Youth Engagement and Retention in Toledo

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Overview/Scope

- Identify gaps in the community as it pertains to services to youth in the areas of college and workforce readiness;
- Bring educational systems and industry together to create and/or clarify pathways that will lead to career attainment; and
- Engage youth in understanding the pathway opportunities of interest that could lead them to choose to college and workforce opportunities within the City of Toledo.

Methodologies

Data for this report were gathered between January and April 2025 through semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and surveys.

Discussions were guided by open-ended questions addressing youth migration, career readiness, perceptions of Toledo, and community engagement. Themes were identified through a qualitative coding process that emphasized frequency, urgency, and alignment with city priorities. Although not statistically representative, the data provides rich narrative insight into youth perspectives and the systemic factors influencing their decisions.

176

08 **Individual Interviews**

04 **Community Focus Groups**
57 participants

04 **Youth Focus Groups**
61 participants

50 **Survey Responses**

Key Findings

Workforce Readiness and Career Exposure
Youth need earlier and broader access to mentorships, internships, job shadowing, and exposure to nontraditional career paths, particularly in STEM, healthcare, and the trades.

Gaps in Soft Skills and Life Preparedness
Life and career success are hindered by a lack of soft skill development. Youth and families emphasize the need for programs that teach financial literacy, communication, and professionalism.

Transportation and Infrastructure Barriers
Poor transit access and deteriorating infrastructure are significant deterrents to youth participation in city life, especially for those who do not drive or live in under-resourced neighborhoods.

Safety and Community Conditions
Fear of violence, poor public safety infrastructure, and lack of trust in policing disproportionately impact youth of color and contribute to feelings of disconnection from the city.

Lack of Youth-Centered Community Engagement
Some city-led efforts fail to recruit youth voice and leadership. Young people are eager to co-create solutions and participate in advisory boards, neighborhood design, and cultural initiatives.

Housing Affordability and Quality
Youth cite cost of living, substandard housing, and landlord harassment as major obstacles. Recommendations include expanding voucher access and redeveloping abandoned properties.

Equity, Inclusion, and Representation
Equity must be intentional. Participants called for increased representation of marginalized youth in leadership, culturally competent programming, and disaggregated data collection for accountability.

Identity, Belonging, and Personal Growth
Youth seek purpose, expression, and connection. Investing in travel, arts, wellness, and civic leadership can deepen their ties to Toledo and foster long-term retention.

Overall Recommendations

Workforce Readiness and Career Exposure

- Expand mentorship, internships, and job shadowing programs tied to local industries.
- Expand current partnerships with trade and vocational programs.
- Partner with higher education institutions to expand dual enrollment opportunities.

Safety and Community Conditions

- Invest in safer public spaces, community policing, and trauma-informed supports.

Gaps in Soft Skills and Life Preparedness

- Develop neighborhood-based youth hubs with wraparound services focused on developing soft skills, budgeting, and life skills.

Transportation and Infrastructure Barriers

- Pilot a year-round Youth Bus Pass Program
- Repair public infrastructure in key corridors.

Overall Recommendations

Lack of Youth-Centered Community Engagement

- Create a Youth Impact Fund to support youth-led initiatives.
- Establish a Youth Retention Task Force.

Housing Affordability and Quality

- Implement housing vouchers or cooperative housing models for young adults.
- Revitalize vacant properties for youth use.

Equity, Inclusion, and Representation

- Design equity benchmarks and ensure cultural representation in leadership roles.
- Host quarterly Youth Town Halls.

Identity, Belonging, and Personal Growth

- Create a digital Youth Opportunity Portal that focuses on personal development, community connections, and engagement opportunities.
- Invest in/Expand on youth-designed public art and festivals.

Next Steps

- Review recommendations to determine priorities for the remainder of 2025 into 2026.

- Meet with local community organizations, educational institutions, and industry leaders to discuss collaborative partnerships to implement key recommendations.

- Continue to create space for youth engagement as strategies are planned and implemented.

Questions