

GEAR UP Talking Points & Key Data



Use this messaging when you talk about GEAR UP to students, families, media, and elected officials. Depending on your audience, you may want to use formal or informal talking points.

Frame your GEAR UP story to the local context by adding specific data and examples in the boxes.

What is GEAR UP?

Formal

GEAR UP, which stands for Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs, is a grant program created and funded by Congress and administered by the U.S. Department of Education.

GEAR UP helps students from low-income communities prepare for and succeed in education and training beyond high school so they can achieve their career goals.

Informal

Created and funded by Congress, GEAR UP is a program that opens doors for students from all backgrounds, especially those from low-income communities. GEAR UP helps prepare students for education and training after high school to reach their dream careers.

College is any type of education after high school. This includes job training, apprenticeships, certificates, and 2-year and 4-year degrees.

- What are the three main problems that your GEAR UP program seeks to solve?
- What are examples of services your GEAR UP program provides to students and families?

Who does GEAR UP serve?

Formal

GEAR UP serves over 500,000 students at almost 3,000 schools across the country. Programs start in middle school and continue through a student's first year of education beyond high school.

Informal

Across the U.S., GEAR UP serves more than a half a million students each year at almost 3,000 schools. Programs support students for six or seven years, from middle school to the first year after high school.

- How many students does your GEAR UP program serve? What grade levels?
- How many hours of services have you delivered to students, to families, and to educators?

Where are GEAR UP programs located?

GEAR UP programs are found in almost every state across the country. This initiative supports rural and urban communities alike.

- Which schools, districts, and colleges does your GEAR UP program serve? How would you describe them?

When did the GEAR UP program start?

The first GEAR UP grants began in 1999, over 25 years ago.

- What year did your GEAR UP program start?

Why is GEAR UP important?

1 | EXPANDS OPPORTUNITY AND INCREASES MOBILITY

Formal

GEAR UP opens doors to opportunity for students and their families by providing guidance on post-high school plans.

Informal

Opportunity is as American as apple pie. GEAR UP gives students and families tools to realize the American dream.

- Why is it important for students to continue their education or training after high school?
- What individual stories can you share that will inspire your audience to see the real-world impact of GEAR UP?
- What quotes or testimonials can you share from students and families?
- What quotes or testimonials can you share from state/community leaders that your audiences may admire?

2 | PROMOTES WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

Formal

By 2031, 85% of good jobs in the U.S. (and 72% of all jobs) will require education and training beyond high school, like a certification or degree ([Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce](#), 2024).

By increasing career and college readiness, GEAR UP contributes to a stronger workforce and economic growth. The program helps prepare students for the demands of the 21st-century job market, benefiting both individuals and the local and national economy.

Informal

A high school diploma isn't enough for most well-paying jobs. GEAR UP helps prepare students for the jobs of the future with guidance on education and training options after high school.

GEAR UP doesn't just promote the workforce; it creates the workforce. Having a strong workforce is an investment in our local and national economy that allows us to compete globally.

- What are your state's projections for the percentage of jobs that will require education or training beyond high school? [Find your state's numbers.](#)
- How does your GEAR UP program align to state or local education and workforce goals?
- What are examples of career exploration or readiness programs that your GEAR UP program offers?

3 | ALLOWS FOR LOCAL CONTROL AND FLEXIBILITY

Formal

GEAR UP empowers local communities to determine their specific needs and how best to address them. This allows for tailored solutions rather than a top-down, one-size-fits-all approach from the federal government. GEAR UP brings resources that provide employment and enrichment in local communities.

Informal

GEAR UP isn't a federal mandate telling everyone what to do. It lets local communities decide what their students need most and employs staff in our area.

- How many staff does your GEAR UP program employ? How many educators benefit from GEAR programs and services?
- What are examples of how your GEAR UP program has addressed local needs?

4 | DEMONSTRATES A PROVEN TRACK RECORD AND GETS RESULTS

Formal

GEAR UP is a long-standing initiative, serving millions of students for over 25 years. The program emphasizes data-driven, research-based interventions.

GEAR UP has a successful track record of increasing post-high school readiness and enrollment among students from low-income communities. For example, 81.6% of the GEAR UP class of 2022 enrolled in postsecondary education right after high school, a rate nearly 30% higher than the national average for students from low-income communities ([U.S. Department of Education, 2024](#)).

Informal

GEAR UP has been around a long time — this is not a new, untested program. GEAR UP has a track record of getting real results in helping students be academically prepared and have a plan for life after high school.

For example, nationally, only about half of students from low-income communities enroll in education after high school. But in those schools with GEAR UP, more than 8 out of 10 students in the class of 2022 enrolled in education after high school ([U.S. Department of Education, 2024](#)).

- What are the education outcomes that will resonate with your audiences? What data or insights can you share that address those outcomes?

5 | BUILDS COMMUNITY INVESTMENT AND PARTNERSHIPS

Formal

GEAR UP fosters collaboration between K-12 schools, higher education institutions, state agencies, industry, and community organizations. There's a return on investment for taxpayers, as programs must match federal funds with an equal amount from non-federal sources.

Informal

GEAR UP doesn't rely on federal funds alone. It's a community effort, partnering with businesses, schools, and local organizations. Taxpayers get their money's worth, as there's a requirement that for every federal dollar, there's a local dollar matched.

- Which partners were involved in designing and leading the GEAR UP program?
- How much do you receive in federal funding, and how much in local matching funds?
- How does the per-student cost of GEAR UP compare to what your districts spend per-student?