


# The ASA Center for Career Navigation at JFF: 1 Year Later

The ASA Center for Career Navigation at JFF celebrates its first anniversary with a powerful focus on opportunities for young people





## The ASA Center for Career Navigation at JFF

### Acknowledgments

JFF is appreciative of the partnership with American Student Assistance (ASA) to stand up the center and is grateful for the many partner organizations who have collaborated with the team to expand opportunities for the next generation of American leaders. The center especially wishes to acknowledge the hundreds of young people who have engaged with us throughout the year to lend their voice, experience, and wisdom to this critical work.

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# Center Mission

**Who we are:** ASA and JFF launched the ASA Center for Career Navigation at JFF—an initiative that empowers young people to confidently explore and navigate post-high school pathways leading to a successful future. Through this partnership, the center offers resources, guidance, and innovative tools to help students and families make informed decisions about what comes next—because every young person deserves access to opportunities that match their potential.

**Our Mission:** To lead the field in developing solutions to help young adults ages 16-24 understand and navigate quality education and career pathways after high school by providing access to resources and opportunities that will lead them to meaningful, quality jobs.



Members of the center team and Youth Advisory Council attend JFF's annual convening, Horizons

Over the summer, the ASA Center for Career Navigation at JFF celebrates its first year of work by building its unwavering focus on helping young people age 16-24 navigate education and career choices, and supporting their journey toward quality jobs and economic advancement. Launched in July 2024 to leverage the strengths of ASA and JFF, in just one year, the center is proud to have advanced across multiple pillars of work, including practice, research, policy, digital tools, and national and regional strategies.

**With strong partnerships with stakeholders across communities and systems, the past year's work has centered the voice and participation of young adults themselves to build solutions that work for all.**



# Fostering Community, Growing A Network

Enabling millions of young Americans to have the information, skills, experiences, and support they need to make good decisions about education and career requires stakeholders across the nation—practitioners, policymakers, researchers, employers and youth serving organizations, industry, funders, and more—to work together to support young people. This year, the center built a strong community in this space through a range of strategies, including:

- ✓ Launching a Career Navigation Stakeholder Network that has welcomed over 80 organizations to date into a community that meets monthly to learn, engage, and advance this work forward.
- ✓ Leading and facilitating discussions in spaces where partners are already coming together to improve education and career opportunity for young people, including the Aspen Institute Opportunity Youth Forum, National Youth Employment Coalition, the creation of the Career Navigation Leadership Council with Holon IQ, the Human Potential Summit, ASU+GSV and JFF's own Horizons Summit.
- ✓ Conducting focus groups with more than 150 people working as practitioners and within industry to better understand the challenges, opportunities, and priorities that are most important to them as they work with Gen Z around education and career navigation.

## Leading National Conversations

Center staff led conversations at the National Youth Employment Coalition annual conference this year, delivering practitioner-focused content that emphasized best practices in career navigation for young people, with special attention to how specific subpopulations—in this case immigrant young adults—face unique barriers to accessing and benefiting from high-quality career navigation services.



# Top reasons members joined the Career Navigation Stakeholder Network



\*Top reasons members joined the Career Navigation Stakeholder Network: connection, shared learning, and actionable tools to support their communities.



Aundrea Gregg, Senior Director at JFF, moderates a young adult panel at the New Orleans Career Center



# Driving Discovery

The center is proud of its strong commitment to advancing knowledge around the practices and policies that improve access to high-quality career navigation for young people, while also leading research on how young people, practitioners, parents, trusted adults, and industry are thinking about this critical topic. Highlights of the center's research work this year include:

- ✓ Partnership with the Walton Family Foundation and Gallup on a national survey of young people ages 16-24 and their parents to better understand their thinking about postsecondary education and career options. The findings further reinforced the importance of high-quality career

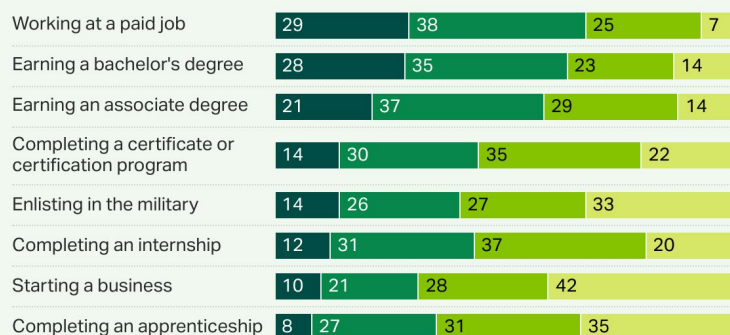
navigation support for young people. [The full report can be accessed here.](#)

- ✓ A national survey of 350 career navigation practitioners, designed to dig deeper into how frontline professionals are working to support young people in making decisions about education and career. Learnings from this survey highlighted how career navigation practitioners are beginning to adopt more tech-enabled, people-centered approaches and also lifted up the need for professional development and training that can equip practitioners with the knowledge and skills they need to work with young people in a dynamic labor market. Read more about this survey and its findings [here](#).

## High School Students' Preparedness to Pursue Postsecondary Pathways

*How prepared do you feel to pursue the following pathways within the first year after finishing high school?*

■ % Very prepared ■ % Somewhat prepared ■ % A little prepared ■ % Not at all prepared



Among those at least a little interested in pursuing each pathway

April 15-25, 2025

Walton Family Foundation and Jobs for the Future

GALLUP





The center is home to a unique team of young adult researchers known as the Youth Participatory Action Research team. This group of young adults conducted in-depth qualitative research on an increasingly important and rapidly evolving topic—how young people use social media to support their career navigation journeys. Using a participatory ethnographic methodology, this team of researchers focused on an interrelated set of questions that included understanding the type(s) of information young people were seeking when opting to use social media to learn about education and careers, how different subpopulations were using social media in their career navigation journey, and the motivational factor(s) that contributed to young people’s engagement with social media as part of their career navigation activities. Key early findings suggest that social media is central to how young people learn about specific education and career pathways. It is perceived to provide both informational and emotional value during a process that is often characterized by high levels of stress and anxiety.

## The Awareness Gap

Results from a national survey conducted by JFF, Walton Family Foundation, and Gallup highlighted how most Gen Zers between ages 16 and 24 and their parents are largely unaware of the full range of options available after high school. This, coupled with infrequent discussions about the future between parents and children, leaves many students feeling unprepared for life after graduation. Just 33% said they know “a lot” about earning a bachelor’s degree or working at a paid job (32%), and fewer than one in five know a lot about options like apprenticeships and short-term credentials.



# Shaping Policy

The center's work is well-aligned with policy's role in driving change. This year, the center invested in policy work at the federal and state level and worked hard to center young adult and practitioner voice in these policy initiatives. Highlights included:

- ✓ The release of a [policy landscape analysis](#) entitled How State Policy Can Transform Career Navigation for Young People: A 50 State Scan. This resource empowers stakeholders to better understand how their state is doing in advancing policies that improve the career navigation ecosystem for young people. The analysis spans a continuum of policy areas, including the availability of actionable education and career pathway information, access to personalized guidance, work-based-learning opportunities, and short-term

credentials. Interactive tools encourage engagement. Summary findings suggest that few states have adopted most of the 19 policies that the center's team identified as foundational to expansive, equitable access to career navigation for 16-to-24-year-olds.

- ✓ Intentional dialogue with federal partners through a center-hosted Salon Dinner and a Congressional Staff Network event brought together nearly 50 high-level government and leadership partners to discuss young adult career navigation policy issues across labor and education systems.

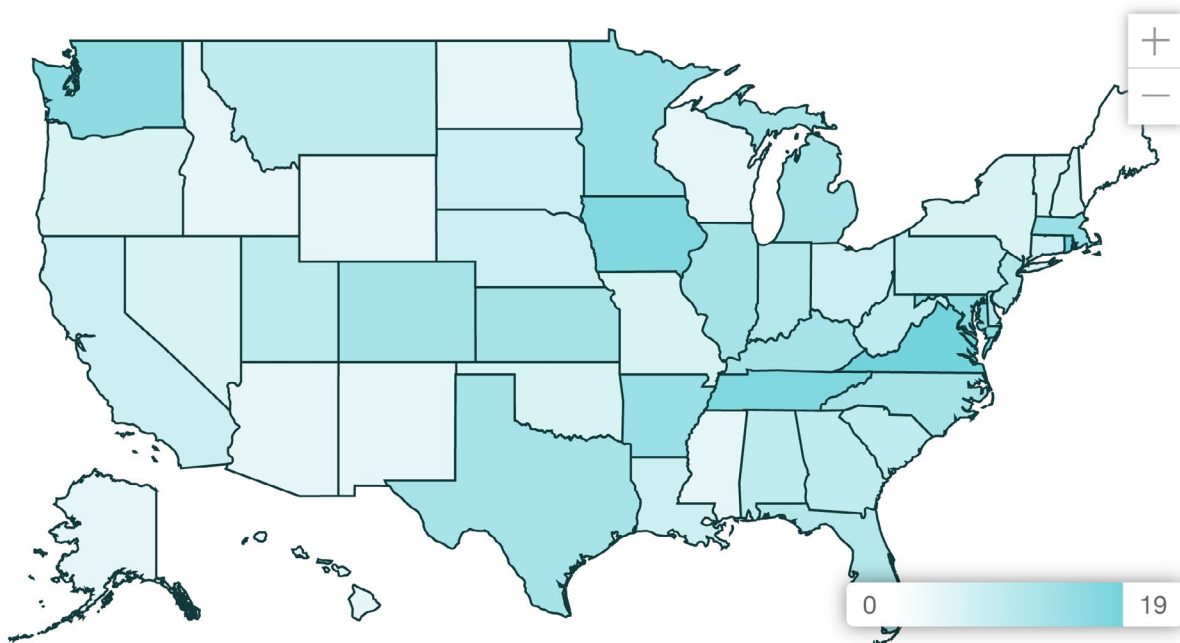


Members of the center speak on a panel at ASU + GSV titled “The Future of Career Navigation: Funding, Policy, and Practice”

- ✓ Investments in youth advocacy ensure that young adults can make their voices heard. This year, the center funded youth policy and advocacy organizations across four states (Washington, Louisiana, Illinois, and Alabama) and provided extensive technical assistance and support to empower these organizations and their youth advocates to identify and advance their priorities at the state level.

## Co-Designing for Advocacy

A+ Education Partners, an Alabama-based policy and education organization, partnered with the center this year to build students' self-advocacy abilities for quality education and career opportunities. The A+ Education Partners team received technical assistance and support from center staff. Working with youth, they codesigned advocacy materials to use in conversations with state policymakers that emphasize the importance of high-quality, real-world learning that can lay a foundation for building a career.



Interactive map showing state progress against 19 career navigation policies. Click [here](#) to interact with map.





# Tech-Enabled, People-Centered Solutions

The center team worked throughout the year conceptualizing, prototyping, and building a free, tool that provides young people with the information they need to reflect on their own career interests, understand how these interests align with real-world opportunities where they live, and chart a learning journey that offers a data-backed pathway to economic advancement. This product will launch in fall 2025 in select regions with a plan to expand to additional regions in 2026. Key differentiators in the center's approach include:

- ✓ A focus on a youth-informed, youth-friendly design, with extensive input from young people throughout the process.
- ✓ Integration of data that illuminates local education, training, and work-based learning pathways, as well as local funding resources, all in one place. It will also provide visibility into the quality of those pathways and their propensity for supporting a young person's access to a quality job and economic advancement.
- ✓ AI-powered guidance, with smart recommendations for career paths, programs, and opportunities tailored to the user and adaptive engagement by age & stage, delivering relevant content and opportunities based on where a young person is in their journey.
- ✓ Intentional dialogue with a broad array of stakeholders. Whether codeveloping with cutting-edge data partners or hosting listening sessions with youth engagement organizations, the center's product build team is committed to strategic partnerships that drive excellence.

## Youth-Led Insight

Center staff traveled across the nation to listen to young people directly about what types of information and resources they needed to feel well-informed and prepared to make education and career decisions. These conversations elevated the need for authentic information, comprehensive profiles of careers of interest, and personalized experience. The center team is using this insight to inform digital product design.



# Place-Based Work

In its first year, the center selected four communities—Seattle, New Orleans, Chicago, and Birmingham, Ala.—as regions to invest in a multi-faceted strategy to catalyze local partners around strengthening the career navigation ecosystem for young people. The team led stakeholder convenings that brought together dozens of key leaders in each region to discuss challenges, opportunities and priorities related to expanding career navigation for young people. This approach prepared communities for the opportunity to be early adopters of center-developed digital tools, and launched a round of grant-based investments to support local organizations in expanding career navigation programming and policy work.

Center staff also welcomed the opportunity to support project-based regional work that enabled the team to bring subject matter expertise and technical assistance to

communities facing specific challenges. This included a diverse portfolio of work ranging from helping the La Guardia Community College system develop a career navigation framework designed to activate staff throughout the college around career navigation, to industry-specific work helping a team in Oregon think about how to engage young people in exploring and pursuing climate-related careers.



A young man speaks at the New Orleans Career Center convening held in June 2025

## Centering Youth Locally

Regional work in New Orleans kicked off with a Career Navigation Lunch and Learn that was co-hosted with the United Way of Southeast Louisiana and held at the New Orleans Career Center. A panel of youth advocates spoke about their perspective on the local career navigation ecosystem, and regional stakeholders expressed strong excitement around centering youth voice and building more opportunities for work-based learning and early exposure to diverse careers and occupations.





Center team leads a session at a convening in Seattle

## Regional Momentum

The center welcomed the enthusiasm and engagement of a wide range of Seattle partners and was especially excited to see local funders, including Washington STEM, Seattle Colleges, Seattle Public Schools, Northwest Education Access, Kinetic West, College Success Foundation, Association of WA Business, YWCA, King County YouthSource, Gates Foundation, Microsoft Philanthropies, co-hosted by the Schultz Family Foundation.







# Center's Online Presence

One of the center's goals is to educate key audiences about the importance of career navigation support for youth through amplifying research, presenting informed perspectives and elevating youth voice. This year, the center team did this through media interviews and content distribution, social engagement, a monthly newsletter, and the launch of our new website.

## Media Coverage

The center's work was highlighted in multiple media outlets this year. Highlights include:

**Forbes**

[Click to read](#)

**FORTUNE**

[Click to read](#)

**FAST COMPANY**

[Click to read](#)

**BUSINESS  
INSIDER**

[Click to read](#)



[Click to read](#)



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## Audience Engagement

We published thought pieces and research which can be found on [our new center website](#). This year, the website will expand to be a resource hub for key audiences across parents, practitioners, and more.

We also launched our monthly newsletter which has grown to over 2,100 contacts and shared both center news and 3rd party resources. You can sign up for the newsletter [here](#).



# Building A Team for Impact

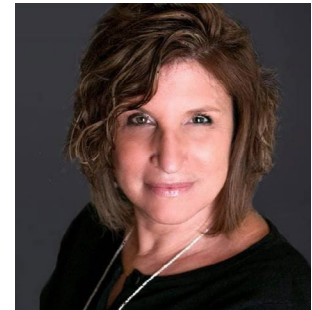
The center is home to a team of professionals who bring the vision, knowledge, experience, and skills to achieve the center's goal of supporting 20 million young adults in making informed, decisions about education and careers. The center's leadership team includes:



**Alex Bulis**  
Chief Product Officer, **ASA**



**Sandy Dawkins**  
Senior Director, **ASA**



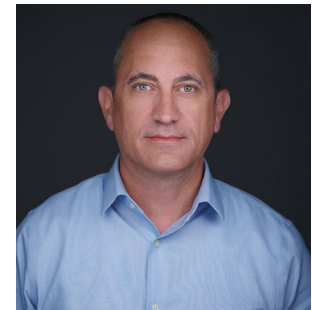
**Judy Goldstein**  
SVP, **ASA**



**Julie Kreiss**  
Senior Director, **ASA**



**Mike Murphy**  
Director, **ASA**



**Greg Smith**  
VP, **ASA**



**Liz Texeira**  
VP, **ASA**



**Jeff Bulanda**  
VP, **JFF**



**Erica Bouris**  
Senior Director, **JFF**



**Erica Cuevas**  
Director, JFF



**Alex Hodges**  
AVP, JFF



**Liz Keeffe**  
Director, JFF



**Tia Kim**  
AVP, JFF



**Tia King-Fontáñez**  
Executive Assistant, JFF



**Alex Sileo**  
Senior Manager, JFF

### **The ASA Center for Career Navigation Steering Committee**

Jean Eddy, CEO, **ASA**

Julie Lammers, EVP, **ASA**

Judy Goldstein, SVP, **ASA**

Maria Flynn, CEO, **JFF**

Susan Gouijnstook, CSO, **JFF**

Stephen Yadzinski, CSIO, **JFF**



In addition to building the staff leadership team, the center prioritized the development of two key stakeholder advisory councils, including a Youth Advisory Council (11 members ages 16-24) and a Career Navigation Practitioner Advisory Council (10 members). Designed to ensure that on-the-ground voices guide the center's work, these advisory councils were invaluable throughout the year, providing feedback and thought partnership. Advisory council members had many opportunities to help center staff represent the center's work with external partners.

## **Tobias' Journey**

Tobias Brown, age 19, served as a Youth Advisory Council member this year. Hailing from Georgia, Brown is passionate about helping young people impacted by the justice system navigate their education and career journey and consistently brought a valuable perspective to the center's work, including how social media plays a role in career navigation, the unique challenges that young Black men face in building their professional lives, and an enthusiasm for research and engagement with national partners doing work in this space.





# Looking Ahead

The ASA Center for Career Navigation at JFF is proud to define its inaugural year by its vision of driving toward excellence in career navigation for young people. By intentionally and strategically braiding together multiple pillars of work and operationalizing an unwavering commitment to a collaborative approach that centers partnership and youth voice, the center has quickly become a national leader in career navigation for young people.

As the center begins its second year, the team is excited to work toward increased impact through key initiatives, including:

- ✓ A regional launch of a digital career navigation platform for young people, building toward a national launch in 2026 including new features and benefits.
- ✓ New research, with an emphasis on generating evidence about the practices and interventions that drive positive outcomes for young adults, with a special focus on disconnected youth.
- ✓ Practical content for parents to help support their conversations with young adults about career navigation
- ✓ Driving the implementation of policy-focused solutions, especially at the state level.

- ✓ Offering expanded, high-quality professional development for career navigation practitioners working on the front lines.
- ✓ Growing the career navigation stakeholder network, including expanding opportunities for peer exchange and capacity-building among organizations doing this work across America.
- ✓ Advancing on industry-engaged practices that strengthen and grow the role of work-based learning in young adult career navigation journeys.



Jeff Bulanda, VP of the center, holding a focus group at Blue Valley CAPS in Overland Park, KS



## About American Student Assistance® (ASA)

American Student Assistance® (ASA) is a national nonprofit committed to helping students know themselves, know their options, and make informed decisions to achieve their education and career goals. ASA believes all students should have equitable access to career readiness learning, starting in middle school, so they can develop a plan for their future. ASA fulfills its mission by providing digital-first programming, resources, and experiences, including Futurescape™, directly to millions of students, in addition to support for educators and intermediaries. To learn more about ASA, visit [www.asa.org/about-asa/](http://www.asa.org/about-asa/).

## About Jobs for the Future

Jobs for the Future (JFF) transforms U.S. education and workforce systems to drive economic success for people, businesses, and communities. [www.jff.org](http://www.jff.org)



