Equity in Youth Entrepreneurship:

Strategic Planning for the Expansion of Youth Entrepreneurship in West Virginia

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The "Equity in Youth Entrepreneurship" project team has completed a one-year strategic planning process focused on the expansion of entrepreneurial opportunities for youth (with a focus on rural and distressed counties). The process included inventory and assessment, evaluation, planning and development of an action-oriented plan. Over a one-year period, the project team conducted four statewide strategic planning meetings, six in-person youth focus group discussions, and distributed and analyzed results of a series of statewide surveys (of youth, educators and providers). Through collaboration, engagement of diverse stakeholders and a focus on youth voices, the project team has developed a statewide report that is designed to be used as a tool to support expansion of entrepreneurial opportunities for rural youth in West Virginia.

Engagement efforts sought to reach diverse stakeholders including students in grades 6-12, teachers, youth development professionals, economic development professionals, higher education representatives, government/elected representatives, entrepreneurs, members of the faith community and other community members. This included:

- 691 rural youths from six counties who participated in a focus group discussion (92) or statewide survey (599) to share information on their awareness, interest and access to entrepreneurial opportunities
- 41 stakeholders participated in statewide planning meetings to contribute to the development of the strategic plan
- 12 providers documented current services provided to youth via an online survey
- 63 middle school teachers completed an online survey to share their perceptions of youth interest, awareness and access to entrepreneurial opportunities

This report includes a discussion of key findings, recommendations and next steps, and collaborative mission, vision and value statements. Additionally, detailed outcomes of planning sessions, focus group discussions and statewide survey data are included as publicly available data to support individuals and organizations working in this field.

Key Findings

The project team considered contributions of stakeholders participating in statewide planning meetings, youth focus group and statewide surveys to develop key findings. Key findings reflect major themes that emerged across multiple stakeholder groups.

1. **Current opportunities for youth entrepreneurship are limited in West Virginia.**

   Current youth entrepreneurship providers include a small, but dedicated, group of professionals who have been working to expand efforts over multiple years. Most existing statewide resources aimed at supporting entrepreneurs do not serve individuals under the age of 18. Similarly, the majority of the vast network of youth development programs do not address entrepreneurship or entrepreneurial thinking. Through our statewide survey of providers, a total of 12 programs reported offering youth entrepreneurship programs in West Virginia. Most of these coordinated statewide or multi-state efforts and served less than 150 students per year.

2. **There is no central network to facilitate growth of entrepreneurial opportunities for youth.**

   There is currently no formal collaboration among providers of youth entrepreneurship programming. There is no recognized central support system focusing on the growth of entrepreneurial opportunities for youth.

3. **There is a lack of understanding of the term "entrepreneurship" among rural youth and adults.**

   Youth report low recognition of the term "entrepreneurship" in both focus group discussions and the online survey. The most common references to entrepreneurship included small business owners, television shows or specific celebrities. Many youth correlate entrepreneurship with wealth and/or risk. "Entrepreneur" and related terms (business owner, innovator, investor, inventor) may not hold the same meaning for youth as adults when used in programming. Adult stakeholders also express varying and broad perceptions of the term ranging from narrow and traditional to broad and expansive.

4. **Rural youth demonstrate low awareness of entrepreneurial opportunities in West Virginia.**

   Rural youth report low awareness of entrepreneurship programs and resources. Participants reported little awareness of existing programs for young people, and little to no awareness of existing resources for adult entrepreneurs.

5. **Rural youth express significant interest in entrepreneurship as a career pathway.**

   Despite low recognition of the term entrepreneurship and low awareness of opportunity, report interest in the field. After a brief discussion about the definition of the term, a total of 37% of focus group participants reported being interested in

becoming entrepreneurs. Additionally, 81.6% indicated at least some interest via the online survey.

6. Youth experience significant barriers to access to programming.

Youth report experiencing concrete, social and psychological barriers to participation in programs. Social and psychological barriers ranked high among students overall including anxiety about new social situations and not feeling welcome. Concrete barriers including transportation, funding and fees were also discussed and ranked significantly higher among students in householders with annual incomes less than $30,000.

7. Current policies and practices may affect the growth of youth entrepreneurship programming.

West Virginia has a strong network of economic development professionals working to grow entrepreneurship in our state. However, many resources and services are not available to individuals under the age of 18 due to policies/funding requirements. Stakeholders identified key policies and practices that limit the ability of economic development organizations to serve youths including:

• The outcome metrics used by funders are not achievable with a youth audience (i.e., jobs created, issuance of loans and businesses started).

• Procedures for awarding funding to a person under the age of 18 are complicated and require parental involvement/consent.

• There is a lack of state level funding designated to support the expansion of entrepreneurial opportunities for youth.

Recommendations and Next Steps

1. Establish the Youth Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Subcommittee.

The West Virginia Entrepreneurship Ecosystem is a formal network that works to facilitate collaboration among entrepreneurship programs throughout the state. Development of a statewide youth entrepreneurship workgroup as a subcommittee of the existing ecosystem will provide a forum for expansion of youth opportunities that foster connections with statewide efforts. The statewide Youth Entrepreneurship Ecosystem (YEE) will include adult and youth leaders. Workgroup members will continue to refine and implement the next steps included in this plan.

2. Build a pipeline of talent by engaging K-12 youth through in- and after-school entrepreneurship opportunities.

To increase awareness and interest and reduce social and psychological barriers to participation, entrepreneurial opportunities must be introduced early and often. The project team recommends incorporation of entrepreneurship programming into existing systems including classroom education, after-school programs, community-based clubs and summer learning opportunities (including STEAM/STEM). Additionally, youth entrepreneurship should be incorporated into degree programs in education, business and/or entrepreneurship to prepare practitioners entering the workforce.

3. Develop a shared understanding of "entrepreneurship" and related terms.

The definition of the term "entrepreneurship" is understood differently among youth and adults. Developing and communicating a shared understanding of terms is key to broadening youth awareness and combatting stereotypes that may increase psychological barriers to participation.

4. Intentionally design youth programs to reduce or eliminate barriers to participation.

It is crucial for organizers to consider barriers to participation when designing and budgeting for programs. Ensuring barriers are reduced or eliminated is resource intensive and is likely to result in increased planning time, personnel and financial resources. The project team recommends the following:

◢ *Expansion of local opportunities.* The majority of programs currently offered are statewide camps or programs. There is a need to increase community-based opportunities that reduce barriers by offering low-cost accessible programs in a setting that is comfortable and familiar to both students and families.

▌ *Evaluate location and length of statewide opportunities.* Statewide or multistate opportunities and extended length programming (i.e., a three-week overnight camp) may exacerbate existing barriers by increasing the need for financial resources (funding, fees, travel, materials, supplies) and may feel intimidating to new participants (which results in increased psychological barriers). Breaking these events into smaller regional opportunities with shorter interactions (i.e., three one-week camps) would provide access to more students.

▌ Integrate entrepreneurship into existing youth development programs, including STEM/STEAM initiatives. Youths report higher levels of engagement with programs like Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and 4-H. Entrepreneurship can be incorporated into existing programs that youth are currently accessing to increase reach.

5. Advocate for policies and practices that support the growth of youth entrepreneurship opportunities

Stakeholders identified policies and practices that can be adjusted to better foster continued growth of opportunities. These include the expansion of existing services for entrepreneurs to youth audiences; expansion of existing youth programming to include entrepreneurship; and adjustment of funding outcome metrics to reflect deliverables that align with youth audiences.

6. Conduct further research to strengthen the existing body of knowledge relating to youth entrepreneurship.

There is a need for additional research relating to youth entrepreneurship in rural communities. Research conducted for this project engaged students from six counties in grades 6-12 and focused on youth awareness, interest and access. Results support the need for additional research to further explore themes in student responses. Specific areas include:

▌ *Understanding youth perceptions of "entrepreneurship and related terms."* Youth express a lack of awareness and understanding of the term "entrepreneurship" with many referring to television (i.e., *Shark Tank*). Exploring youth perceptions of terms is vital to the development of programs that appeal to youth audiences.

▌ *Exploring youth perceptions of entrepreneurship as high risk.* Many participating youth expressed sentiments of entrepreneurship as a high-risk career path. More research is needed to better understand the origin of this perception, and how it influences student interest.

▌ *Development of common measures to evaluate youth entrepreneurship programs.* As previously discussed, outcome metrics for funding related to entrepreneurship and economic development are often not applicable to youth audiences. There is need for researchers to work collaboratively with practitioners to define the potential outcomes of youth entrepreneurship programs and standardize metrics and evaluation tools.

7. Collaboratively pursue funding for the expansion of entrepreneurial opportunities for youth.

By working collaboratively, stakeholders can increase competitiveness for federal funding for expansion of youth entrepreneurship. The project team has identified several funding opportunities, including the ARC POWER grant, to pursue in 2023. Survey results demonstrate significant awareness/engagement in youth development programs (4-H, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts). Engaging youth-serving organizations and entrepreneurship/economic development professionals in collaborative pursuit of funding will capitalize on the strengths of both groups to increase the reach of programming.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Introduction

This report reflects the outcomes of a one-year strategic planning process aimed at expanding entrepreneurial opportunities for youth, with an intentional focus on rural and low-income counties in West Virginia. This project was funded by a technical assistance grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission. The process included inventory and assessment, evaluation and planning and development of an action-oriented plan. Highlights and key information about this report can be found at **extension.wvu.edu/equity-in-youth-entrepreneurship.**

West Virginia and other rural states struggle with a persistent challenge: the outward migration of talented young adults. According to the USDA, the population of rural communities in West Virginia dropped by 130,562 people between 1980 and 2018 (USDA Economic Research Service, 2019). As West Virginia University's President Gordon Gee stated, "We've exported four things: coal, oil and gas. But the most tragic thing we've exported is talent" (Nash, 2018). It is often assumed that graduates leave the state after completing their education to pursue gainful employment. West Virginia, particularly in rural areas, has struggled with a lack of traditional employment opportunities and unemployment rates are typically higher in rural areas (Workforce West Virginia, 2019).

Youth are essential to the long-term growth of rural economies. In West Virginia, nearly 99% of businesses are "small" (less than 500 employees) (U.S. Small Business Administration, 2018). Entrepreneurship education for young people is key to providing the next generation of entrepreneurs with the knowledge and skills they need to consider nontraditional career paths. There are significant barriers to targeting rural and low-income youths with educational programming. Underserved youth are more likely to experience barriers related to finances, transportation and scheduling conflicts. Additional barriers include general access/awareness of options and feelings of exclusion (Avent and Jayaratne, 2019).

Strategic planning for the expansion of youth entrepreneurship education with an intentional focus on rural and low-income youth will serve as a tool for long-term diversification of rural economies. The incubation of entrepreneurial ventures in West Virginia, specifically in the distressed or at-risk areas, is crucial to transforming the economy and redefining the primary economic drivers in these areas. The timing is ripe for new skill development and opportunities for incubating new products and small businesses in our state. Introducing innovation and entrepreneurship skills to students in rural areas of the state will add value to the workforce and impact economic development.

Stakeholder Engagement

Over a one-year period, the project team conducted four statewide strategic planning meetings, six in-person youth focus group discussions and a series of statewide surveys (youth, educators and providers). Engagement efforts sought to reach diverse stakeholders including rural youth (grades 6-12), teachers, youth development professionals, economic development professionals, higher education representatives, government/elected representatives, entrepreneurs, members of the faith community and other community members. The information gathered was used to complete this report which is intended to be used as a tool to expand entrepreneurial opportunities for rural youth in our state.

Youth Engagement

The project team sought to engage youth from rural and low-income counties through in-person focus groups and a statewide survey. This research was approved by the WVU Institutional Review Board (IRB). County-based WVU Extension faculty members coordinated in-person delivery of both focus groups and student surveys through partnerships with schools in counties designated as "distressed" by the Appalachian Regional Commission. In-person delivery at rural school sites was chosen to reduce potential barriers to participation, including those relating to transportation and access to technology. Research sought to assess student awareness, interest and access to entrepreneurial opportunities.

Youth Focus Groups

Methods

Six in-person conversations were conducted to collect qualitative data and ensure the viewpoints of youth were included in the development of the strategic plan. Conversations were held in Clay, Braxton, Fayette, Nicholas, Lincoln, and Logan counties. WVU Extension faculty serving these counties worked with their local school administrators to recruit youth participants and facilitate 60- to 90-minute discussions. Focus groups in Clay and Fayette counties engaged high school students, while focus groups in Braxton, Lincoln, Logan and Nicholas counties engaged middle school students. Sessions were conducted in a classroom setting and were recorded, transcribed, de-identified and analyzed for major themes. Participation in focus group discussions was optional and required consent from parents and assent from students. All participants received a $10 gift card as an incentive. A total of 12 questions were used to facilitate discussion (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Youth Focus Group Questions

Category: Awareness
Raise your hand if you know what entrepreneurship is (count recorded). What does the term "entrepreneurship" mean to you?
What do you think are important traits, skills or resources for entrepreneurs to have?
How many of you know someone who is an entrepreneur? Can you tell us about them?
Are you aware of any programs in your community that help students start a business, invent something or develop their career skills? Can you describe them?
Category: Interest
Do you have any interest in being an entrepreneur (for example, starting a business or inventing something)? Why or why not?
What career(s) are you interested in? Why?
What school or community activities do you currently participate in (or would like to participate in)? Why?
What would you like to have in your school or community that is not currently available? What ideas do you have?
Is there anything else you'd like to share/ask?
Category: Access
What are some reasons that you might choose to participate in an entrepreneurship or career development program?
What are some reasons you might NOT participate?
What, if anything, makes it hard to join activities that you are interested in?

Outcomes

Ninety-two rural youths participated in a focus group discussion and shared their thoughts, opinions and perceptions of entrepreneurship. Word clouds were created to analyze open-ended responses with words that were mentioned the most frequently appearing in the largest font. Questions were divided into three categories: awareness, interest and access.

Awareness

Youth reported low awareness and understanding of the term "entrepreneurship." When asked "Raise your hand if you know what entrepreneurship is?" only 26 students (or about 28%) did. When asked, "What does the term 'entrepreneurship' mean to you?" students shared a variety of words/phrases (see Figure 2). The most common phrases included money, owner, business, marketing, sponsor and risks. Students also discussed themes from television and social media (including the show *Shark Tank* and celebrity Elon Musk), and jobs held by individuals they are familiar with, including mechanic, doctor and billboard owner. Roughly one third (36% or 33 out of 92 students) reported knowing someone who was an entrepreneur. After these questions, researchers shared a definition of entrepreneurship to ensure all students, including those who did not recognize the term, could participate in subsequent discussion questions.

Figure 2: Focus group participant responses to: "What does the term entrepreneurship mean to you?"

Participants discussed their views on important traits and skills for entrepreneurs to have. Youth identified several traits with the most common being persistence, leadership, determination, dedication and persuasiveness. The most common skills identified included being knowledgeable, problem solving, social skills and efficiency. Much of student discussions focused on personas that reflected an extroverted personality type. Results of student responses relating to skills and traits are reflected in Figures 3 and 4.

Figure 3: Traits identified by participants as important for entrepreneurs.

Figure 4: Skills identified by participants as important for entrepreneurs.

Students were asked to share resources they were aware of that help them start a business, invent something or develop their career skills. Students reported awareness of very few resources with several indicating that there are none available to them locally. Student-identified resources are listed in Figure 5. Notably, students did not identify many of the major providers of youth entrepreneurship programming in West Virginia.

Figure 5: Identified community resources that help a student start a business, invent something or develop their career skills.

Identified Community Resources	
Career readiness/Vo-tech (in-school)	Community center
Online courses	Church
Resources from other communities	Charleston Clay Center
Squarespace for website building	Local stores
Ag Advisor, FFA and 4-H	Bank
Community drives/fundraising	Local entrepreneurs as mentors

Interest

Students were asked several questions relating to their interest in entrepreneurship and/or other available career development programs. Researchers sought to determine what motivates students to participate in programs, and what programs they currently participate in. Overall, about one third (37%) of respondents indicated an interest in becoming an entrepreneur, roughly one-half reported they are undecided or unsure (48% and 15% answered "no." Students discussed many reasons why they may choose to participate in a youth entrepreneurship or career development program with the most common responses relating to knowledge, interests, skills, money and networking (see Figure 6). Students' responses to questions regarding motivators are displayed in Figure 7.

Researchers also sought to collect information on current career interests and afterschool activities. The most common response relating to career interest among students was, "I don't know or unsure" indicating students were undecided about their future careers. Others shared a broad array of interests including being a YouTube star, historian, therapist, firefighter and many more (see Figure 8.) Students also shared information on activities they are currently engaged in. Again, students reported a broad range of activities, with participation in a sport being the most common (see Figure 9).

Figure 6: Focus group participant responses to "Why might you choose to participate in an entrepreneurship or career development program?"

What are some reasons you might NOT participate?

Figure 7: Interest in becoming an entrepreneur among focus group participants.
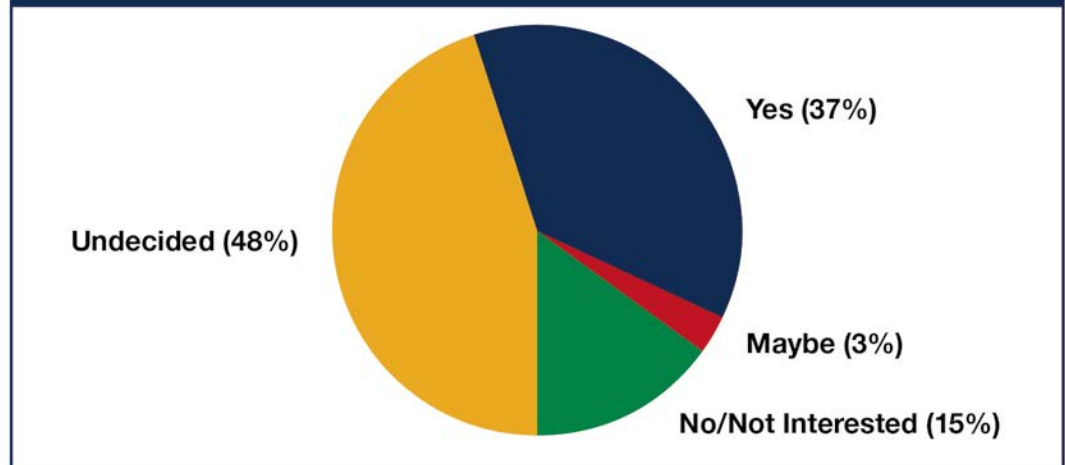
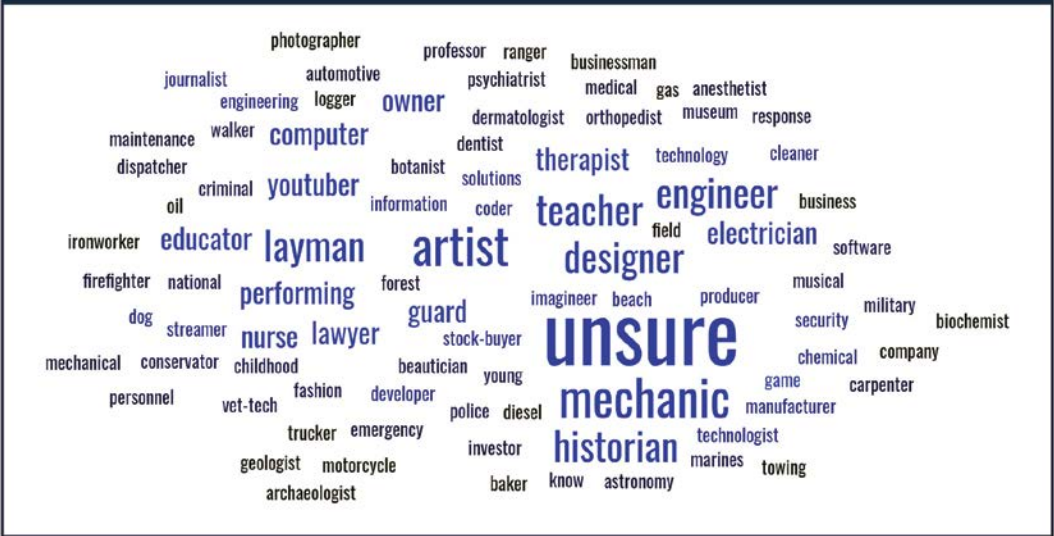**Figure 8: Career interests among focus group participants.**


Figure 9: Focus group participant responses to, "What school or community activities do you currently participate in?"

Students were asked what they would like in their school or community that is not currently available. The most frequent response related to increasing time spent in vocational technology (V-Tech) classes and related opportunities (see Figure 10).

Figure 10: Focus group participant responses to "What would you like to have in your school or community that is not currently available?"
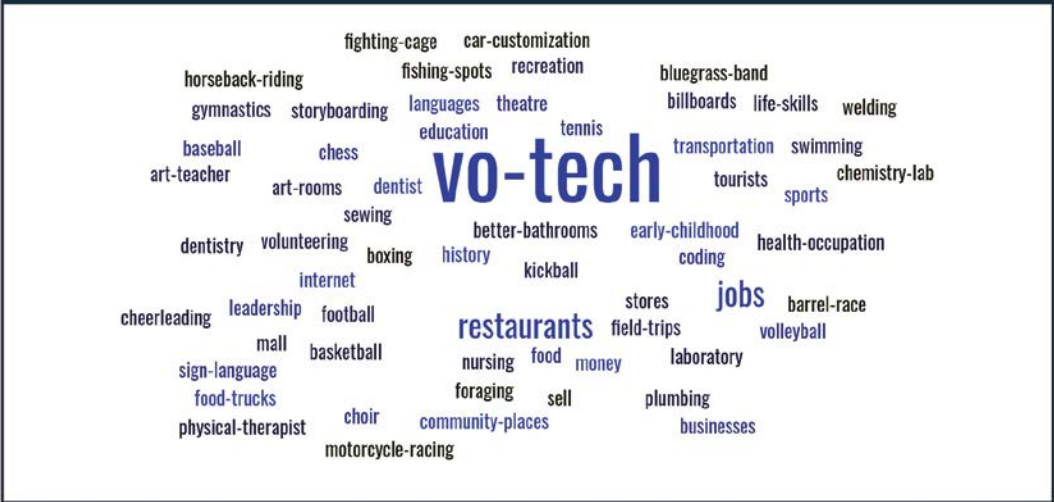
Access

Students were asked to share reasons they may choose not to participate in a youth entrepreneurship program. Common responses included programs not meeting their interests and a feeling of being overwhelmed/busy/short on time with current commitments. Several students discussed themes relating to entrepreneurship being intimidating, not for introverts, dangerous or a gamble (see Figure 11). Students also were asked what might keep them from participating in any activity they are interested in. Responses included a broad range of concrete and social/psychological barriers to participation (see Figure 12).

Figure 11: Focus group participant responses to "Why might you choose not to participate [in entrepreneurship programs]?"

Figure 12: Focus group participant responses to what makes it hard for them to join activities they are interested in.

Questions relating to access to activities prompted rich discussions among participants. Student quotes related to barriers were categorized to better capture the sentiments expressed. Several students shared experiences relating to social or psychological barriers. These included feeling unwelcome or insecure about participation. They also expressed being affected by concrete barriers like transportation, funding/fees, materials/supplies and time/scheduling difficulties.

Student participants discussed several barriers related to time. Many expressed having packed schedules that included things like school, homework, sports, after-school jobs and/or family responsibilities. Several students discussed the desire to spend less time on classes that they felt were unimportant to allow for more time for career focused courses. Others shared that parent schedules limited the ability to participate. Student quotes that illustrate challenges related to **time** include:

▰ "You have to have like enough time within your personal life and take care of yourself with your homework and everything else that needs to be done."

▰ "Schooling was a major part of this because obviously, there are some classes that don't need to be in here. We could be doing something more productive with our life instead of something so useless."

▰ "I have to work."

Several students expressed challenges related to navigating parents and/or family schedules. Student quotes that describe challenges with **family schedules** include:

▰ "My grandparents are always working, so there's no time for doing stuff out. I can't drive."

▰ "Time commitment and obsessive amount of siblings that my mom can't charter around all over the place."

▰ "Schedule because I have to do stuff that my parents have to do."

Students expressed experiencing challenges relating to insufficient resources.

This included availability of transportation and/or the time and cost associated with travel. Student questions that demonstrate experiences related to **transportation** include:

/ "Money and expensive gas prices. My parents don't have the gas money."

/ "Distance, hard to get to jobs that are too far off."

/ "No transportation."

/ "The places are too far and take too much time to get there."

Discussions included statements of a general lack of financial resources including program fees, costs to participate and the cost/availability of materials needed. The quotes below demonstrate students' experiences with insufficient financial resources.

/ "Don't have enough money to do it."

/ "Not having the materials to be able to do it."

In addition to concrete barriers to participation, students discussed social and psychological barriers. Examples of student quotes demonstrating these themes include:

/ "People think your idea is stupid and keep making comments about how it wouldn't work."

/ "People in the group told you not to; the social group won't let you in."

/ "You're not feeling it. It's all mental because you give up on yourself."

/ "My family being mean and brats."

"My grandparents are always working so there is no time to do stuff out. I can't drive."

"The places are too far and take too much time to get there."

"People think your idea is stupid and keep making comments about how it wouldn't work."

Youth Survey

Methods

The project team conducted a survey, via Qualtrics, of students in grades 6-12 in Clay, Braxton, Fayette, Nicholas, Lincoln and Logan counties. The survey included quantitative and qualitative questions aimed at gathering data on youth perceptions of entrepreneurship from a broader audience of students than focus group discussions. To ensure youth from distressed counties were engaged, the survey was implemented inperson during the school day by a member of the research team. As with the youth focus groups, participation in the survey was optional and required parental consent and youth assent.

A member of the project team facilitated the survey in person at each school site to classrooms selected by the school. Faculty members explained the research to students including elements outlined in the cover letter and offered students an opportunity to ask questions. They then shared a QR code and link for their use for completion of the optional survey. All students in the classroom, regardless of participation, were given an incentive item at the conclusion of the presentation. Questions focused on youth awareness, interest and access to programming (see Figure 13).

Figure 13: Statewide Youth Survey Questions

Expanded Demographics
How old are you?
What county do you live in?
What grade are you in at school?
Which of the following best describes you?
What is your gender?
Are you enrolled in Career and Technical Education (CTE) at your school?
Who do you live with mostly?
How many people live in your home?
What is the highest level of education a parent/guardian has completed?
Awareness
What do you think of when you hear the words "entrepreneurship" or "entrepreneur"?
Do you have a parent or guardian who is an entrepreneur or owns their own business?
Do you know anyone in your community who is an entrepreneur? If yes, what do they do?

Have you heard of any of the following activities?
Have you participated in any of the following activities?
How do you hear about programs or activities that you want to do?
Who are you most likely to take a recommendation from for enrolling in a program?
Interest
Please rate your interest in being an entrepreneur (with 1 being not interested and 5 being very interested).
What careers are you interested in?
Are you aware of entrepreneurship education programs at your school? (If yes, please describe.)
Access
Which of the following barriers (if any) might stop you from being able to participate in a program?
Do you participate in an after-school program at your school? (If yes, please describe.)
Are you on a sports team or other extra-curricular activity? (If yes, please describe.)
Do you work after school?
Which of the following best describes your job?
Which of the following best describes your work schedule?
What do you do with the money you earn?
Which of the following do you spend the most of your money on?

Outcomes

The online youth survey received a total of 599 complete responses. Responses with less than 50% of primary questions answered were eliminated from the sample. The majority of respondents were from Clay, Braxton, Fayette, Nicholas, Lincoln and Logan counties, with a small number of students living in neighboring counties. Respondents included middle school students (69%) and high school students (31%). Students identified as 49.5% male, 42.2% female, 2.5% non-binary, and 3.7% other. Participants reported living with one parent (15.9%), two parents (63.3%), a foster parent (2.3%), or a grandparent (8.8%). Student race is reflected in figure 18 and includes roughly two-thirds identifying as white or Caucasian. Roughly one-third reported participating in after-school programs at their school and one half (49.9%) participated in sports or other extracurricular activities. Among high school students, 47% were enrolled in CTE (see Figures 14-16).
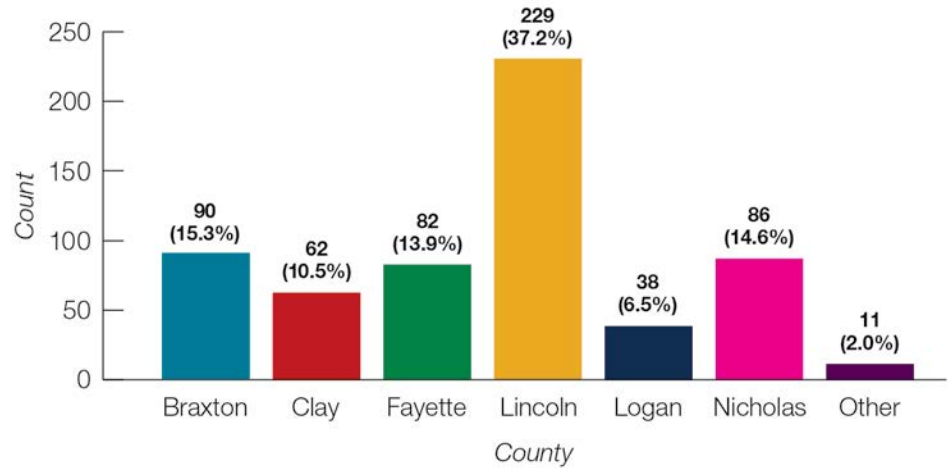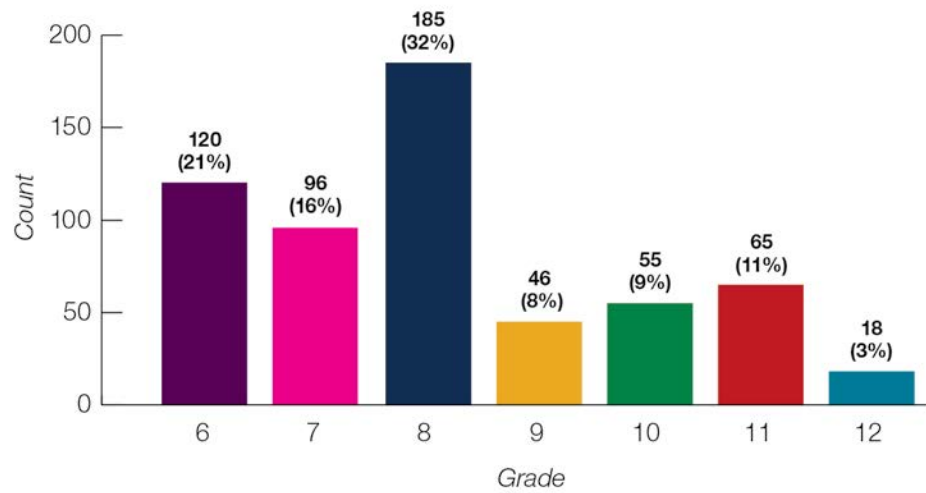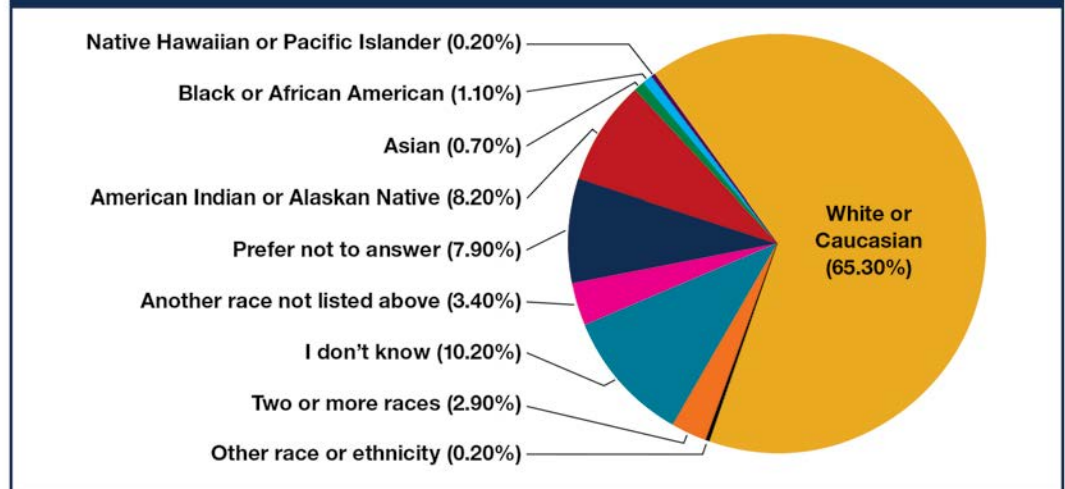
Figure 14: Student responses to "What county do you live in?"

Figure 15: Student responses to "What grade are you in at school?"

Figure 16: Student responses to "Which of the following best describes you?"

Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (0.20%)
Black or African American (1.10%)
Asian (0.70%)
American Indian or Alaskan Native (8.20%)
Prefer not to answer (7.90%)
Another race not listed above (3.40%)
I don't know (10.20%)
Two or more races (2.90%)
Other race or ethnicity (0.20%)
White or Caucasian (65.30%)

Awareness

Questions related to student awareness demonstrate little knowledge of existing programs/resources. However, one-third of students reported having a parent of guardian who is an entrepreneur or owns their own business (35%), with over half reporting knowing someone in their community who is an entrepreneur (56%). Almost half (44%) reported being aware of entrepreneurship programs at school.

When asked to identify programs that they are aware of and/or participate in, students report low awareness and engagement in existing programs focusing on entrepreneurship or entrepreneurial thinking. However, students reported significantly higher awareness and engagement in youth development programs including 4-H and Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts (see Figures 17-20).

Figure 17: Student responses to questions relating to personal experience with entrepreneurs.
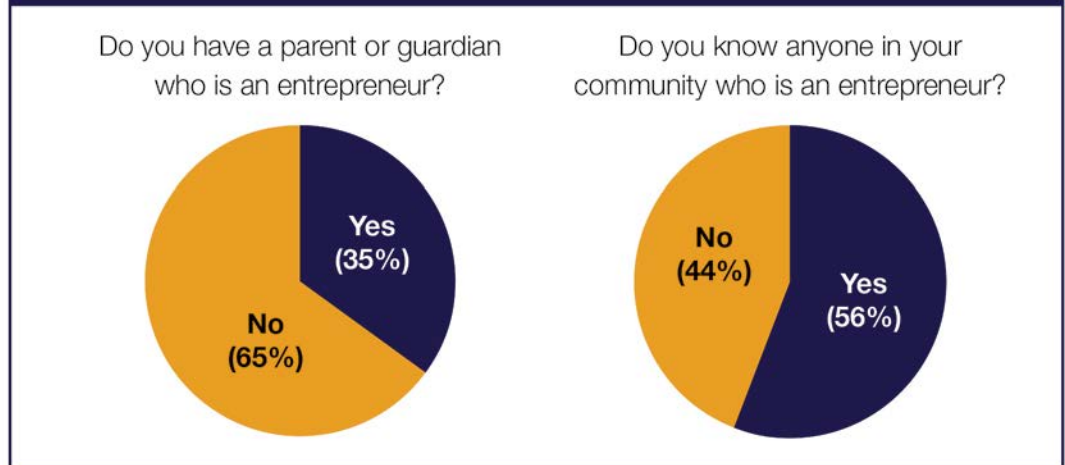
Do you have a parent or guardian who is an entrepreneur?

Yes (35%)

No (65%)

Do you know anyone in your community who is an entrepreneur?

No (44%)

Yes (56%)

Figure 18: Student responses to the question "Have you heard of any of the following activities? (Check all that apply.)"

Bar chart values:
- Boy Scouts: 399 (67%)
- Girl Scouts: 387 (65%)
- 4-H: 347 (58%)
- My Hometown is Cool: 75 (13%)
- WVU Impact Challenge: 74 (12%)
- WV High School Business Plan Competition: 56 (9%)
- Junior Achievement: 40 (7%)
- Governor's School for Entrepreneurship: 40 (7%)
- Other: 32 (5%)
- America's Entrepreneurial Schools: 24 (4%)
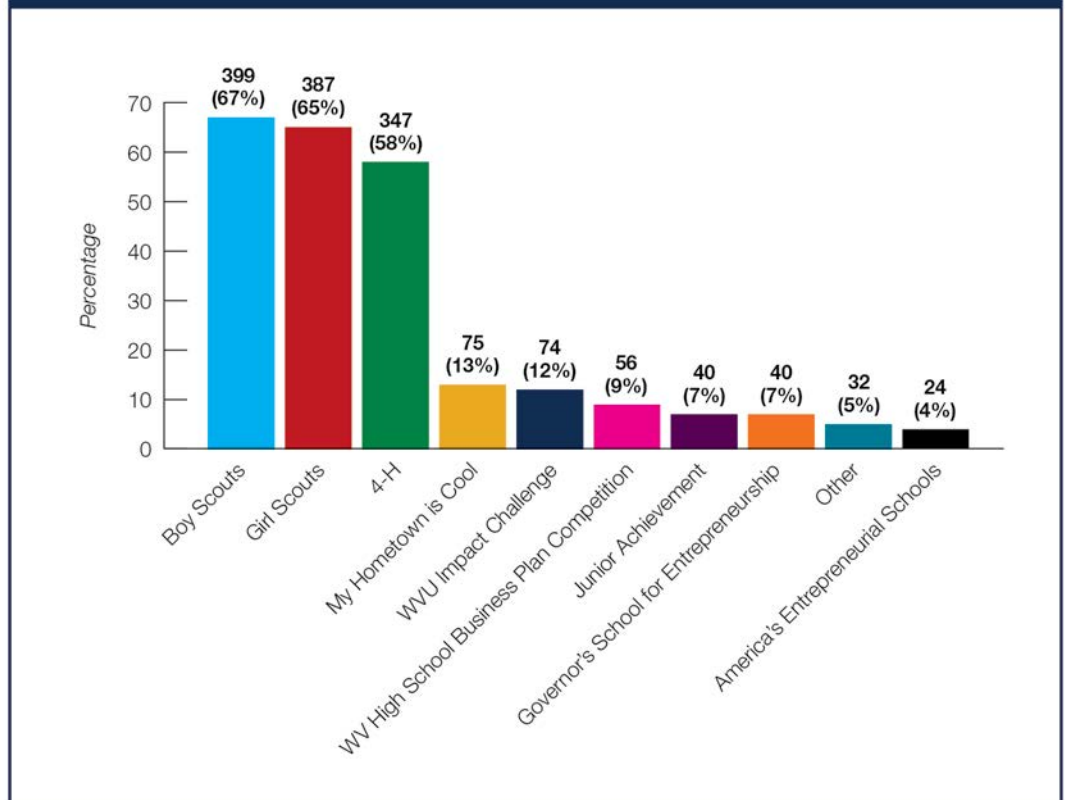
Y-axis: Percentage

Figure 19: Student responses to the question "Have you participated in any of the following activities?" (Check all that apply.)
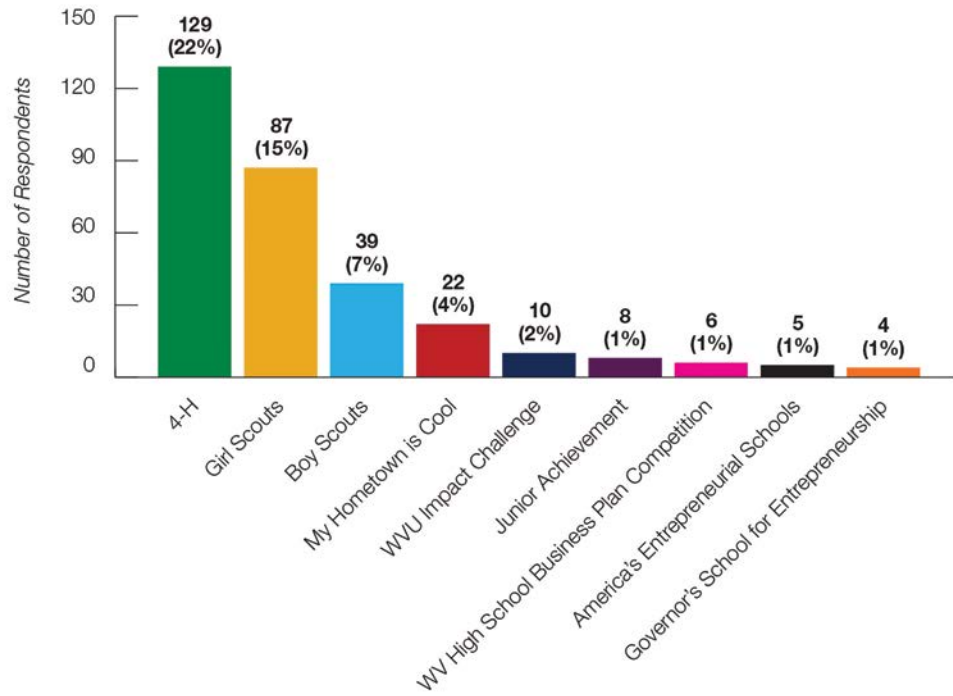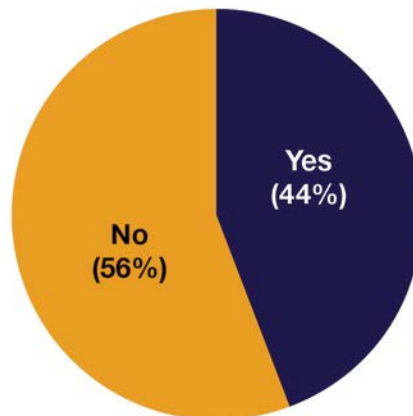

Figure 20: Student responses to "Are you aware of any youth entrepreneurship programs at your school?"

Interest

Students responding to the survey reported relatively high levels of interest in entrepreneurship. When asked to rate their interest in being an entrepreneur, the majority (81.6%) report at least some interest. Additionally, 27.5% report high interest (4 or 5 on a scale of 1-5). Despite low understanding of terminology related to entrepreneurship and low awareness and engagement in existing programs, students demonstrated interest in entrepreneurship via both focus group discussions and the statewide survey (see Figure 21).

Figure 21: Student's rating their interest in being an entrepreneur.
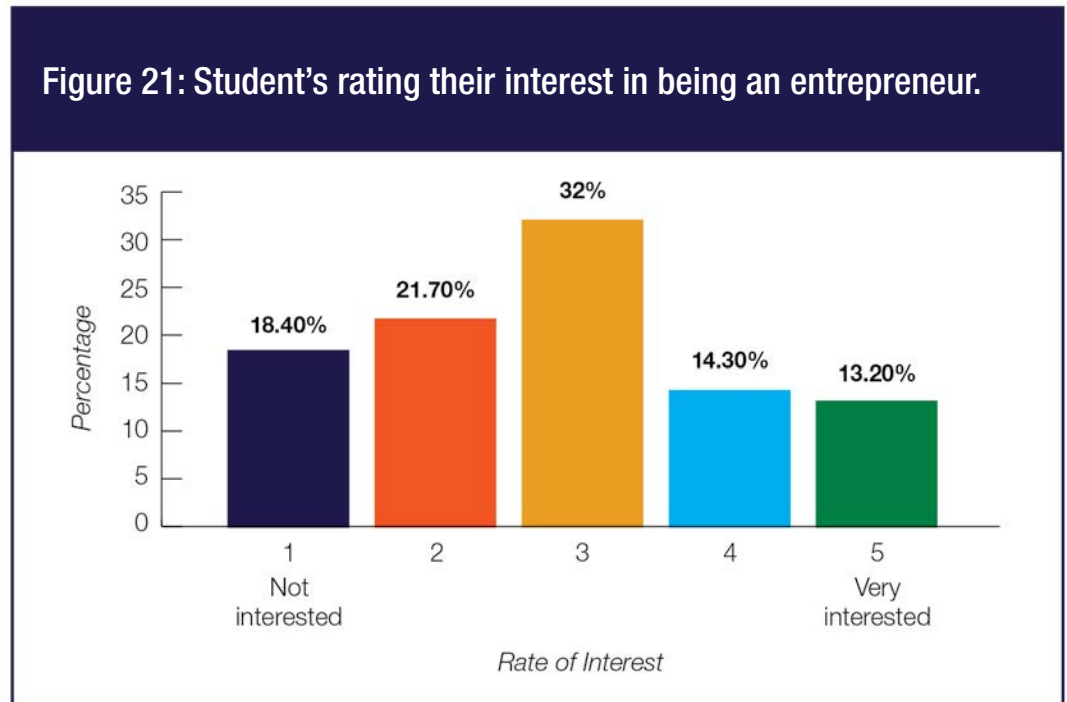
Access

Youths participating in the statewide survey expressed experiencing concrete, social and psychological barriers to participation in programming that they are interested in. Youth barriers are displayed in Figure 22 by self-reported income. Psychological barriers, including anxiety about new social situations and not feeling welcome, did not vary significantly by income. However, other barriers are significantly higher among students in households with an annual income of less than $30,000. Transportation, funding/fees, family responsibilities and confidence were reported as significantly higher among lower-income students.

Figure 22: Youth reported barriers to participation (mean scores on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being not a barrier and 5 being a significant barrier). *Household income based on youth self-reported data.

What is your household income?	Transportation	Time	Funding/ Fees	After-School Job	Family Responsibilities	Access to Technology	Program Requirements	Confidence	Nothing Available Nearby	Anxiety About New Social Situations	Not Feeling Welcome
Under $10,000 per year	1.92	1.62	2.5	1.92	2.31	1.46	1.85	1.77	2.23	2.31	2.46
$10,001-$30,000 per year	2.44	2.41	2.69	2.19	2.63	1.81	1.93	2.41	2.63	2.63	2.3
$30,001-$50,000 per year	1.84	2.24	2.06	1.69	2.06	1.61	1.71	2.18	2.26	2.69	2.23
$50,001-$75,000 per year	1.82	2.15	1.82	2.06	2.06	1.35	1.56	1.94	2.22	2.28	1.87
$75,001 or more per year	1.66	2.36	1.62	2.17	1.76	1.17	1.44	1.83	2.22	2.32	2.09
I don't know	2.09	2.18	1.94	1.78	1.88	1.56	1.87	1.59	1.75	2.47	1.72
Overall Mean	1.91	2.23	1.98	1.99	2.03	1.45	1.67	1.94	2.21	2.45	2.07

Barriers are ranked from most significant to least significant in Figure 23. This table demonstrates key differences in barriers among students who live in households with incomes less than $30,000. When considering the top five barriers reported by students (both overall and low-income students) four out of the five are identical. However, funding/fees ranks as the number one barrier for youth in low- income households, and 7 out of 11 among youths overall. The barrier of time, on the other hand, ranked second overall but was less significant among low-income youths (ranking 8 out of 11). Three of the top five barriers to participation were social/ psychological barriers, including anxiety about new social situations, not feeling welcome and family responsibilities.

Figure 23: Youth barriers to participation (ranked from most significant to least significant).

Rank	Overall	Students with household income less than $30,000
1	Anxiety about new social situations	Funding/fees
2	Time	Anxiety about new social situations
3	Nothing available nearby	Family responsibilities
4	Not feeling welcome	Nothing available nearby
5	Family responsibilities	Not feeling welcome
6	Afterschool job	Transportation
7	Funding/fees	Confidence
8	Confidence	Time
9	Transportation	Afterschool job
10	Program requirements	Program requirements
11	Access to technology	Access to technology

Adults participating in statewide strategic planning meetings discussed the increase in the number of students working after school and the effect on participation in out-of-school programs. Among survey respondents, a total of 25% of high school students and 27% of middle school students reported having an afterschool job. When these results are sorted by household income, we can see that higher income households (those making more than $75,000 per year) have the highest percentage of students with afterschool jobs (49%). Afterschool work did not vary significantly among students who did or did not participate in sports teams. Additionally, students who reported working after school were more likely to identify time as a significant barrier to participation in programs, with approximately one-fourth identifying time above 4 on a scale of 1-5 (see Figure 24).

Figure 24: Students reporting having afterschool jobs by household income.

Adult Stakeholder Engagement

Statewide Strategic Planning Meetings

Four statewide strategic planning meetings were held in various locations across the state. Full-day sessions were hosted in person at the WVU Main Campus (Launch Lab), WVU Beckley (WV HIVE) and Marshall University. The project team also hosted a virtual session to ensure those who could not travel could participate in the process.

Strategic Planning Session 1A and 1B

The first series of meetings were held in May 2022 and focused on inventory, assessment and evaluation. Youth focus groups were held prior to the first series of strategic planning meetings. Adult participants reviewed and discussed youth feedback.

Two identical statewide strategic planning meetings were held in May 2022 to engage service providers and community members in discussion and collaborative planning. The first session (1A) was held in partnership with Marshall University. The second session (1B) was held in partnership with the WVU Morris L. Hayhurst Launch Lab. Sessions were held in different regions of the state to reduce travel for participants, with each session following the same agenda. Strategic planning meetings were open to any person interested in contributing.

Defining Entrepreneurship

Participants discussed that youth from rural and/or underserved counties may have a different understanding of the concept than youth from other counties depending on local programs available. Perceptions also may vary significantly among middle and high school youth due to increased opportunities in high school. One participant

stated, "We must consider who to ask the questions to because age, grade and county affect their understanding. Those who participated in the state programs have different perspectives, too."

Participants expressed that many students this age might have experience with, or an understanding of, the concepts related to entrepreneurship but lack familiarity with the term itself. Students may understand traditional models of entrepreneurship relating to small business ownership, but lack the experience or knowledge needed to understand the broader concepts of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial thinking. It was noted that youth responses lacked words/phrases relating to the values of entrepreneurship, including the impact entrepreneurs can have on the community, economy and economic development. This may be key to increasing understanding, as many stakeholders considered students to be social-minded and passionate about projects that help others (see Figures 25-26).

Figure 25: Strategic planning participant perceptions of the term "entrepreneurship."

- better life
- risks
- creativity
- solution
- money
- (unlimited) income
- business creator
- challenging status quo
- being your own boss
- endless possibilities
- opportunity
- lifestyle

- wealth creation
- impact
- options
- self-owned/empowered business
- fail last and move forward
- nothing to something
- greater than ones self
- commercial application of innovative solutions
- hope
- career opportunity

- power to employ
- problemsolving
- solution to generational poverty
- local economy
- community pillar
- community growth
- economic development
- healthy economy
- chance to stay in the community
- power circle

Figure 26: Perceived gaps in terms identified by youths to describe "entrepreneurship."

- opportunity
- control
- autonomy
- self-awareness
- customer

- grit
- perseverance
- (not afraid of) failures
- willingness to help

- social enterprise
- maker/doer
- gambling
- passion

Perception of required skills/traits of entrepreneurs

Figure 27: Essential skills of successful entrepreneurs (as identified by adult stakeholders).

- problem solving
- solution oriented
- networking
- critical thinking
- risk mitigation
- value creation
- doer
- willingness to help
- ability to see big picture
- speaking skills

Figure 28: Essential traits of successful entrepreneurs (as identified by adult stakeholders).

- persistence
- risk taking
- self motivated
- thinker
- profit oriented
- deep empathy
- collaborative
- visionary
- gambling
- competitive
- useful
- creative
- innovative
- goal oriented
- growth mindset
- not afraid of failures
- continuous learning

Adult stakeholder responses were compared with youth responses. Youth identified skills and traits reflecting traditional views of leadership. For example, the top responses among students included "leadership, determination and persistence." Participants in strategic planning meetings identified a broader set of social and emotional skills that contribute to success, including "networking, empathy and speaking skills (see Figures 27-28)." Additionally, adult participants identified many skills and traits relating to an open, flexible mindset (including creative, collaborative, growth mindset and continuous learning). Participants discussed the value of expanding the views of students to include a broader set of skills, traits and values. Youth identified traits included several words that reflected the perception that entrepreneurs have an outgoing and gregarious personality (including confidence, good personality, persuasive, convincing, approachable and friendly). One stakeholder suggested that it is important for youth to know that all personality types, including introverts, can be successful entrepreneurs.

Increasing Awareness: Brainstorming

Participants worked together to brainstorm ideas for increasing youth understanding of entrepreneurship and related concepts and increasing awareness of the resources available. Ideas expressed included:

- Expand the use of the term "entrepreneurship."
- Highlight success stories of young entrepreneurs that celebrate their diversity, creativity and innovation.
- Educate youths about entrepreneurship as an option for secondary income and/or career expansion.
- Develop and share messages on the impact/benefit of entrepreneurship to communities.
- Expand opportunities for middle school students to engage in entrepreneurship education.

- Educate youth about regional and/or statewide resources.
- Collaborate to better share information on opportunities for youth.
- Develop formal youth mentorship opportunities.
- Focus on integration of entrepreneurship into existing programs serving youth (as opposed to stand alone programs).
- Create a pipeline to higher education.
- Offer professional development programs for educators.
- Increase the involvement of families/caregivers.

Reducing and Eliminating Barriers: Brainstorming

Stakeholders worked in teams to brainstorm ideas for reducing or eliminating the barriers expressed by student focus group participants. Suggestions are charted below by type of barrier.

Addressing psychological barriers

- Incorporate confidence building and/or empowerment into youth programming.
- Recognize and address mental health and wellness through access to counselors, welfare checks and other resources, as needed.
- Work to increase connection to positive, caring, adults who can mentor students (through schools and the larger community).
- Work to connect interested students to facilitate bonding, shared accountability and pride in high performance.
- Engage family members as they affect student interest and access.
- Offer family coaching as way to support positive adult-child relationships.
- Integrate fun, low-pressure entrepreneurship activities across curriculum or classes (through all subjects and beginning in elementary school).
- Recognize the importance of representation and role models. Share real-life examples of people students can identify with and be inspired by.
- Provide opportunities for students to travel and explore possibilities in West Virginia and other states.
- Earlier exposure through education.
- Learn the value of failure by having the opportunity to take risks and learn what works and what does not.

Addressing scheduling conflicts

- Integrate activities into the school day.
- Provide buses and/or transport kids to activities outside of school.
- Intentionally engage students who live with grandparents (this is a significant percentage of West Virginia students).
- Consider providing an extra period at school that includes transportation.
- Connect students with a caring adult.

⁄ Work to improve the home-school connections and engage families.

⁄ Create a resource like the innovation hub in the schools, including middle school.

⁄ Incorporate into summer programming.

⁄ Paid work opportunities to replace less educational work arrangements for youth (using employers as mentors).

⁄ Consider/evaluate solutions implemented by other states.

Addressing concrete barriers

Financial

⁄ Choose and use no cost – low-cost resources.

⁄ Expand opportunities for paid apprenticeships, internships and work experience.

⁄ Seek out sponsors to provide resources.

⁄ Engage intentional adults/parents to help students with resources (food, amenities, books, etc.).

⁄ Increase collaboration to facilitate better use of existing resources and collaboratively pursue funding.

⁄ Educate students about bootstrapping.

⁄ Connect content to K-12 and gamify it.

⁄ Work on state school reform (more financial support to schools and teachers).

⁄ Add vo-tech to middle school and increase availability in high school.

Transportation

⁄ Incorporate activities into the school day.

⁄ Create vo-tech centers, merge vo-tech with other classes.

⁄ Include transportation in the budget (recognize its importance).

⁄ Add education to the bus rides to schools.

⁄ Work to increase public transit.

⁄ Promote or facilitate carpooling.

⁄ Provide and/or expand after-school buses.

Strategic Planning: Session 2A and 2B

The project team conducted two sessions in August 2022: a virtual session and an in-person session at the WV Hive Network in Beckley, West Virginia. The second round of strategic planning meetings focused on planning and development of action steps. Participants discussed what steps they would take if unlimited resources were available for the expansion of youth entrepreneurship. Themes emerged including:

Family involvement

⁄ Create an awareness campaign for parents. Help parents understand how they can coach their kids to be entrepreneurs.

⁄ Support family engagement and awareness of entrepreneurship as a viable career pathway.

K-12

⁄ Add entrepreneurship education in elementary school.

⁄ Identify motivational speakers to go out and speak to high schools.

⁄ Develop business coaches in high schools to mentor entrepreneurs.

⁄ Build a K-12 pipeline, starting with mindset in K-5, behaviors in 6-8 grades, and launching in 9-12.

⁄ Develop an in-school entrepreneurship pathway.

⁄ Expand access to high-quality entrepreneurship opportunities intersecting with STEM for all West Virginia youths after-school and during the summer.

⁄ Provide educator training and support.

Financial support

⁄ Create a revolving loan fund and/or seed fund to provide start-up funds for student-run businesses.

⁄ Create an educator entrepreneurship fund to allow educators to receive support for their innovative classroom projects.

⁄ Look for investment opportunities.

Wider support

⁄ Develop a youth entrepreneurship ecosystem.

⁄ Develop an entrepreneur hub facility and BizTown in West Virginia.

⁄ Increase technology resources.

⁄ Develop a comprehensive system that supports young entrepreneurs from concept to production (design assistance, small batch, funding access, etc.).

⁄ Create an entrepreneurship mentorship program that connects young entrepreneurs with business owners.

Participants also discussed what resources or programs are most important for expansion of opportunities. A list of suggested programs was developed, then participants voted on the single most important element. The highest ranked responses included:

⁄ Focus on entrepreneurship as problem-solving and community building.

⁄ Develop an innovation HUB in schools.

⁄ Integrate into after-school and summer programs.

⁄ Pair students with caring adults/mentors.

⁄ Create seamless integration through K-12 curriculum.

Much of the discussion focused on long-term growth and development of opportunities for youths. In the spirit of entrepreneurial thinking, participants worked to identify "low-hanging fruit," or steps that can be taken quickly with few resources. The steps identified most frequently across both sessions include:

/ Facilitate a statewide youth entrepreneurship ecosystem group to increase collaboration.

/ Highlight success stories of young and diverse entrepreneurs.

/ Integrate entrepreneurship across CTE career clusters.

/ Engage families in programming.

Provider Survey

A statewide survey of entrepreneurship resource providers was distributed to collect information on youth entrepreneurship programs in West Virginia. The survey was open to any organizations that contributed to entrepreneurial opportunities for youths. Survey respondents identified 12 major programs. Among these, eight programs serve high school students, one program serves middle school students and one program provides resources for elementary students. One program reported serving a combined elementary, middle or high school audience. The following programs were identified by respondents:

/ America's Entrepreneurial Schools (EntreEd)

/ Junior Achievement

/ James Rumsey Technical Institute – JRTI Company Lab-Entrepreneurship Pathway

/ West Virginia Code Club (hosted by University of Charleston Innovation)

/ Pocahontas County Farm to School

/ Pierpont Maker Camp

/ Simulated Workplace Entrepreneurship Education Pathway (SWEEP)

/ Randolph County Kid Boss

/ West Virginia Statewide High School Business Plan Competition

/ WVU Impact Challenge/Fashion Impact Challenge

/ My Hometown is Cool!

The majority (9 out of 12) of programs report serving between 10 and 150 students each. The settings in which the programs are delivered include in- and after-school, summer camp/programs, weekends and "other" such as online or hybrid. The respondents that offer an entrepreneurship curriculum were asked to describe the source of their curriculum. Four out of the six respondents who offered an entrepreneurship curriculum stated that their curriculum was self developed. The other two respondents described the source of their curriculum as "other" (see Figure 29).

Figure 29: Delivery methods of youth entrepreneurship programming.

Other – please describe (8%)

Weekends (25%)

In-school (42%)

Summer camp/program (8%)

Afterschool (17%)
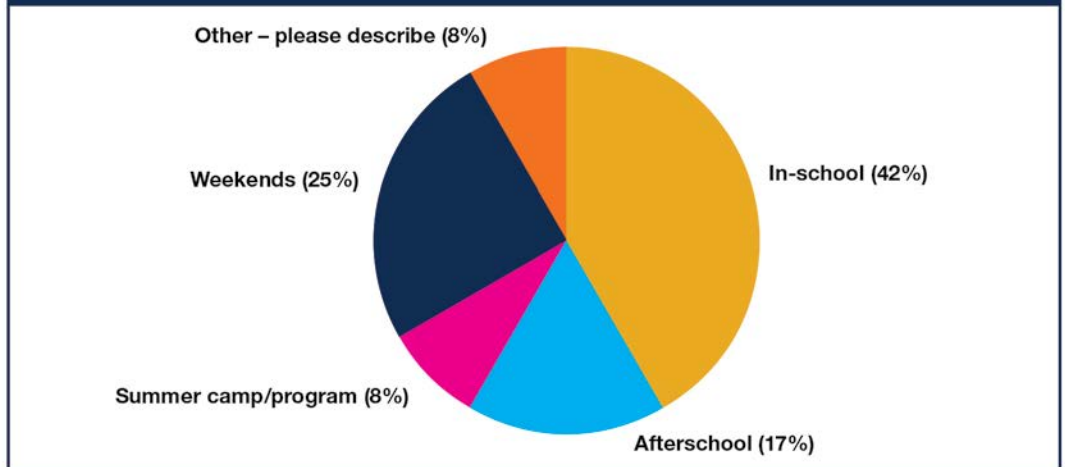
Survey of K-12 Educators

Teachers were asked to share their perceptions of student interest in entrepreneurship and other careers (see Figure 30). On average, teachers reported student interest in entrepreneurship as an average of 2.5 (with 1 being uninterested and 5 being very interested). Teachers reported several perceived areas of career interest among their students including trades, business, STEM, medical/healthcare and other/miscellaneous fields. The respondents who indicated entrepreneurship programs are available to their students, were asked to describe the programs (see Figure 32).

Teachers were asked to identify existing programs that they are aware of. As with youth, teachers were more aware of youth development programs (like Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and 4-H) and less aware of entrepreneurship programs. The most recognized program in this field was the Governor's School of Entrepreneurship (see Figures 31-32).

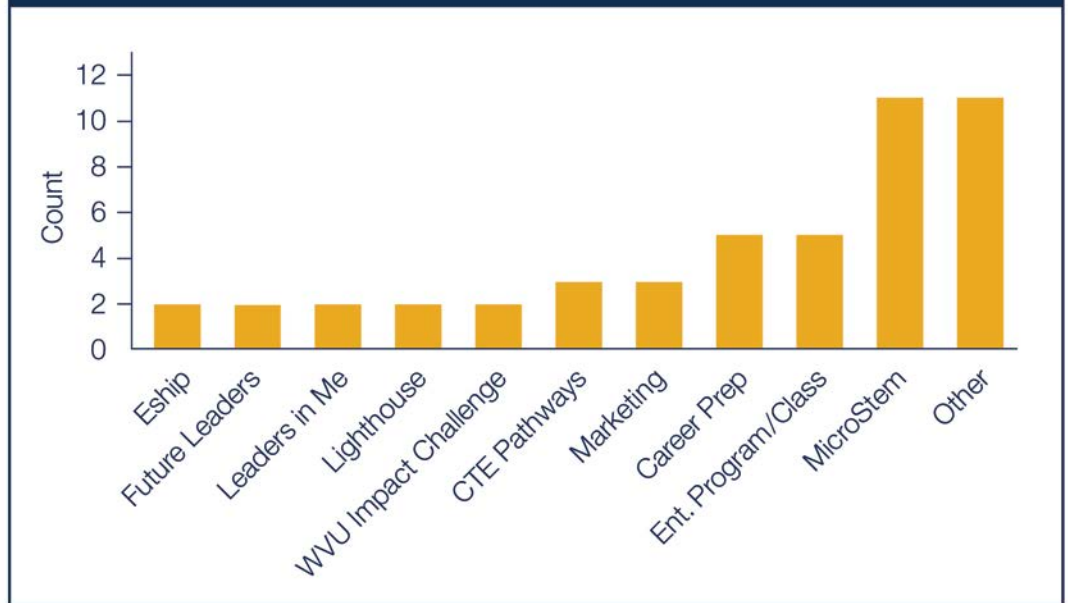Figure 30: Teachers' perceptions of student career interest.
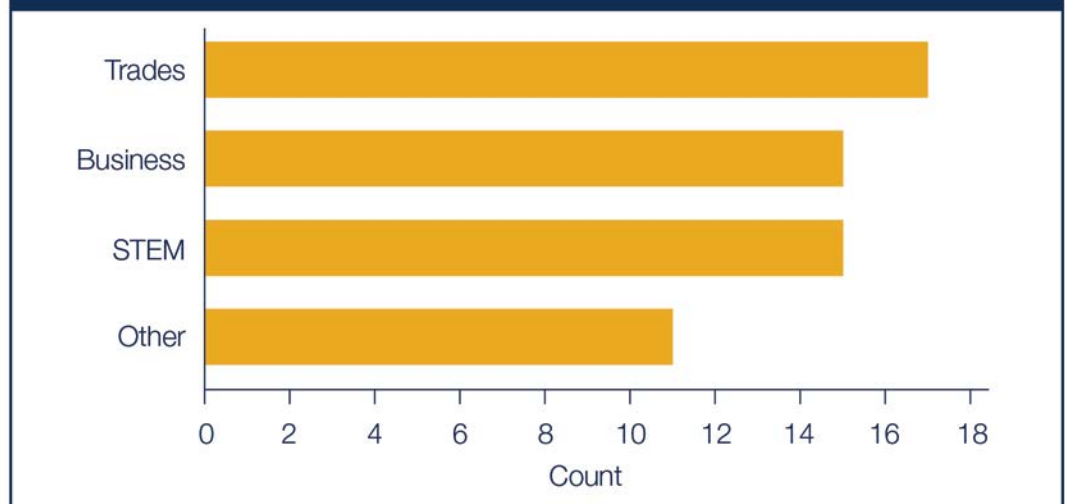
Trades: building, coal mining, electrical, construction, welding, small business, CDL trucking, automotive, mechanic

Business: business, business management, business owner (landscaping, service, different fields), marketing

STEM: science, Earth sciences, technology, engineering, programming/coding, cyber security

Other: military, agriculture, art/design, social media, teaching, education, customer service, real estate, restaurant, retail, computer oil/gas engineering

Figure 31: Entrepreneurship programs available to students.

*"Other" refers to entrepreneurship educational programs that were only listed once.

Figure 32: Teachers' perceptions of programs that students participate in.
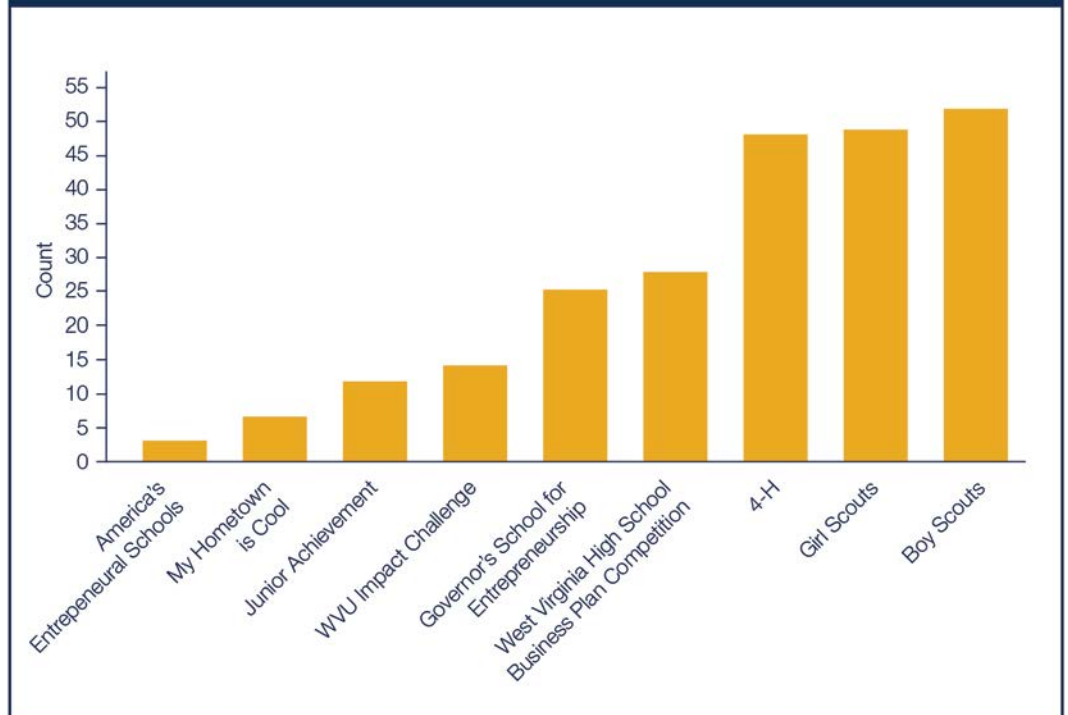
MISSION, VISION AND VALUES

The project team developed mission, vision and values statements to guide the creation of the Youth Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Subcommittee. The following statements were developed with feedback from participants of statewide strategic planning sessions and represent the goals and values of the team of collaborators.

Who We Are

The West Virginia Youth Entrepreneurship Ecosystem is a subcommittee of the West Virginia Statewide Entrepreneurship Ecosystem.

Mission

The West Virginia Youth Entrepreneurship Ecosystem works to create a shared vision for youth entrepreneurship by activating a network of public and private sector partners. The ecosystem advocates for policy change, fosters collaboration and provides education and support to providers.

Vision

West Virginia will lead the country in youth entrepreneurship. As a start-up state, we grow the next generation of innovators through intentional and equitable access to education, support and resources.

Values

⁄ All students deserve access to inclusive entrepreneurial education.

⁄ Fostering the entrepreneurial mindset is essential to developing the next generation of innovators.

⁄ Entrepreneurship empowers rural youth while providing economic opportunity and hope to combat poverty.

⁄ Entrepreneurship is vital to building a strong and diverse economy in West Virginia.

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https://www.arc.gov/

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- U.S. Senator Joe Manchin III
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- West Virginia Small Business Development Center
- Junior Achievement
- The EdVenture Group
- Forge Business Solutions
- WV HIVE Network

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Thank you to the youth and adult stakeholders who contributed their time and expertise to this initiative through strategic planning meetings, focus group discussion and statewide surveys.

Thank you to the leadership team for their collaboration over an 18-month period.

WVU Extension faculty (top row, left to right) **Lauren Prinzo** (PI), **Ami Cook** (Co-I), **Dana Wright** (Co-I); (bottom row) **David Roberts** (Co-I); and **Lauren Weatherford** (Co-I)

WVU Extension faculty/staff live and work in all 55 West Virginia counties to bring research-based knowledge and outreach to our communities. WVU Extension offers expertise in a broad range of areas, including family and community development; 4-H and youth development; and agriculture and natural resources. We want to empower our residents by giving them tools and resources they can use to improve the lives and livelihoods of all West Virginians. A special thank you to our Extension agents who share a passion for youth entrepreneurship and for their support of this project. (**extension.wvu.edu**)
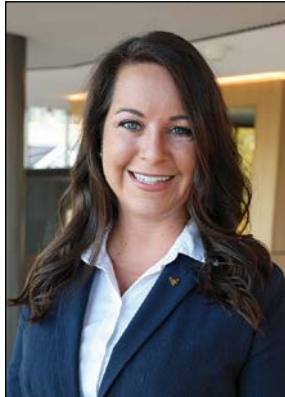
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Resource Partners

West Virginia Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Network

The Entrepreneurship Ecosystem effort started as a simple exercise in aligning efforts for better communications through collaboration. In less than three years, it has evolved into a core service provider and created a formal network, the West Virginia Entrepreneurship Network, and a fully functioning ecosystem website through WVBusinessLink.com, a program of the West Virginia Department of Economic Development.

Current co-chairs: Tara St. Clair and Amber Ravenscroft

https://westvirginia.gov/thriving-industries/

West Virginia BusinessLink

West Virginia BusinessLink is a "virtual center" that incorporates the services of the entire economic development ecosystem within the state so that entrepreneurs and small businesses seeking services will have instant access to information on all available resources. Initially funded through the CARES Act, this funding specifically addressed only COVID recovery so it limited the number of direct services which could be provided to businesses. This project will allow WVBL to expand services to a broader population and help provide sustainability.

https://wvbusinesslink.com/

APPENDIX:
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