



READY BY 21™ AND THE READY BY 21™ CHALLENGE

Frequently Asked Questions from Leaders in the Field

What is Ready by 21? Is it a new initiative?

Ready by 21 is not a program or a campaign or even an initiative. It is a challenge to all who care about children and youth to change the way they do business. Specifically, it is a call to think differently – to learn a different way to approach all of the tasks associated with trying to manage, make or measure change at any level from the classroom to the capitol – so that, together, we can act differently. Over the years, the Forum has created a considerable array of conceptual and practical tools to help people think and act differently to ensure that young people have the supports they need to be ready for college, work and life. We have bundled these under the phrase “Ready by 21” because it conveys the end goal – young people ready for college, work and life.

If it isn't a new initiative, why does it have a trademarked name?

People liked the phrase, the framework and the tools. The phrase struck a chord with those who were looking for a concise way to describe the end result of “supporting youth development” and a way to signal that they were trying to do business differently to achieve that goal. When people began calling asking if they could use the term to name their coalitions, conferences and reports, the Forum's legal counsel advised that we seek a trademark, to associate the phrase with the framework and to prevent misuse.

How is this different from other branded products and initiatives such as those promoted by the America's Promise Alliance and the Search Institute?

The America's Promise Alliances' Five Promises – caring adults, safe places, health services, educational opportunities, opportunities to contribute – are a part of the lexicon. Both the term “five promises” and the branded list have given the public and policy makers a consistent language to talk about the supports or “nutrients” children and youth need in their communities. And while few people can name the Search Institute's 40 Developmental Assets, the branded list fulfills the same purpose as the five promises. Both tools give communities a clearly defined goal complete with an understandable checklist that can be used to guide action and measure progress.¹ The Forum includes both lists in its tool kits and links them to the neutral list of key supports developed by the National Research Council in 2002. Our intention is not to introduce another branded list, but to underscore the importance of having consistent language, definitions and indicators associated with youth outcomes and community supports. Adopting common language is one of 10 key tasks in the Ready by 21 Blueprint for Change. (Download the Ready by 21 Challenge Overview to learn more).

If my organization or community wants to take on the Challenge and use this approach, do we have to form a new coalition?

Definitely not. The Ready by 21 Challenge was created to help communities suffering from the weight of too many coalitions and initiatives that focus on a small piece of the puzzle – violence prevention, infant mortality, literacy, after school programs. The tools are designed to help leaders find their own work in the context of the bigger picture of what is needed and what exists, so that they can be more precise and persistent in creating partnerships. The goal is to understand what exists – programs, services, funding, initiatives, policies – and find ways to make these pieces add up before creating new ones that just add on, creating confusion.

Do we have to use the name Ready by 21 or the terms included in the tools?

Again, definitely not. The Forum provides “starter language” developed by our organization and others (such as the Search Institute and the America’s Promise Alliance). Resources include options for defining age groups, outcomes, settings (e.g. schools), supports (e.g. relationships), strategies (e.g. aligning policies) and stakeholders (e.g. business). If your organization or community has already developed or adopted language, you should definitely use it. Our suggestion – use the Ready by 21 lists as “master lists” to compare against. Make sure your lists are complete and reflect your vision.

We’re already a member of America’s Promise Alliance or the National Collaboration for Youth. Do we have to join another alliance or coalition?

No. The National Collaboration for Youth should be the networking destination for all national organizations that support children and youth through programs, research or advocacy. The America’s Promise Alliance is the destination for the broader array of national organizations and corporations that care about children. The Forum is a member of both groups and both are Ready by 21 National Partners. The Forum’ aims to develop intentional partnerships with national organizations whose state and local members have the responsibility or opportunity to change the odds for youth. In addition to the National Collaboration and America’s Promise, current national partners include the American Association of School Administrators, the National Conference of State Legislatures and Corporate Voices for Working Families. We are pleased to report that United Way of America (UWA) is our signature partner. UWA and the Forum have joined forces to challenge and support local United Ways across the country and are in the first stages of piloting this work. The Forum will add other national partners as we move forward as we continue to expand our capacity to support state and local leaders. Any national organization whose staff or members are interested in changing the way they do business should contact the Forum. We are building the tools and partners to start a “doing business differently” tidal wave.

How does Ready by 21 connect to national initiatives like the America’s Promise “15 in 5” Campaign or major local and state initiatives such as high school reform?

We liken Ready by 21 to “intel inside.” Using these frameworks and tools can help communities and leaders get where they are going faster. We recommend that any organization, group or community that is serious about tackling a big goal, such as changing the lives of 15 million children in 5 years, step back to look at the Big Picture of youth outcomes, community resources and leadership horsepower, in order to step forward together with more focus. Again, Ready by 21 is not a packaged program or policy agenda. The tools and frames can be brought into any planning, assessment or decision-making process.

Why the phrase “Ready by 21?” And is the Forum saying that all young people need to go to college?”

“Ready” implies an end state, a state of being not only “problem-free, but fully prepared” to quote Karen Pittman, the Forum’s co-founder. “By 21” suggests a time by which all young people should be ready, recognizing that many will be ready well before their 21st birthdays. College, work and life (civic, social, familial) are three milestones that every young person should be prepared for fully. They may opt not to go to college or seek employment, but that should be by choice, not because they are unprepared. And all evidence suggests that the vast majority of young people want to work and will require some form of post-secondary education or training to be prepared for the workforce and for life.

¹ Note: The 40 Assets are divided into two categories – internal and external. The external assets correspond to the five promises and to the National Research Council’s list of key developmental supports. The internal assets track well against lists of skills and competencies that go beyond academic achievement to describe the assets youth need to succeed in the 21st century.