization and increase access to engage youth and young adults in training, education, and professional development experiences.

Advancing Racial Equity and Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging

American YouthWorks was founded with the idea of a shared community and ethic of inclusion. One of our core principles is to create a diverse and inclusive workplace that reflects our participants' and staffs' backgrounds, cultures, and experiences in order to better implement our mission to serve the youth and young adults in our programs. AYW strives to create an environment in which participants and staff are welcomed and supported, acknowledging that diverse perspectives and contributions should be sought out and valued.

AYW will ensure that racial equality and diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) are foundational aspects of our educational and training programs for both staff and program participants. Through focused and intentional efforts, AYW will work to build a more diverse staff, student, and participant community on campus, and equip individuals with the support and opportunities necessary for their success. Organization-wide actions include initiatives to improve hiring and recruitment processes for both staff and program participants and training to build cultural awareness and inclusiveness skills among staff and participants. AYW has a Racial Equity and DEIB Committee that was formed in 2019. This Committee is composed of staff members representing all areas of the organization.

This strategic plan outlines various ways AYW will further diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging within the organization.

Strategic Plan Goals Overview

How We Work with the Community:

Goal 1: Build on AYW's history of offering an inclusive, supportive, and professional environment that prepares participants for education and career pathways.

Goal 2: Increase program capacity to expand service to more local community members and Opportunity Youth.

Goal 3: Amplify external communications and marketing to increase AYW visibility and reach in the community.

How We Work Together:

Goal 4: Develop a stronger sense of unity and trust across the organization to increase workplace satisfaction.

Goal 5: Provide staff with opportunities for skill development and career advancement within the organization.

Goal 6: Improve alignment of staffing structures and operating procedures to increase staff productivity, efficiency, and overall job satisfaction.

How We Prioritize Sustainability:

Goal 7: Increase capacity and diversify development activities in order to expand fund-raising and funding sources to ensure organizational sustainability.

Goal 8: Establish an operating reserve to support new growth opportunities and mitigate unanticipated events.

Goal 9: Commit AYW to environmental sustainability by annually assessing and reducing the carbon footprint of all operations, incorporating eco-awareness practices, and expanding green jobs training.

Strategic Plan Goals

How We Work with the Community: Goal 1

Goal 1: Build on AYW's history of offering an inclusive, supportive, and professional environment that prepares participants for education and career pathways.

1.1 Continue to strengthen participant training, addressing core competencies including technical skills, industry recognized credentials, social-emotional awareness, leadership, and interpersonal skills.

- A. Evaluate AYW program offerings including vocational training, education, and certifications to ensure they match participant interests with labor market need.
- B. Identify opportunities for collaborative training across AYW departments.
- C. Utilize member orientation and on-going training throughout the year to instill and reinforce AYW's culture of safety, professional development, and belonging.
- D. Ensure that the training and certification attainment is well-matched to the



diversity of AYW participants.

- E. Integrate teaching life, employment and college-readiness skills into all vocational and academic curriculums.
- F. Promote a culture of safety through the inclusion of risk management awareness in all vocational training programs.

1.2 Consider racial equity and DEIB in the creation of programs and services to better serve AYW participants.

- A. Evaluate participant success in program completion and post-program placements to ensure that they equitably benefit from programs and services.
- B. Disaggregate and evaluate AYW data by race and other distinct demographic components to better ensure equity in AYW program and training delivery.
- C. Provide opportunity youth with access to relevant mentorship opportunities to expand their career path possibilities.
- D. Develop educational curriculum and training for participants to better understand the connection between the environment and social and economic justice issues.

1.3 Collaborate with key employment partners to assess and improve AYW training so they better align with partners' needs and respective work cultures.

- A. Work with employment partners to be culturally responsive to and expand opportunities for young people from marginalized communities.
- B. Explore training and job shadowing opportunities in training-related placements that expose participants to higher-paying roles.

**How We
Work
with the
Community:
Goal 2**

Goal 2: Increase program capacity to expand service to more local community members and Opportunity Youth.

2.1 Align expansion of programs, funding, and partnerships with internal AYW program, staff, and infrastructure capacity.

- A. Maintain core program metrics and analyze data to understand program capacity and staffing, increasing the effectiveness of our curriculum/ pedagogy.
- B. Annually forecast program service growth to inform personnel and hiring decisions.
- C. Examine the barriers to increasing program capacity, including participant eligibility (e.g., age, educational status), physical location, disabilities, other DEIB considerations, staffing capacity, and facilities.
- D. Use a safety risk management framework to critically evaluate opportunities for program growth and expansion.

2.2 Identify collaboration opportunities and potential partner organizations that would allow AYW to engage with more local and opportunity youth.

- A. Deepen relationships with existing partners such as City of Austin, City of Houston, and eastern Travis County.
- B. Establish new relationships with local grassroots organizations and youth serving agencies.

2.3 Regularly evaluate local and national social and economic trends in order to focus AYW capacity-building efforts.

- A. Continually assess technical and soft skills training to adapt to and meet community and participant needs.

2.4 Refine recruitment strategies to resonate with and be accessible to opportunity youth and distinct community needs.

- A. Adjust recruitment strategies to be responsive to the growing interest for communities to hire local.
- B. Ensure recruitment communication channels are accessible (e.g., plain language, utilize texting, etc.)
- C. Increase equitable opportunities for online education and training that increase recruitment by reducing barriers that exist for in-person program participation.

How We
Work
with the
Community:
Goal 3

Goal 3: Amplify external communications and marketing to increase AYW visibility and reach in the community.

3.1 Invest in marketing and promotional campaigns to increase AYW presence beyond immediate communities and sectors where AYW currently operates.

- A. Create comprehensive AYW marketing plans to mutually benefit, cross-promote, and share collaborative opportunities.
- B. Educate staff members about AYW programming and other activities and initiatives to align messaging.

3.2 Create an annual marketing plan that conveys the organization's value and includes tailored outreach and messaging for priority communities.

- A. Schedule website refreshes to ensure relevance to community needs and provide current information on AYW activities.
- B. Utilize data to implement digital advertising to reach intended audiences and maximize outreach.
- C. Where appropriate, include marketing costs into grant applications in order to promote new programs or initiatives.

3.3 Evaluate all external and public-facing communications and materials through a racial equity and DEIB lens to ensure the services offered by the organization resonate with community members.

- A. Implement overall assessment of communication marketing material and channels to evaluate equity, approach, and messaging as needed.
- B. Incorporate feedback from staff members and program participants to ensure materials accurately reflect services.

3.4 Encourage Board members to engage in communications with their professional networks to promote AYW and facilitate connections to new industries and sectors.

- A. Prioritize the recruitment of a Board Member who is a marketing professional who could advise on marketing plans for AYW.

**How We
Work
Together:
Goal 4**

Goal 4: Develop a stronger sense of unity and trust across the organization to increase workplace satisfaction.

4.1 Promote open communication, transparency and timely feedback between managers and employees, both vertically and horizontally.

- A. Utilize staff surveys to identify needed internal communications improvements.
- B. Acknowledge multiple styles of communication to ensure a variety of voices and perspectives are incorporated.
- C. Provide on-going training to help staff build communication skills.


4.2 Foster a work culture that creates space for deeper conversations on topics that are meaningful to staff through affinity groups, working committees, or other means.

**How We
Work
Together:
Goal 5**

Goal 5: Provide staff with opportunities for skill development and career advancement within the organization.

5.1 Continue to strengthen staff training, addressing core competencies including technical skills, industry recognized credentials, emotional intelligence, leadership, and interpersonal skills.

- A. Utilize staff orientation and on-going training throughout the year to instill and reinforce AYW culture of safety, professional development, and belonging.
- B. Identify opportunities for collaborative training across AYW departments.
- C. Learn from and share the strengths and best practices from all AYW programs.
- D. Train staff in business development and fundraising so all staff see themselves as AYW ambassadors when partnerships or development opportunities arise.

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- 5.2 Improve retention of staff to increase AYW’s ability to provide quality services and ensure continuity of operations.
 - A. Continue to improve the rate of staff retention over the next five years.
 - B. Evaluate data by race and other demographic factors to better understand how AYW is doing on retention and advancement of all demographic sub-groups.
 - 5.3 Provide career advancement training and mentorship opportunities to grow AYW leadership from within.
 - A. Provide training in: management skills, communication, conflict resolution, emotional intelligence, performance management, and budgeting.
 - B. The Human Resources Department and Racial Equity and DEIB Committee review and improve AYW practices to ensure advancement opportunities are equitable and inclusive.
 - 5.4 Conduct an annual benefits and compensation analysis to determine how the organization compares to the benefits and compensation market in the respective regions where AYW operates.
 - A. Maintain transparency in reporting the results of the annual salary and benefits analysis.
 - B. Update AYW salaries in all department budgets based on annual analysis and available funds.
 - 5.5 Develop an “Employee Satisfaction and Professional Development Committee” with staff at various levels of seniority to develop implementation recommendations for improving staff retention, providing career training, and ensuring job satisfaction.
 - A. Conduct an annual staff survey to track staff needs over time.
 - B. Work with the leadership team to create a comprehensive professional development plan that will feed into our Succession Planning Document and will identify emerging leaders, transfer knowledge, increase skill levels, and cross-train current staff.

How We
Work
Together:
Goal 6

Goal 6: Improve alignment of staffing structures and operating procedures to increase staff productivity, efficiency, and overall job satisfaction.

- 6.1 Integrate internal operational practices and relevant grant compliance across AYW to strengthen effective service delivery to participants and clients.
 - A. Incorporate staff perspective into aspects of staffing, policies, and recruitment to make agency processes more inclusive and equitable.
 - B. Identify how the norms and standards of white dominant culture shape the nature of operational and compliance standards, communication, collabo-

ration, and decision-making and may impact staff success differently based on race and ethnicity.

- C. A policy review committee with varying staff levels will regularly review cross programmatic and operational policies, processes, and procedures to increase consistency and streamline work.

6.2 Annually review staff recruitment to streamline processes for equitably hiring and retaining a racially diverse, highly skilled staff.

- A. Identify areas for improvement in recruiting and hiring practices, including an annual staff survey.
- B. Develop an improvement plan based on results of the annual review of staffing trends to make adjustments and set goals for the next year.

6.3 Identify strategies to streamline job functions and reporting structures to improve team efficiency.

- A. Utilize the annual staff survey to evaluate staff workload and analyze progress over time.
- B. Executive Leadership will help increase efficiencies in organizational alignment and staff positions, freeing up resources and streamlining workflow to reduce redundancy and increase productivity.
- C. Executive Leadership will look to fill gaps where expertise is lacking to support AYW future growth.

6.4 Implement recommendations from the safety risk management audit that examines both AYW and program specific practices, procedures, and policies to mitigate risks for participants, staff, and the organization.

- A. Implement recommendations from the audit report.
- B. Evaluate the impact of changes in AYW risk management strategies, such as database alerts and frequent assessments by program staff members.
- C. Ensure cross-agency integration of practices, procedures, and policies, wherever applicable (e.g., Program Policy Comparison Committee).

6.5 Implement AYW's new data management system to support accurate and consistent data collection and reporting.

- A. Utilize the existing internal database team to oversee the implementation of the new data management system.
- B. Train staff to use the new data system through a multi-phase implementation plan with dates and action steps for each phase.
- C. Create an agency-wide system for user feedback to continually improve and expand the scope and connectivity of the new data system.

- 6.6 Ensure data systems and necessary technology and hardware are in place and aligned to allow remote working options for staff.

**How We
Prioritize
Sustainability:
Goal 7**

Goal 7: Increase capacity and diversify development activities in order to expand fundraising and funding sources to ensure organizational sustainability.

- 7.1 Build stronger connections with philanthropy, including potential donors, sponsors, and partners to diversify funding streams.
 - A. Create an annual plan to increase outreach to potential philanthropic partners.
 - B. Share with staff the importance of creating connections between development and program partners.
- 7.2 Continue to expand investment in AYW's development department to ensure it has adequate capacity for increased fundraising outreach.
 - A. Evaluate development opportunities and set priorities around additional funding outreach that will enhance funding diversity and support stable income.
 - B. Annually review Development staffing capacity to align with fundraising goals.
- 7.3 Cultivate a Board that is intentionally diverse in demographic make-up, areas of expertise, and influence to expand AYW networks and visibility.
 - A. Annually review and outline Board responsibilities to achieve funding goals.
 - B. Conduct a strategic refresh of Board governance to align with AYW five-year strategic plan.

**How We
Prioritize
Sustainability:
Goal 8**

Goal 8: Develop policies to establish, use, and access an operating reserve.

- 8.1 Build stronger connections with philanthropy, including potential donors, sponsors, and partners to diversify funding streams.
 - A. Create a mechanism for considering contributing a portion of incoming unrestricted revenue to the operating reserve.
 - B. Define restrictions on the access and purpose for funds.
 - C. Determine appropriate investment strategies for the fund.
- 8.2 Maintain sufficient funding in an operating reserve to cover three months of administrative expenses and 10% of three months fee-for-service revenue.
 - A. Identify and recommend through the budgeting process various funding streams to invest in an operating reserve.
 - B. Review annually to make sure we are on track to achieve this by 2025.

**How We
Prioritize
Sustainability:
Goal 9**

Goal 9: Commit AYW to environmental sustainability by annually assessing and reducing the carbon impact of all operations, incorporating eco-awareness practices, and expanding green jobs training.

9.1 Explore and implement ways for AYW to reduce its carbon impact.

- A. Conduct an annual energy and resource usage (paper, chemicals, etc.) audit to identify the most effective ways to reduce AYW carbon impact in four main areas of operations: facilities; vehicle fleet and gas-powered machinery; supplies and single-use plastic; data and records management; remote working and automated work processes.
- B. Develop a plan to communicate sustainability measures to staff, participants, and public.

9.2 Effectively communicate and contextualize the implementation of environmental initiatives to participants and staff members.

- A. Solicit staff input on proposed and potential changes to operations.
- B. Share purpose, impact and context on intended changes to everyday practices and organizational operations.

9.3 Prioritizing and engaging with local, state and regional efforts and initiatives to create more sustainable and equitable communities.

- A. Engage staff, participants, and the public on environmental justice issues that are relevant to the communities AYW serves.
- B. Internally and externally promote AYW's environmentally focused activities.

9.4 Invest in green jobs training and career pathways related to carbon sequestration activities to meet the growing business practice of reducing carbon impact through carbon credits.

- A. Secure projects that address environmental justice issues, improve carbon sequestration, and enhance green infrastructure.

