

BOLD FUTURES ACADEMY · EIN 33-3751028
IMPACT REPORT · FOUNDED MARCH 2025

WHERE IT CAME FROM, AND WHY.

A complete record of what Bold Futures Academy has built, why we built it in this order, and where we are going next. Written for the board, funders, and partners who help us move.

PREPARED FOR
THE BOARD, FUNDERS, AND PARTNERS OF BFA

PREPARED BY
VANESSA RUTH GAY · FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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SECTION 01 · START HERE

01

What Bold Futures Academy is.

*Who we serve, what we run, and how to read the
numbers in the rest of this report.*

What Bold Futures Academy is.

Bold Futures Academy helps young people understand themselves, build the capabilities every path requires, and learn from real experience, so they can navigate what comes next with clarity and readiness. College, a trade, a job, or a business of their own. We are a 501(c)(3) nonprofit based in Rockland, Massachusetts, established in March 2025 and built on mentorship work that started before the organization existed.

The word we use for what we teach is readiness, and we mean more by it than most people do. Not only work readiness. Readiness to go to college and know why you chose it. Readiness for whatever comes after high school when it is not college at all. And readiness after that too, because the hardest transition most young people face is the one out of college or a training program and into a working life nobody prepared them for. Four things sit underneath all of it: understand yourself, build readiness, explore what is possible, and turn experience into opportunity.

Those four are not steps a student finishes in order. The real shape is a loop: learn something about yourself, meet something outside yourself, try it, get feedback, think about what it meant, revise what you believed, and go again. Everything we run is built to turn that loop a few more times before the stakes get high.

Understand yourself, build readiness, explore what is possible, turn experience into opportunity is our public theory of change, simple enough to hold onto. But readiness by itself is not the finish line. A young person can become genuinely more ready and still lack the relationships, introductions, paid experiences, and real opportunities that let that readiness go anywhere. That is a separate problem from the one readiness solves, and it is why partnerships and opportunity brokering are part of how we work rather than an afterthought to it.

The work began with college students. Our founder was volunteering with UConn's Werth Institute and kept meeting the same two people. One was the twenty year old encountering entrepreneurship for the first time, years after the point where it would have changed what she chose to study. The other was the senior a few months from graduating who could not say in plain words what she was good at. The gap was not talent and it was not ambition. They had reached consequential decisions and unfamiliar rooms without enough self-understanding, practice, feedback, relationships, or real experience to draw on. Bold Futures Academy does that work, and does it earlier.

WHO WE SERVE

High school students in grades 10 to 12, through LaunchLab. College students anywhere, through our college programming, which is Ignite mentorship and our summer internship together. We are also exploring a broader readiness pathway that could eventually support young people across additional ages and transition points. That work is exploratory and not yet operating. Programs are free to students.

HOW THIS REPORT IS BUILT

We built this report to move the way our own thinking actually moved, not by category. It starts with a problem we did not invent, the evidence that young people are not being made ready, wherever we found it. Then it follows us to the place we went to check that against real students, UConn, and what we heard there. Then our response, LaunchLab, and what running it taught us. Then a pattern we kept living out before we had a name for it, three years of workshops that turned out to be the same thing wearing two different partners. Then the wider realization that pattern forced on us, and everything that widening produced. The evidence sections, the money, and the team follow after that, and the report closes with where all of it is going.

How to read the numbers in here.

We are a small organization doing depth over scale work in a sector that mostly does the opposite. That shows up in the numbers, and we would rather explain it once than dress it up. Our first LaunchLab cohort had six students in it. Our fielded surveys are small, and we report them at their real size. Where we describe what changed for students, we are reporting early evidence, participant-reported change, and what facilitators observed. Those are directional signals, not proof that we caused a long-term change in anyone's trajectory. We have not been here long enough for that, and Section 12 explains what we are building so that we can eventually know. We are equally careful about the words we use for our own work: something we built, something we delivered alongside a partner, something we are testing, something we have planned, and something we hope to do in ten years are five different claims, and we keep them separate throughout.

One number needs a note, and it is the same fact seen two ways. More than seventy young people have been reached by this work in total, and a little more than fifty of them since Bold Futures Academy was founded. The rest were reached before the organization existed, through our founder's mentorship and workshops at UConn. When you see the seventy on the next spread and the fifty beside it, they are not two competing counts. Seventy is the whole body of work. Fifty is what the organization itself has delivered. Both are labeled everywhere they appear, because a reader deserves to know which is which.

We also report the ones that do not flatter us. The Hartford workshop in Section 07 is the clearest example. Eight scholars completed reflection surveys, average confidence in describing themselves rose from 3.5 to 4.1 out of five, and four of the eight moved. Two were already at the ceiling. Two did not move at all, and both wrote down why. That second pair is why the Hartford evidence ends with a design change rather than a victory lap.

WHAT IS IN THIS REPORT

This report moves the way our thinking actually moved, not by category, and the section list follows that order. Section 02 is the problem, before it was ours. Section 03 is UConn, where we went to check it against real students. Section 04 is LaunchLab, our response. Section 05 is what the first cohort taught us, including the Navigator. Section 06 is a pattern we kept living out before we named it, and Section 07 is what that pattern may become, a readiness pathway we are exploring but have not built, with the Hartford evidence folded into it. Section 08 is the realization that widened us past entrepreneurship. Sections 09 and 10 are what that widening produced, the summer internship and our move toward corporate-sponsored work. Section 11 is every quote we have, Section 12 is how we measure whether any of this works, Section 13 is the money, and Section 14 is the board and team. Section 15 is where this goes. The year-by-year roadmap lives in the Strategic Plan rather than in here.

A WORD FROM OUR FOUNDER

We do not round these numbers up. Reporting honestly is how we earn the right to claim depth.

RUTH GAY · FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

SECTION 02 · THE GAP

02

The problem, before it was ours.

Three findings we did not produce, from research we did not fund. This is where the work actually starts, before any program existed to respond to it.

What the national research says.

Our own data is small by design. These three findings are not ours, they are large and independent, and they describe the gap our students walk into.

01 · Employers say school is not doing this job

75% of surveyed companies reported that some or all of the recent college graduates they hired were unsatisfactory, and in the same survey 53% of hiring managers considered recent graduates unprepared for the workforce. These are two different measures and we keep them apart. The concerns reported included communication, work ethic, response to feedback, professionalism, workload management, initiative, and adaptability.

02 · Young people want to build, and are not shown how

Three in five teenagers say they would rather build something of their own than take a traditional job. Entrepreneurship is not standard curriculum in most schools, so that interest rarely has anywhere to go. The interest is not the missing piece. The instruction is.

03 · Graduates say the education did not fit

94% of surveyed recent graduates reported at least one regret about their degree. In the same study, 64% wished they had majored in another field and 50% reported insufficient guidance when selecting their major or degree. That is a decision made years earlier, often without anyone helping them work out what they were good at first.

WHAT WE TAKE FROM THIS

The problem often begins before college and can compound across later transitions. It shows up in the absence of anyone helping a young person understand themselves, practice what every path requires, and learn from something real before the stakes get high. That is the work BFA does, and it now extends from high school through college, training, work, and early adulthood.

Sources. Employer readiness figure: Intelligent.com, survey of 966 U.S. business leaders, August 2024. Teen entrepreneurial intent: Junior Achievement USA, survey of 1,000 teens ages 13 to 17 conducted by Wakefield Research, reported March 2022. Graduate regret figure: Hult International Business School and Workplace Intelligence, College Graduate Skills Study, based on a survey of 800 HR leaders and 800 recent graduates, October 2024. Every figure in this section is checked before each edition, and where we cannot point to a source the number does not go in the document.

SECTION 03 · WHERE WE WENT TO LISTEN

03

What we heard at UConn.

Before there was a program, there was a place we went to check the problem against real students. This is that place, and what it told us.

Why UConn is where this starts.

Our founder was volunteering as a mentor at UConn's Werth Institute for Entrepreneurship before Bold Futures Academy existed. That is not a partnership we signed. It is the place we went, on our own time, to find out whether the gap we suspected was real. On September 9, 2023, the Werth Institute invited her to join NetWerx as an alumni mentor. She onboarded five days later. Everything in this section happened before the organization did.

What we found there is the reason everything after this section exists.

Five roles across three years of recurring engagement.

A relationship with the UConn Werth Institute that began through alumni mentoring in September 2023 and has since included mentoring, workshops, pitch review, and other recurring engagements. It is still active. It has taken five distinct shapes, and it is the closest thing we have to a model of what listening to one place, over years, actually looks like. It is recurring engagement rather than a formal BFA and UConn organizational partnership, and we do not describe it as one.

ROLE	WHAT IT HAS MEANT IN PRACTICE
One to one mentor	Fifteen documented mentee matches since February 2024, across two successive mentoring platforms, running from a first introduction through a full venture arc. Four of those mentees have rated the mentorship through the university's own platform, eleven times between them. Every rating is five out of five.
Invited guest speaker	Eight students at the summer speaker series in July 2024, a Werth Innovators cohort on campus that November, and a second cohort in November 2025 for a session on pitching and sharpening a business idea. The last of those produced the survey data reported in this section.
Summer program mentor	Three consecutive summer programs, including the Werth Innovators internship for first-year women, mentoring students across the full length of their projects.
Pitch reviewer	Final project presentations reviewed in person on campus in May 2025 and virtually since, giving structured feedback on each student's final pitch.
Stand-in mentor	When a student's assigned mentor cannot make a session, our founder takes them. This is the least visible part of the relationship and probably the largest by headcount.

WHY WE ARE SHOWING YOU THIS

A funder looking at a young organization reasonably asks whether its partnerships are real or aspirational. This one has survived a platform migration, a change of staff contacts, and the founding of an entire nonprofit in the middle of it, and the invitations still come unprompted. That is the standard we are trying to reach with every partner named in this report.

What the November 2025 UConn research told us.

Our second UConn workshop, after the first in 2024. BFA student feedback survey · n=7 · UConn Werth Institute · Mixed sophomore and junior cohort · Self-reported, post-workshop.

100%

FELT UNPREPARED BY HIGH SCHOOL

All seven said high school did not prepare them to think like a founder. Four said not really, three said not at all.

86%

WOULD HAVE JOINED LAUNCHLAB IN HS

Six of seven said yes outright. One said maybe. None said no.

4.1/5

POST-WORKSHOP CONFIDENCE

Average confidence in taking their idea to the next level after one session. Six rated 4, one rated 5.

100%

SAID BFA CAN BRIDGE THE GAP

All seven. The gap between high school exposure and college readiness is real, and they believe we are positioned to close it.

SKILL GAPS THEY NAMED	SHARE NAMING IT
Time management	86%
Identifying real problems	71%
Financial literacy	71%
Pitching	57%
Empathy mapping	43%
Business planning and team collaboration	43%

Asked what they most wanted to be taught, the group named empathy mapping, pitching practice, team collaboration, AI literacy, ethics, and financial literacy. Asked what was standing in their way, they named two things: money and confidence. Five of the seven opted in for ongoing mentorship and have been re-engaged.

What they actually said.

Direct responses from all seven participants, grouped by theme. These are the sentences that shaped the LaunchLab curriculum.

ON THE GAP THEY FELT IN HIGH SCHOOL

- How to come up with ideas, how to be successful in entrepreneurship.
- Design thinking. Having a bright idea isn't always the same as having an execution plan.
- How to network and how to connect with other people.
- More about mindset and purpose.

ON THE SUPPORT THEY WISHED THEY HAD EARLIER

- I wish I had encouragement. Most adults look at me like I'm crazy and it would have been nice to have more support.
- People in similar fields, alumni from my program.
- Mentorship. Most important thing.

ON WHAT BFA CAN DO FOR YOUNGER STUDENTS

- Let them know that their big ideas are realistic.
- Give them the confidence to pursue their ideas.
- Understanding that their potential is limitless, and seeing what they are capable of.

IN ONE WORD, THE WORKSHOP WAS

Insightful. Amazing. Insightful. Perspective. Fun. Insightful. Great. Three of the seven independently reached for the same word.

SECTION 04 · WHAT WE BUILT BECAUSE OF IT

04

Our response: LaunchLab.

We heard what UConn students wished had reached them earlier. LaunchLab is us building that, for the age group that still had time to use it.

Built because of what we heard, not instead of it.

LaunchLab is a six week virtual program in which every high school student builds a venture from scratch and pitches it at Demo Day. Students earn the title Venture Fellow and leave with a working business plan, a tested prototype, and a pitch they have delivered live to mentor panelists. Spring 2026 was the inaugural cohort. The Fall 2026 cohort is underway. It runs September 12 through October 17 on the theme Entrepreneurship in the Age of AI, The Human Advantage.

Not all of that came from a guess about what teenagers need. A room full of college students, describing what they wished had reached them years earlier, real practice at building something before the decisions that follow high school get made without that practice behind them, gave us a hypothesis worth testing with a younger age group. LaunchLab is that test. Whether it holds for high schoolers the way it held in retrospect for the college students who described it to us is exactly the kind of thing the evidence in this section is meant to show, not something we could know in advance.

THE LINE WE ARE DRAWING ON PURPOSE

We heard this, so we built that. That is the whole justification for LaunchLab's existence, and we would rather state it plainly than let a good program look like it appeared from nowhere.

SECTION 05 · THE FIRST COHORT

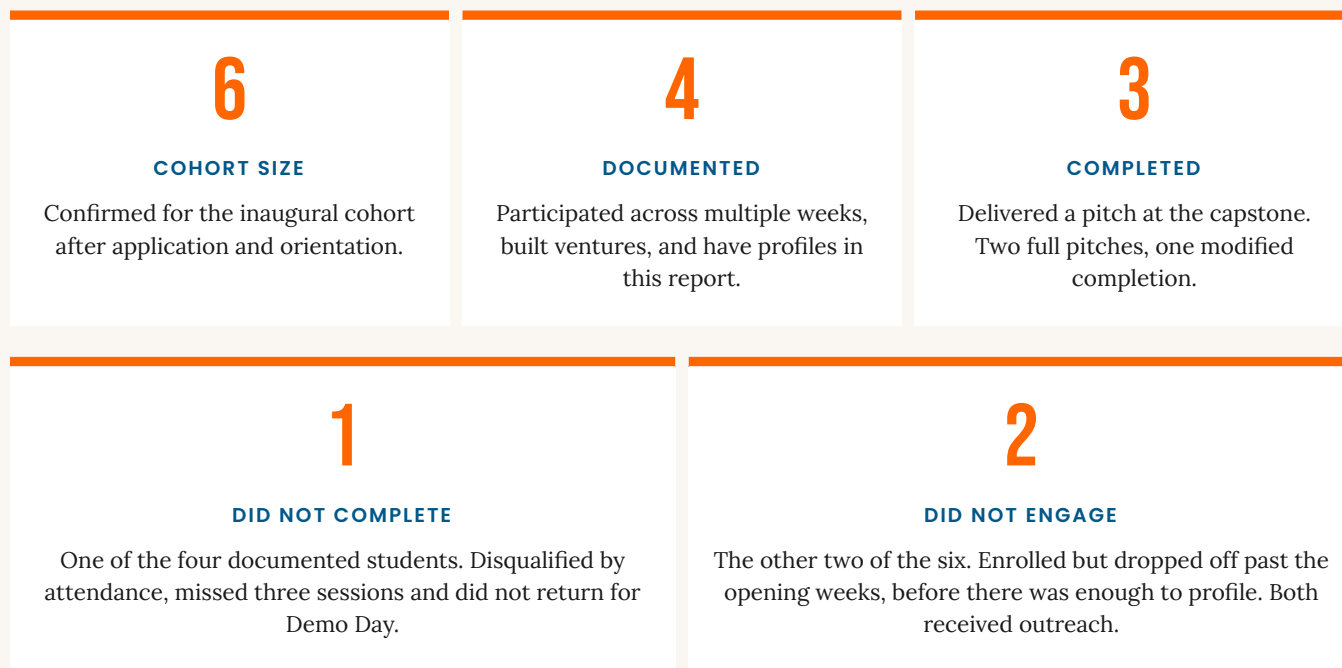
05

What Spring taught us.

*Six students enrolled. Four engaged meaningfully.
Three completed Demo Day. What that actually looked
like, and what we changed because of it.*

The honest funnel.

A six week virtual high school program. April 18 to May 23, 2026. Saturdays, 11:30 AM to 3:00 PM ET. Theme: Entrepreneurship in the Age of AI, The Human Advantage.



WHY WE REPORT THIS WAY

Read together, these five numbers are one funnel, not five separate counts. Six enrolled. Four left enough of a trace to document, and of those four, three completed and one did not. The other two of the six disengaged early enough that we could not build a profile of them at all. We do not round these numbers up. The four students who engaged meaningfully built real ventures, made measurable shifts in how they think, and produced documented work. Reporting honestly is how we earn the right to claim depth, and it is how we work out what Fall 2026 needs to fix.

What the cohort produced.

One founder pitched *NeuroGuard*, an AI safety net for stroke triage. Another pitched *Bridge AI*, a tax documentation tool that helps farms turn surplus produce into deductible donations. Each delivered a seven minute slot: three minutes of pitch, two of peer feedback, two of mentor panelist feedback. Both were grounded in working prototypes, complete business plan notes, and customer hypotheses they had actually tested.

A third founder built *Asian Student Awareness* across the prior weeks and pitched at Demo Day before leaving the program early for legitimate reasons. Her venture exists and her arc is documented. That modified completion path is one Fall 2026 will explicitly design for, through asynchronous pitch recording and makeup options.

From a lack-of-scope, data-less, un-researched idea with an ambiguous solution, to a professional-grade deck and pitch presentable to board members.

VOLUNTEER MENTOR · LAUNCHLAB SPRING 2026 · DEMO DAY OBSERVATION

Student profile 01 of 04.

NeuroGuard · An AI safety net for stroke triage

ONE-WORD ANCHOR	FORMS SUBMITTED	ROLE IN TEAM SIM	OUTCOME
Discernment	Weeks 1 to 5, complete	CEO, Week 4	Full Demo Day pitch

THE VENTURE

NeuroGuard is an AI assisted tool that flags when emergency stroke triage AI may be underweighting a patient's symptoms because of biased or unrepresentative training data, so a clinician can review the case before a time-sensitive decision is made. By Week 5 the founder had repositioned it as a second layer of safety rather than a replacement for clinical judgment, a framing she arrived at through user feedback during the MVP panel.

WHAT SHE DEMONSTRATED

- **Personal experience as method.** Drew on her own observations throughout, never treating the venture as an academic exercise.
- **Mentor feedback as input.** Took panel feedback seriously and visibly narrowed from broad AI bias to one clinical use case.
- **A documented shift.** Began with a profit-first framing of entrepreneurship. By Week 5 she was articulating human-centered design as the moat rather than the constraint.
- **Leadership under pressure.** Stepped into the CEO role during the team simulation and held it.

LaunchLab gave me the chance to turn an idea into something real.

ANONYMOUS FOUNDER · SPRING 2026 · WEEK 6 EXIT REFLECTION

Student profile 02 of 04.

Bridge AI · Tax documentation for surplus farm donations

ONE-WORD ANCHOR	FORMS SUBMITTED	ROLE IN TEAM SIM	OUTCOME
Pivot	Weeks 1 to 5, complete	CTO, Week 4	Full Demo Day pitch

THE VENTURE

Bridge AI moved through three distinct stages: a hardware environmental concept in Week 1, a machine learning platform for food waste reduction in Week 3, and finally a business to business tool that helps farms document surplus produce as tax deductible charitable donations. By Demo Day it had a working prototype and a real customer hypothesis. This founder was the only student present every single week.

WHAT THIS FOUNDER DEMONSTRATED

- **Iteration as identity.** Three pivots in five weeks, each grounded in new feedback or evidence rather than in indecision.
- **An early shift.** Their Week 1 reflection captured a move from a profit-first frame to a learning-first one, credited to guest speaker Conor Twomey.
- **Founder thinking, not user thinking.** Their closing reflection positioned them as the agent using AI rather than the other way round, a distinction many adult founders never make.
- **Consistent attendance.** The only student in the cohort present every week.

Student profile 03 of 04.

Asian Student Awareness · Reducing bullying through cross-cultural learning

ONE-WORD ANCHOR	FORMS SUBMITTED	DEMO DAY	OUTCOME
Purpose	Facilitator observation	Pitched, modified path	Modified completion

THE VENTURE

Asian Student Awareness was built directly out of the founder's own childhood experience of being bullied. The venture focused on reducing bullying through structured cross-cultural learning, with interventions designed to run in school settings where students from minority backgrounds are routinely targeted. By Demo Day she had carried it from a personal memory to a pitched concept.

WHY THIS PROFILE IS BUILT FROM OBSERVATION

This founder did not submit weekly live session forms. Her profile is drawn from facilitator observation across the weeks she was present and from the work she submitted directly. The signal she gave was strong enough that a full profile could be built from observation alone, which says something about how clearly she carried the venture.

WHAT SHE DEMONSTRATED

- **Personal experience as a starting point.** Built the venture out of the most honest source she had.
- **Mission-first framing.** By the end she was describing entrepreneurship as building an idea with purpose to help other people, which is close to a word for word statement of the LaunchLab thesis.
- **She came back to pitch.** Despite an early departure for legitimate reasons, she returned to deliver at Demo Day.

Student profile 04 of 04.

Food insecurity venture · Reducing shame as a barrier to access

ONE-WORD ANCHOR	FORMS SUBMITTED	ATTENDANCE	OUTCOME
Depth	Week 2 only	3 absences, disqualified	Did not complete

THE VENTURE

This student's venture centered on food insecurity, with a focus on lower income households and students who could not reliably afford good food. The distinguishing insight was identifying shame, rather than cost or logistics, as the deeper barrier keeping people from using food resources that already existed. It was the most sophisticated root cause framing in the cohort.

IMPORTANT NOTE ON DATA SOURCES

This student submitted one live session form, from Week 2. The profile is built from that form combined with facilitator observation across the weeks they were present. The depth of that single form was unusually high and the patterns in it are real. The student missed three sessions including Demo Day, which closed their engagement and disqualified them from completion.

WHAT THIS STUDENT DEMONSTRATED

- **Empathy as a working tool.** Approached the process through the people they wanted to serve rather than through the product.
- **Root cause thinking.** Identified shame as the barrier rather than the surface symptom of cost.
- **The non-completion case.** We do not erase students from the record because they did not finish. Including this profile honors what they contributed and gives Fall 2026 a clearer signal on how to support students whose engagement is uneven.

The Navigator: how every student starts, now.

One thing Spring taught us directly: we needed a common starting point before a student ever built anything, so we could tell what LaunchLab actually changed rather than guessing. That is the Bold Futures Navigator. We are beginning to use it as a common starting point across student experiences, and the Fall 2026 LaunchLab cohort is the first to use it as a structured baseline. It is not yet a mature longitudinal system, and Section 12 describes what would have to be built for it to become one.

The Navigator gives a student a starting map of themselves, and it gives us an honest baseline to measure against later. It is not a personality quiz and it does not hand a student a single answer. It reads back what a student's own answers reveal about their experiences, strengths, interests, the way they work, and the problems they are drawn to, and turns that into a first draft of their personal brand and several directions worth exploring, each with a plain reading of why it surfaced and what might not fit. Alongside it the student gets people worth talking to, questions to ask them, small experiments to run, and a ninety day plan that starts with one step this week.

We read it as a map, not a score. The Navigator does not settle anything about who a student is. It gives them language and a few honest guesses, and then the experiences that follow either back those guesses up, complicate them, or overturn them. A student who believes something different about themselves at the end of a program than they did at intake has not drifted off course. That is the design working, and it is something we now measure directly rather than treating as a side effect.

HOW TO READ A NAVIGATOR RESULT

The Navigator suggests problem areas a student might explore, drawn from the interests they describe. Those are prompts, not statements of what a student wants to solve, so we keep them between the student and their mentor and never report them as findings.

What changed for Fall, and what we are watching for.

Changes from Spring include asynchronous pitch recording, an explicit attendance policy reviewed at orientation, and a strengthened mid-program mentor touchpoint. Fall 2026 applicants completed the Navigator before the program began, which gives this cohort something Spring never had: the possibility of a real before-and-after on the same students, months apart, in their own words. The cohort is underway now, and we are watching for that.

50

EXPRESSED INTEREST

Through the LinkedIn posting, at no acquisition cost.

17

FULL APPLICATIONS

Completed the long-form application and the Navigator.

10

SEATS

The cohort is capped at ten so every student gets real attention.

Compared with the pilot, which enrolled six, that is close to three applications per seat. It is the clearest signal we have that demand is not the constraint.

WHAT WE WILL REPORT IN OCTOBER

Attendance and completion for the cohort of ten, the six entrepreneurial muscles re-rated at the end against the Navigator baseline each student already has on file, and exit reflections in their own words. Reported the same honest way the Spring funnel is, including any student who does not complete.

SECTION 06 · WHAT WE KEPT DOING BEFORE WE HAD A NAME FOR IT

06

The pattern we kept seeing.

Three workshops, two partners, two years, and one skill underneath all of them that we did not name out loud until the third one made it impossible to miss.

Three workshops, two partners, two years.

Our workshop practice started at UConn, with pitching workshops run in 2024 and again in November 2025, both of them working sessions where students sharpened a real business idea and made the case for it out loud. Hartford, in July 2026, was the third. What Hartford gave us was not a curriculum. It was a question about shape: whether an hour is the right unit at all, and whether readiness support needs to be more sustained than a single session. That question is what we are now exploring, and Section 07 describes where the thinking has got to.

WHEN	PARTNER	WORKSHOP
2024	UConn Werth Institute	Pitching and strengthening a business idea. Delivered before BFA was incorporated.
November 2025	UConn Werth Institute	Pitching, second consecutive year. Feedback survey fielded with all seven participants.
July 2026	Hartford Youth Scholars	Personal branding, co-facilitated with HYS. Reflection surveys from all eight scholars.

PIPELINE AND PARTNERSHIP VALUE FROM THE JULY SESSION

- **Recruitment.** One yes and four maybes for LaunchLab Fall 2026 out of a single hour, with no recruitment spend. Four of the five supplied student or guardian contact details. The fifth is reachable through HYS.
- **Relationship.** The session moved us from one-time guest toward a working relationship with HYS. They have indicated willingness to refer eligible students into our opportunities. That has not been formalized in an agreement.
- **Direction.** The session gave us the clearest evidence yet that readiness support may need to be sustained rather than delivered in a single hour. That is a design direction we are exploring, not a product we can sell.

SECTION 07 · WHAT THE PATTERN MAY BECOME

07

Readiness pathway exploration.

What our delivered workshops suggested, what we are now exploring, and what we have not yet built. BFA has not launched, delivered, sold, or validated a formal multi-session readiness program.

What we have delivered, and what we have not.

This section describes a direction, not an operating program. We want to be exact about the difference, because the difference matters to anyone reading this as a funder or a prospective partner.

STATUS	WHAT IT COVERS
DELIVERED	UConn workshops in 2024 and November 2025. The July 2026 Hartford Youth Scholars personal branding workshop. LaunchLab. The Summer 2026 internship. Mentorship and recurring student support.
OBSERVED	Across those experiences, the same readiness needs kept surfacing, and a single session repeatedly proved too short to meet them.
EXPLORING	Whether those lessons should become a sustained, multi-session readiness pathway, and what its architecture would be.
NOT YET TRUE	We have not launched a formal series, delivered one end to end, sold one, quoted a fee for one, or validated the architecture below through delivery.

SAID PLAINLY

Based on what we have observed across UConn, Hartford, mentorship, and other student experiences, we are exploring a multi-session readiness pathway organized around six recurring capability areas. That architecture is still under development and has not yet been validated through delivery as a complete series. Nothing in this section should be read as an available program.

The working architecture we are exploring.

Six recurring capability areas, drawn from what we kept seeing across delivered workshops and mentoring. This is a working design hypothesis. It has not been delivered as a complete series or validated.

CAPABILITY	THE QUESTION PARTICIPANTS ANSWER	WHAT THEY PRACTICE
01 · Know Yourself	How do I understand myself well enough to make better choices and work well with others?	Strengths, values, identity, working style, patterns, decision-making, and how they tend to show up with other people.
02 · Speak Up	How do I communicate clearly when something is at stake?	Communication, listening, self-advocacy, asking for help, giving and receiving feedback, difficult conversations, disagreement, boundaries, basic negotiation.
03 · How Teams Work	How do I contribute when success depends on other people too?	Teamwork, collaboration, leadership, trust, accountability, role clarity, group decision-making.
04 · Get It Done	How do I keep moving when the work is hard, unclear, boring, or changing?	Motivation, initiative, adaptability, resilience, ownership, priorities, follow-through, navigating ambiguity.
05 · Your Money, Your Choices	How do I make better money decisions as my responsibilities grow?	Tradeoffs, spending, saving, banking, a first paycheck, credit, taxes, benefits, longer-term planning.
06 · Navigate Opportunities	How do I recognize, evaluate, and act on an opportunity?	Recognizing an opportunity, evaluating fit, comparing tradeoffs, identifying missing information, asking good questions, taking a next step.

The internal sequence runs self, to people, to work, to money, to opportunity. A partner can weight a series toward the capabilities their young people need most, and the scenarios are always drawn from the situations those participants are actually navigating. What a partner cannot do is order a single session off a list, because one session opens a door and does not finish the job.

How a series would run, if we build it.

PROPOSED DESIGN Each series would unfold across multiple sessions of sixty to ninety minutes, built around a coherent developmental arc rather than a set of unrelated topics. Sessions are experiential. Participants work through simulations, scenarios, role-play, case studies, team challenges, and live practice, get feedback, and try the thing again. We do not just teach a subject. We put students inside it.

ADAPTED TO AGE AND CONTEXT

The capability stays stable and the developmental context changes. Speak Up for a middle schooler is asking a teacher for help, a conflict with a friend, a disagreement in a group project, and holding a boundary. For a high schooler it is accountability on a team, a schedule conflict at work, receiving criticism, and advocating for an opportunity. For a college student or emerging adult it is a conversation with a manager, unclear performance feedback, negotiating expectations, and navigating a power difference. Each series is adapted to the age, setting, and real situations participants are navigating.

THE STRONGEST USE CASE: YOUTH INTERNSHIP PROGRAMS

An employer, nonprofit, municipality, or university already running a high school or college internship program owns the meaningful work, the projects, the supervision, the managers, and the industry learning. We own the professional development layer around it: self-awareness, professional communication, feedback, self-advocacy, teamwork, initiative, adaptability, workplace judgment, financial readiness, and structured reflection. Your team provides the work experience. BFA builds the readiness around it.

In that setting the internship itself becomes part of the curriculum. Early on, interns predict how they will work, communicate, and respond to challenge. Midway they use real feedback and learn what they are like as teammates. During paid weeks they decide what to do with money they are actually earning. At the end they name what the experience taught them, what became more or less attractive, what evidence they now have about themselves, and what to explore next. We complement the employer, the supervisor, and HR. We do not replace any of them.

WHAT WE LEARNED THE HARD WAY

One session is probably not enough. Our own delivery history is the evidence: single hours produce real movement in the room and then stop, and the partners who wanted a series were the ones whose students kept going. The catalogue of individually bookable sessions we published earlier this year has been retired for that reason.

What happened at CCSU.

Day 3 of the Hartford Youth Scholars College Bootcamp · July 15, 2026 · Central Connecticut State University · Co-facilitated with HYS program lead Natiel Cooper.

We co-facilitated the hour with HYS, using our own personal branding material: an Experience Inventory, an Accomplishment Statement builder, and a Mini Pitch with a live feedback loop. It was a single session, delivered a month before the Readiness Workshop Series had a name, and what it covers is now the Know Yourself capability inside the Series. Eight in-person scholars completed reflection surveys. Seven were rising seniors and one a rising junior, drawn from eight different Connecticut schools, a mix of competitive independent schools and Hartford area public and magnet schools.

WHAT WE CAME TO DO, AND WHETHER WE DID IT

The goal for the hour was narrow and we set it in advance: every scholar should be able to name their own value out loud, in specific words, and pitch it. Three of the eight went further and delivered their pitch in front of the whole room, in a session where nobody was required to. At the start of the hour, not one of those three could articulate what they were good at when we asked them directly. Hartford Youth Scholars staff told us afterwards that they had not seen their scholars engage in a workshop like that before.

3.5→4.1

CONFIDENCE DESCRIBING
THEMSELVES

Average self-reported, before and after, out of five.

4 OF 8

REPORTED A CONFIDENCE
INCREASE

Two more were already at five and could not rise.

4.1/5

LIKELIHOOD TO RECOMMEND

Five of eight rated four or five. One rated two.

5 OF 8

INTERESTED IN LAUNCHLAB

One yes and four maybes, out of one hour of programming.

4 OF 8

WANT TO BUILD SOMETHING

Rated themselves four or five on starting a business, project, or movement.

8

SCHOOLS REPRESENTED

Eight scholars, eight different schools, one shared gap.

What the numbers actually say.

The headline average hides the more useful finding. Read the movement scholar by scholar and the hour explains itself.

MOST USEFUL PART OF THE SESSION	SCHOLARS	CONFIDENCE MOVEMENT
Mini Pitch and feedback	3	All three gained. Movements of +2, +1, and +1.
Experience Inventory	2	One gained by 1. One flat, and she wrote that her table did not talk.
Accomplishment Statement	1	Flat at five. Already at the ceiling before the session began.
Presentation and examples	1	Flat at five. Also at the ceiling.
No selection made	1	Flat at three. Named nothing as most useful.

THE SIGNAL

Every scholar who named the Mini Pitch as most useful gained confidence. Of the six scholars who had room to move at all, four moved, an average of 3.0 to 3.8. The two who started at five could not rise. The two who stayed flat with room to grow are the same two who reported that nobody at their table engaged. Confidence movement tracked table engagement rather than exposure to the curriculum. That is a finding about room design, not about whether the hour worked. Among the six scholars who had room to move, the session produced measurable directional movement for those who engaged with the Mini Pitch. What we learned is how to make sure the two quiet tables get the same hour the loud ones did.

What this changes for the next collaboration.

01

Add a co-facilitator

With a single facilitator, small group scaffolding was thin. Two scholars asked for individual attention in writing. Trained peer leads are the cheaper alternative.

02

Structure the turn-taking

A silent table is a design failure, not a student failure. Build named turns into the Mini Pitch sprint so no scholar can be skipped.

03

Lead with the Mini Pitch

It produced every confidence gain in the room. In a sixty minute session it should be the anchor, not the closer.

04

One session may not be enough

An hour opened the door and did not finish the job. This is the observation that started us asking whether readiness support should be sustained rather than one-off.

THE DESIGN CHANGE THAT CAME OUT OF THIS

The fourth item is the one that changed how we think. A single hour can move a room and still leave the work unfinished, and the capabilities involved are not learnable in one sitting. That observation is what led us to start asking whether readiness support should be sustained across several sessions rather than delivered once. We have not answered that question by delivering a full series. We are exploring it, and Section 07 sets out where that exploration currently stands.

What they want solved.

Every scholar was asked to name one problem in their school, community, or daily life that they wish someone would solve. Their answers are the mission-fit evidence.

Three of eight named some form of representation or equity: the absence of people of color at their school, the absence of diversity among teachers, and equality stated plainly as a one word answer. Others named pollution and litter in their streets, aging facilities, and campus access. Five of eight identified themselves as the kind of person who likes understanding people and their problems, which is the empathy-first disposition the human advantage thesis is built on.

My experiences can be small, they don't have to be big.

12TH GRADER · HARTFORD YOUTH SCHOLARS WORKSHOP

Always say what makes you different.

12TH GRADER · HARTFORD YOUTH SCHOLARS WORKSHOP

THE ANSWER WE ARE NOT EDITING OUT

One scholar wrote that the problem she wants solved is her own school. That it does not try to help students with the future, that it would be nice if it showed even a little that it cared, and that it is annoying to have to figure everything out by yourself. She rated her confidence three before and three after, and marked not right now for LaunchLab. She is the student this organization exists for, and one hour did not reach her. That is the most useful sentence in the dataset.

SECTION 08 · THE REALIZATION UNDERNEATH ALL OF IT

08

Readiness for any life path.

Running LaunchLab and the Series side by side taught us something neither one told us on its own: the gap was never really about entrepreneurship.

What LaunchLab and the Series told us, once we looked at them together.

Taken separately, LaunchLab answers a gap in entrepreneurship education, and the Series answers a gap in human capabilities. Taken together, across four years of mentorship, two program lines, and three workshops, they were telling us the same thing from two directions: young people are not being made ready, and the missing readiness was never specific to starting a business.

The UConn students who wished LaunchLab had reached them earlier were not all telling us they wished they had started companies sooner. Several told us plainly they wanted mentorship, confidence, and someone to tell them their ideas were worth pursuing, none of which is unique to entrepreneurship. The Hartford scholars who could not name what they were good at were not missing a business idea. They were missing the more basic thing LaunchLab and the Series both turned out to be teaching underneath their different subject matter: how to understand yourself, practice a capability that matters regardless of the path, and walk into a room able to make the case for what you bring.

That is the widening. We did not set out to become a broader organization than an entrepreneurship nonprofit. We noticed, across everything we had already built, that the readiness gap we kept finding was general, not specific to one path, and we changed what we were building because of what we noticed.

WHAT THIS WIDENING PRODUCED

Two things, directly. Our summer internship, because college students need to practice ownership of real work regardless of whether they ever start a company. And our move toward corporate-sponsored work, because the same readiness gap shows up again the moment a student is handed a real employer's problem. Both are covered next.

SECTION 09 · THE WIDENING, APPLIED TO COLLEGE

09

The summer internship.

If the readiness gap is general, college students need to practice ownership of real work, not only mentorship toward it. This is us building that.

Real ownership, not another mentorship conversation.

Ignite gives a college student mentorship toward the workforce. The internship is where they actually enter it, inside our own organization first. Eight young adults interned with us over the summer, across operations, communications, partnerships, and program development, and their work was not filing. They took the spring cohort's feedback and turned it into specific changes to the program. When it was over we asked them to reflect, and five of the eight answered. Five of eight is a small and self-selected group, so we treat what follows as an early read and not a verdict, and we report it at its real size.

4.8/5

OVERALL EXPERIENCE

Averaged across the five who answered. Four rated it five, one rated it four.

4.8/5

FELT SUPPORTED

Support from mentors and from the executive director, averaged across the five.

9.6/10

WOULD RECOMMEND

Likelihood to recommend a BFA internship to a friend.

4.2/5

CLEARER SENSE OF THEIR PATH

How much the internship clarified the future they want. Real spread underneath the average.

4.2/5

MORE ABLE TO BUILD OR LEAD

How much more capable they felt of building or leading something of their own.

5 OF 8

RESPONDED

The base for every figure on this page. We do not imply five speak for all eight.

WHAT MATTERS MORE THAN THE RATINGS

It is what they said they can now do that they could not before, because it came from real work rather than a lecture. One is much better at working without solid instructions, which she had struggled with. One built live automations that now run our intake across three different tools. One learned to shape curriculum for an audience and to use AI to make her work clearer and more accessible. One got sharply better at running interviews and pulling the real insight out of them. These are capabilities shown through ownership, which is the whole point of the way we run the program.

WHAT THEY SAID WOULD MAKE IT STRONGER

They were honest about it, and their answers pointed one direction. Not more teaching, but more structure around the work: knowing their role sooner, clearer communication when a project pivots, more chances to connect across pods so the work feels less siloed, and a steadier coaching rhythm. We are building all four into the fall.

WHAT THEY ASKED FOR	WHAT WE ARE DOING ABOUT IT
Clearer role framing early	A short written brief for every intern role, so nobody has to guess what their work is for.
Better communication during a pivot	A simple pivot protocol, so when a project changes direction the reason and the new scope are stated plainly.
More cross-pod connection	Built-in time to meet across pods, so the work does not feel siloed.
A steadier coaching cadence	A regular one to one check in for each intern, which is the thing more than one of them named by name.

I loved learning how to cater curriculum towards an audience in an innovative way.

ANONYMOUS SUMMER INTERN · 2026 · SHARED WITH PERMISSION

Quotations on this page are shared under each intern's documented permission. Interns who asked to remain anonymous, or whose responses were kept internal, are represented here only in the aggregate figures.

SECTION 10 · THE WIDENING, APPLIED AT SCALE

10

Toward corporate readiness.

The same gap shows up again the moment a student is handed a real employer's problem. Our 2027 plan is to test that with one real partner, not several at once.

Why one partner, and why real problems.

We are not trying to line up several corporate partners at once for 2027. We are trying to find one who can help us build the actual architecture: a real business problem, drawn from that partner's own work, that a small group of college students take on directly.

The point is not exposure to a company. It is practice at the thing a job actually asks for before anyone is being paid to do it. A student who has spent real hours on a real client's real problem, with real constraints and a real deadline, has built something LaunchLab and the Series cannot fully simulate on their own: the capacity to solve a corporate problem, not just the readiness to be handed one. That is the rhythm we are trying to get students into, practicing the actual work before they are hired to do it, rather than only being told what the work will be like.

Launching with one partner, done well, has to work for three parties at once: the partner gets a real deliverable and a look at emerging talent, we get a credible model to show the next partner, and students get evidence they can point to that is not a certificate but an actual client outcome. We would rather get that right once than announce three partnerships that are shallow.

WHERE THIS STANDS TODAY

No partner is secured yet. This is a 2027 goal, not a current program, and it goes to the board as an open decision rather than a settled plan. The exact format, whether that is a sponsored cohort or a bounded challenge, depends on what a real partner is actually ready for, and we are deliberately not locking that in before one exists.

What we learned by listening in 2026.

Our college interns interviewed a small group of college students, most of them from our UConn pipeline, about what would make a real six week experience worth their time. A few of the people interviewed were also our own interns, so this is a small and connected group, and we read it as direction rather than proof. Even so, the same needs kept coming up.

WHAT COLLEGE STUDENTS TOLD US THEY WANT

- **A mentor who genuinely shows up, and stays.** This was the strongest and most consistent thing they said. The failure they named most was the mentor who is warm at the start and gone by the end.
- **Real work, with something real to show for it.** A business plan, a prototype, product samples, or something they can talk about in an interview. For a few, the proof was less an object than a clearer sense of direction and the skills they walked away with.
- **Honest critique and a light hand on accountability.** They wanted to be told plainly what to fix, and checked on with a quick message rather than another meeting.
- **The return named up front.** Whether that is pay, a real relationship, or a credible next step, they were clear that an unpaid, low-value six weeks loses to an ordinary job.
- **Room to explore, or room to go deep.** Some wanted to go deeper on an interest they already had. Others needed repeated chances to find one. The same program has to serve both.

I wish someone built a bridge of connections for me. Connections is super important when it comes to finding a job, and I hate admitting it, but it is.

COLLEGE STUDENT · 2026 EMPATHY INTERVIEW

WHY THIS IS IN THE REPORT AT ALL

None of this is a 2026 result, and we have kept it out of our impact numbers. It is here because it is the reason our 2027 plan looks the way it does. When you read Section 13 and see a college experience built around real work with real people and a real next step, this is the listening that shaped it. It is also the reason the Readiness Workshop Series is aimed squarely at organizations already running internship programs, where the work already exists and only the readiness layer is missing. What these interviews are is directional. A small, connected group told us something consistent, and we are treating it as a reason to test something rather than as a finding.

SECTION 11 · IN THEIR WORDS

11

Every voice.

Every quote we have, from college mentees, LaunchLab founders, Hartford scholars, and the mentors who watched them work. Gathered in one place.

Every voice, in one place.

Everything students, alumni, interns, and mentors have said about this work, gathered from four years and five different settings. Shared with permission, with names withheld. Nothing has been invented.

IGNITE AND COLLEGE MENTORSHIP · UCONN WERTH INSTITUTE

She helped me embrace my own entrepreneurial ideas, sparking newfound confidence. Her encouragement empowered me to overcome my hesitations and pursue new ventures.

ANONYMOUS MENTEE · IGNITE · UCONN WERTH INSTITUTE

Working with Ruth honestly felt so natural. I loved how our values aligned and how easy it was to brainstorm with her. I always left our chats feeling inspired and encouraged.

ANONYMOUS MENTEE · IGNITE · UCONN WERTH INSTITUTE

From our very first meeting, she was intentional, kind, and genuinely cared about helping me grow. She supported me through every stage of my project, starting with ideation.

ANONYMOUS MENTEE · IGNITE · UCONN WERTH INSTITUTE

Her guidance set me on the right path for my final two years of undergraduate studies and played a key role in helping me secure internships and build meaningful relationships.

ANONYMOUS MENTEE · IGNITE · UCONN WERTH INSTITUTE

LAUNCHLAB, WORKSHOPS, AND THE INTERNS

LaunchLab · Spring 2026 cohort

Before LaunchLab, I thought entrepreneurship was strictly building a business. Now I think entrepreneurship is building an idea with purpose to help other people.

ANONYMOUS FOUNDER · LAUNCHLAB SPRING 2026

It gives students real hands-on experience building a venture, not just learning about entrepreneurship in a classroom. You meet amazing people, gain confidence, and leave with skills you can use in any future career.

ANONYMOUS FOUNDER · LAUNCHLAB SPRING 2026

The UConn workshop · November 2025

I wish I had encouragement. Most adults look at me like I'm crazy and it would have been nice to have more support.

WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT · ON WHAT HE NEEDED IN HIGH SCHOOL

Mentorship. Most important thing.

WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT · ON THE SUPPORT HE WISHED HE HAD EARLIER

Hartford Youth Scholars workshop · July 2026

My experiences can be small, they don't have to be big.

12TH GRADER · HARTFORD YOUTH SCHOLARS WORKSHOP

The summer internship, 2026.

Four of the five interns who completed the reflection survey gave us permission to share their words. The fifth asked that their responses stay internal, and they do.

This summer was impactful, a bit challenging, and incredibly rewarding. I loved meeting so many new people with such diverse and interesting stories and skill sets.

ANONYMOUS SUMMER INTERN · 2026 · SHARED WITH PERMISSION

This summer was such a rewarding learning experience. Not only did I learn from my team and my role, but I was also able to learn from Ruth.

ANONYMOUS SUMMER INTERN · 2026 · SHARED WITH PERMISSION

I am much better at being able to work without solid instructions, as I struggled with this in the past.

ANONYMOUS SUMMER INTERN · 2026 · SHARED WITH PERMISSION

This summer helped shape how I will work on education policy and curriculum in the future.

ANONYMOUS SUMMER INTERN · 2026 · SHARED WITH PERMISSION

Every quote in this section is shared under the speaker's documented permission. Names are withheld throughout, including where a student gave us permission to use theirs, so that the section reads consistently and no student is identified by comparison with another.

What happens after.

The honest limit of this report is that we are too young to show ten year outcomes. What we can show is what has already happened to students who came through the mentorship line first, because some of them have kept going.

FROM MENTEE, TO COLLEAGUE, TO THEIR OWN VENTURES

Two of the college students first met through the UConn mentorship pipeline went on to intern with Bold Futures Academy this summer. One of them has asked to come back as a co-facilitator for the Fall 2026 LaunchLab cohort, which means a student who was being mentored two years ago will be standing at the front of the room teaching high schoolers this September. Both of them are building. One launched her own podcast, out of the venture work she and our founder had been doing together, and has since invited her on as a guest. The other started her own YouTube channel, then built a wellness platform and published a wellness journal aimed at helping people track and improve their mental health. It is a real product, on sale, and our founder is a customer.

THIS IS THE PATHWAY WORKING, IN MINIATURE

One student, mentored two years ago, is about to teach the next cohort. That is the exact arc this organization is built to produce, from mentee to capable adult to someone who turns around and builds for the people behind them. It is two people, named here in outline rather than as a statistic, because two is what we honestly have. In two years this should be a table. Right now it is a promising start, and we are going to describe it as one.

11 RATINGS RECEIVED Submitted through UConn's platform between October 2024 and November 2025.	5/5 EVERY ONE OF THEM No rating below five has ever been given.	4 MENTEES RATING Four distinct students, one of whom rated the mentorship seven separate times.
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SECTION 12 · HOW WE MEASURE

12

How we measure whether this works.

Eight things a young person should be able to show, what we can evidence today, and the system we are building so that in ten years we will actually know.

Level one: what we can measure now.

We report against eight things a young person should be able to show. Some we can already evidence. Some we cannot yet. We kept these eight rather than swapping in a new framework, so next year's report can be compared against this one. What changed is that each is now tied to a source of evidence, and Direction now includes what a student revises, not only what they grow more confident about.

WHAT WE MEASURE	WHAT IT MEANS, AND WHERE THE EVIDENCE COMES FROM	2026 EVIDENCE
Direction	A clearer sense of strengths, interests, and next steps, and whether a student revises what they believed after new experience.	MULTIPLE EVIDENCE SOURCES
Agency	Confidence, initiative, and ownership, ideally calibrated: knowing what you can do and what you still do not.	MULTIPLE EVIDENCE SOURCES
Adaptability	How they handle a pivot or a setback, across a program.	MULTIPLE EVIDENCE SOURCES
Collaboration	How they work with and learn from other people, in team simulations and live work.	MULTIPLE EVIDENCE SOURCES
Capability	Communication, teamwork, initiative, judgment, and self-advocacy shown through actual work rather than self-report alone.	MULTIPLE EVIDENCE SOURCES
Evidence	The artifacts they can point to, and whether they can explain their own contribution.	MULTIPLE EVIDENCE SOURCES
Relationships	The mentors and professional connections they build, and whether those relationships persist past the program.	EVIDENCE REMAINS LIMITED
Opportunity	Referrals, interviews, paid work, internships, education milestones, continued leadership.	EVIDENCE REMAINS LIMITED

WHAT IS THIN, SAID PLAINLY

Relationships and opportunity are the two we cannot yet show at any scale. What we have is two mentees who became interns and are now building their own ventures, one of them returning to teach this fall. Two people is what we honestly have, so we are calling it a promising start. In two years this should be a table.

THE SUMMER INTERNSHIP IS NOW A TRACKED INITIATIVE, NOT A ONE-TIME EVENT

We ran our first summer internship in 2026 and intend to run it every year from here. Starting in 2027 it gets the same treatment as our other program lines: a Navigator or entry baseline, exit reflections, and a follow-up check months later, so we can eventually show what a summer of real ownership actually changes for a college student rather than only how the summer felt to them.

Level two: what we intend to learn over time.

BFA is too young to claim ten-year outcomes. It is not too young to build the system that will eventually let us know.

Attendance is not the question. Neither is satisfaction. Over the next decade we want to answer harder ones: how a student's understanding of themselves changes, and what they revise once experience contradicts it. Whether the capabilities they practice with us show up somewhere we are not in the room. Whether their experiences become more consequential over time. Whether the relationships last, and whether they open actual doors. Whether students move into paid work, internships, jobs, further education, or ventures of their own. And eventually, whether the people who came through turn around and mentor, teach, refer, hire, fund, or create opportunities for the ones behind them. Answering any of that requires infrastructure we do not have yet, so we are building it in the order below rather than promising it at once.

PHASE	WHAT WE WILL BE ABLE TO SEE
2027	A durable student ID, a Navigator baseline, common constructs across programs, evidence collected inside programs rather than bolted on, exit conversations, follow-up at three, six, and twelve months, a purposeful interview sample, a multi-year case cohort, and data and AI governance.
2028	Comparison across cohorts and across partners. Whether relationships persist. Whether stated intentions turn into action. Sharper instruments, because the first year's will not be right.
2029	Integrated alumni tracking and an Experience and Evidence Ladder, with a student's decisions, relationships, opportunities, and artifacts linked over time rather than sitting in separate files.
2030 to 2031	Sector-level learning, and evaluation of economic access: whether paid opportunity changes who participates, who persists, and who accepts what comes next.
2032 to 2033	A formal research and evaluation function, shared data standards with partners, longitudinal functions inside an opportunity exchange, and a first published Future Readiness Outlook.
2034 to 2036	Replication evaluation, cross-region quality assurance, multi-region longitudinal case cohorts, and mature research and standards infrastructure.

Each phase is gated. We move to the next one when delivery quality, student evidence, partner repeat intent, and staff capacity say we can, not because the calendar advanced. The gates are in the 2027 to 2036 Strategic Plan.

How the eight outcome areas meet the six phases.

Our strategic plan organizes a student's development into six phases. This report measures eight outcome areas. They are not competing frameworks and we are keeping both, so that next year's report can still be compared against this one.

The six phases describe where a student is in their journey. The eight outcome areas describe what we might observe changing along the way. Evidence sources describe how we would know.

OUTCOME AREA	PHASES WHERE IT USUALLY SHOWS	WHERE THE EVIDENCE COMES FROM
Direction	1, 2, and 4	Student self-report, Navigator baseline, mentor observation
Agency	1, 3, and 5	Student self-report and BFA observation
Adaptability	3 and 5	BFA observation and artifact revision history
Collaboration	3 and 5	BFA observation, team simulation, supervisor feedback
Capability	2, 3, and 5	Work products, observed performance, partner or supervisor feedback
Evidence	3, 4, and 5	Artifacts and work products the student can explain
Relationships	2, 5, and 6	Relationship and referral records. Currently thin
Opportunity	4, 5, and 6	Referral completion, externally verified or administrative outcomes. Currently thin

HOW TO READ OUR EVIDENCE LABELS

We have tightened these on purpose. Multiple evidence sources means more than one kind of evidence points the same way. Early evidence available means something real but preliminary. Self-reported evidence only means exactly that. Evidence remains limited, and not yet measured longitudinally, mean we cannot yet make the claim. A small number of participants reporting improvement is not enough on its own to call something well evidenced.

What the longitudinal layer would add, and what it must protect.

PROPOSED FOR THE PROOF PHASE

None of what follows is operating today. It is what our strategic plan proposes to test, and it is described here because it directly changes how we would measure the eight areas above.

FIVE RECURRING NAVIGATOR MOMENTS

The current Navigator is our starting map and it is available now. The proposed phasal Navigator is an extension to be tested, not an existing capability. It would support five recurring moments: entry or re-entry, before an intervention or referral, after an important experience, at a major decision or transition, and during the annual journey review.

MY BFA YEAR

A proposed annual student-facing record, maintained manually at first. It would let a student review, correct, keep, and use a yearly summary of the phases they visited, significant experiences, what they learned and what they reconsidered, artifacts created, capabilities practiced, feedback received, relationships that mattered, decisions made or revised, opportunities pursued, barriers encountered, evidence they can reuse, recommended next steps, and their own reflection. It is meant to be a living developmental journal, not an institutional report card.

STUDENTS SHOULD GET VALUE FROM SHARING INFORMATION WITH US

A student's information should not exist mainly to satisfy funders or to evaluate other organizations. If the annual record is not genuinely useful to the young person who receives it, the arrangement is extraction and it will fail on its own terms.

THE PROTECTIONS THAT HAVE TO COME WITH IT

Informed and voluntary participation, with service participation and research consent kept separate. Guardian involvement where required. Student access, correction, portability, defined sharing permissions, and withdrawal. Data minimization, retention and deletion rules, de-identification where appropriate, and human review of any recommendation. Student-held does not mean a student legally owns our systems. We remain the legal custodian and are accountable for handling the record properly.

Red lines, and what the pilot must learn.

RED LINES

- No sale of participant data. No named student-level funder dashboards.
- No permanent readiness or risk score. No automated denial of an opportunity or service.
- No punitive partner rankings.
- No use of participant data to train external AI systems without explicit authorization.
- No assumption that program participation equals research consent.
- No causal claims the research design does not support.

WHAT THE PILOT MUST LEARN

Whether we can maintain student contact over time, provide a record students genuinely value, run recurring check-ins without excessive burden, preserve meaningful qualitative and quantitative evidence, document how experiences inform later decisions, help students turn experiences into stronger next steps, tell self-report apart from verified evidence, produce useful aggregated partner learning, protect participant trust, operate without unsustainable founder dependence, and recognize when we should refer rather than deliver something ourselves.

SUCCESS IS NOT THE AMOUNT OF DATA COLLECTED

It is whether a student can point to something in the record and say it helped them decide something. If we gather a great deal of information and no student uses any of it, the pilot has failed even if the dataset looks impressive.

SECTION 13 · MONEY

13

Where the money comes from.

The approved FY2026 operating budget, what it is spent on, what is not secured yet, and who has been carrying the costs so far.

The FY2026 operating budget.

Approved by the board for the current year. It is a small budget and a deliberately flat one, and we would rather show it than describe it.

PROJECTED REVENUE

SOURCE	FY2026
Individual donations	\$18,000
Grants and foundations	\$25,000
Corporate sponsorships	\$10,000
Gifts in kind	\$10,000
Total	\$63,000

WHERE IT GOES

ALLOCATION	FY2026	SHARE
Program	\$32,660	51.7%
General and administrative	\$17,714	28.1%
Marketing and fundraising	\$11,760	18.6%
Total expenses	\$63,134	100%

The largest single line is the founder and executive director stipend at \$18,000, most of which is allocated to program delivery. After that come facilitator stipends, program space, student workbooks and materials, food for in-person sessions, liability insurance, compliance filings, and the software the organization runs on. A \$1,000 contingency reserve sits at the bottom.

TWO THINGS TO READ CAREFULLY

The budget balances to within \$134, which means there is no cushion. And \$25,000 of the \$63,000 is grants and foundations, which is projected rather than secured. A reader should treat that line as the gap we are working to close this year, not as income already in hand.

How this actually gets funded.

Three things, and only one of them is cash.

Donated professional work

This is the largest and least visible line, and it is the reason a budget this small has produced this much. One board member handles all of our accounting and bookkeeping pro bono through her own firm. Our board chair covered the incorporation and startup filings out of pocket. Board members sit on the admissions committee, serve as program managers, come in as guest speakers, mentor students, and carry outreach and partnership development. Volunteer designers make our flyers. Eight interns spent the summer rebuilding operations, program delivery, and our college partnerships. None of that is on an invoice. All of it is real.

Giving, which is early but moving

Our Givebutter campaign has raised over \$1,000, and across our wider network we have raised over \$1,500 since it launched. The goal for the year is \$12,000, and the board is running a give or get effort to reach it. Eight of our eleven board members have given personally. That is a small dollar figure and we are not going to dress it up, but the participation rate is the number a funder should look at, because it says the people closest to this organization are backing it with their own money.

The founder

The rest has come from our founder. Our books record roughly \$18,700 of spending since 2024, of which over \$10,300 is money she put in personally, carried as a loan to the organization. It covers the website, the design work, the software, program printing, recruitment advertising, insurance, and a virtual assistant from September 2025 through April 2026.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR A FUNDER

A gift here does not top up an endowment. It replaces money currently coming out of one person's pocket, and it buys the second facilitator, the printed workbooks, and the program space that let us serve more than ten students at a time. It also solves a problem that goodwill cannot. Volunteers rotate, and every time one moves on, the institutional knowledge leaves with them. What we are raising for is the ability to hold a small team in place long enough to stop starting over.

SECTION 14 · THE TEAM

14

Who runs this.

A working board with four standing committees, a facilitation team that has grown with every cohort, and an intern program that carries real deliverables.

The board and the team.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Eleven directors and advisors covering education, finance, law, marketing, community development, and entrepreneurship. Donald Dea chairs the board. Arlene Powers serves as secretary and Jessica Haberer, who works in nonprofit finance, serves as treasurer. Mohammad Sarhan advises on curriculum, Raj Shankaran on corporate partnerships, Kevin Lederer on venture and strategy, Sade Reese on marketing, and Brianna Thomas on fundraising. Ruth Gay serves as board president and executive director.

COMMUNITY ADVOCACY, SPLIT TWO WAYS

Two directors carry community advocacy, and they work different segments of it. Mercy Yalartai builds relationships with other nonprofits and looks for places where organizations doing similar work can do it together instead of separately. Christopher Hendricks builds relationships with partners and with foundations, and contributes directly to our grant work. Both also carry school outreach and school partnerships, which is how most of our students find us. Neither of those roles is advisory. They are the outreach function of a small organization, being done by directors rather than by staff we cannot yet afford.

FOUR STANDING COMMITTEES

COMMITTEE	REMIT
Executive	Governance, leadership direction, and organizational strategy.
Development	Fundraising, grants, donor engagement, and financial sustainability.
Marketing and outreach	Brand, partnerships, and recruitment.
Program	Curriculum quality, student experience, and program evaluation.

Who delivers the programs.

The Spring 2026 pilot was co-facilitated, and our program manager helped design that first curriculum. For Fall 2026 the facilitation team has grown, with co-facilitators each leading their own segment of a Saturday session, supported by volunteer mentors and Demo Day panelists drawn from working founders and professionals. Marketing and design are handled in house.

THE INTERN PROGRAM

Eight interns worked across operations, communications, partnerships, and program development in summer 2026. Their work was not fling. They took the feedback from the Spring cohort and turned it into specific, measurable changes to the program, and they rebuilt the curriculum materials around what the data actually said. Several of the design changes described earlier in this report came out of that work, and Section 09 reports what the interns themselves got out of it.

WHY THIS SECTION IS HERE

A young organization built around one founder is a real risk, and funders are right to ask about it. Our answer is that the delivery team, the board committees, and the intern pipeline have all grown faster than the student count has, which is the order we wanted them to grow in.

SECTION 15 · WHERE THIS GOES

15

Where this goes.

What we tested our own thinking against, what 2027 is actually for, and the organization we are trying to become.

Our theory of change, refined against early evidence and external research.

This year we finalized a theory of change, and we did not just write one down. We tested what we believed against our own program data and against qualitative research published elsewhere, to find out whether the story we were telling ourselves actually held up.

The available evidence was consistent with an iterative developmental model and gave us sufficient reason to test the six-stage pathway more deliberately. It did not prove that the pathway causes stronger long-term outcomes, and we are careful not to say that it did. The six stages are understand self, explore and prepare, build and solve, discern and position, work and deepen, and lead and give back. They are the same six the board's 2027 to 2036 Strategic Plan describes. The pathway is iterative rather than a pipeline. Students may enter at different phases, revisit phases, or move between them as their circumstances change, and the four-part public message on our website, understand yourself, build readiness, explore what is possible, and turn experience into opportunity, is the simple public articulation of the same thing rather than a competing theory.

Our goal for the next few years is to keep testing that theory, on purpose, against both our own data and what the wider field publishes, rather than assuming we got it right once and moving on.

WHAT THIS MEANS IN PRACTICE

Every program line in this report exists because something we tested told us to build it. That is not an accident of narrative. It is the actual discipline, and we intend to keep it.

2027: our proof year, and what proof actually means here.

The Strategic Plan calls 2027 the proof year, and we want to be precise about what that does and does not mean. It does not mean one student walking an entire pipeline start to finish, and it is not a contradiction of the fact that we are not building anything new. Proof means establishing credible evidence that the mechanisms already in place, delivery quality, partnerships, student learning, the operating model, and the connections between our lines, work well enough to repeat. Launching what we already have, deliberately and without adding to it, is how we get that evidence rather than something we are doing instead of getting it.

To be precise about what that does and does not mean: we do not plan to add another major stand-alone direct-service program line during the proof phase. LaunchLab, college mentorship, and the internship are our established lines going into 2027. The readiness pathway is an exploration rather than a launched program, and a corporate partnership is a prospect rather than a commitment. What we do plan to add is a bounded longitudinal operating layer around them, described later in this section. It is not custom software and it is not a completed database.

WHAT WE ARE ACTUALLY TRYING TO LEARN

Over the next decade, two questions matter more than any program: what actually contributes to a young person's unreadiness, and what shapes the decisions that carry them down one path instead of another. Answering those honestly, rather than assuming we already know, is the research agenda underneath everything else in this report.

Readiness in an AI-shaped era.

As AI makes information, content production, and cognitive assistance more widely available, polished output alone becomes weaker evidence of learning and capability. A strong-looking essay or deck no longer tells you much about what the person who submitted it understands.

That raises the value of things young people have always needed and are now asked for earlier: framing a worthwhile problem, understanding what they are actually doing, evaluating outputs, verifying evidence, exercising judgment, working with other people, disclosing material assistance, and staying accountable for consequential decisions. These are the capabilities our existing pathway already develops, which is why we are not building a separate AI program or adding a seventh phase.

THE PRACTICE LOOP

Understand the problem and your own thinking before reaching for a tool. Use the tool deliberately. Verify what it produces against something real. Own the result, meaning you can explain the work, identify material assistance, defend the reasoning, and answer for the outcome.

QUESTIONS WE WANT THE PROOF PHASE TO ANSWER

When does AI deepen learning, and when does it let a student bypass it. Can students verify AI-generated claims. Can they tell fluency from accuracy. Can they explain and defend AI-assisted work, and say what judgment remained theirs. Are there differences in access, confidence, or support across students. And how is AI changing the entry-level learning opportunities our students are walking into. We are not making predictions about which specific careers disappear.

The staged proof phase, and the three-sided hypothesis.

CONDITIONAL

Our strategic plan sets out a staged architecture rather than one pilot. This is a summary. The plan carries the detail, including Gates 0 through 5.

STAGE	WHAT IT IS
A	Roughly 18 to 24 participants, generally ages 17 to 24, recruited through relationships we already have, followed at least 12 months with a manual Journey Record and recurring check-ins. Tests retention, student value, feasibility, data quality, and burden
B	A small early-high-school co-design strand, to learn what entry should look like for students closer to the start of high school. Not a longitudinal outcome cohort
C	A conditional 2028 Massachusetts cohort of roughly 30 to 40 participants, only if the earlier gates are met
D	A conditional multi-provider expansion of approximately 120 participants, requiring further capacity, governance, partner readiness, and evidence

THE THREE-SIDED HYPOTHESIS

One student-centered architecture could produce three connected kinds of value, not three separate programs. For students: continuity across experiences and transitions, a living record, reflection, reusable evidence, and stronger next-step guidance. For nonprofit partners: possible visibility after a student leaves an intervention, learning about referrals and later decisions, and evidence that may improve program design. For funders: possible aggregated learning across a portfolio, visibility into gaps, transitions, duplication, and intervention sequences, and better understanding of contribution over time.

The partner and funder side is a hypothesis. What we would be producing is contribution evidence, not proof of causation, and we use those words deliberately. No partner has agreed to purchase anything and we have not demonstrated demand. What we would eventually be able to say is that participants frequently reported using lessons, relationships, artifacts, or experiences from an intervention in later decisions, and that we observed certain subsequent behaviors. What we would not say is that a nonprofit caused a student's eventual education or employment outcome.

WHAT THE BOARD IS INITIALLY CONSIDERING

A bounded prototype and a proof process. Not immediate authorization for custom software, the 120-person expansion, administrative-data linkage, partner rankings, automated recommendations, causal claims, or a full evidence-infrastructure business line.

The discipline we are holding ourselves to.

The next two years are for proof, not size. The standard is not that one student completes every phase or every program, because the pathway does not work that way. It is whether we can hold an appropriate longitudinal relationship, engage a student across several developmental moments, help them interpret what those experiences meant, preserve evidence they can actually reuse, support a stronger next decision, deliver value they would recognize as valuable, and do all of it without unsustainable founder effort or excessive burden on the student. Until we can show that, growing would multiply something unproven.

That has a cost and we accept it. It means turning down volume we could probably fill. It means a second LaunchLab cohort has to argue for itself. It means we spend part of this year building data infrastructure instead of running another program, which is not the kind of thing that photographs well. We think it is the right order, and the strategic plan the board is reviewing is built on stage gates rather than a growth curve for exactly that reason.

WHAT THAT MEANS FOR THIS REPORT

You should expect the next few editions of this document to stay small and get more specific rather than getting bigger. If our numbers jump before the pathway is proven, that is a reason to ask us harder questions, not a reason to celebrate.

READING THIS ALONGSIDE THE STRATEGIC PLAN

This report is the record of what happened and what we learned from it. The 2027 to 2036 Strategic Plan is where the reasoning, the year-by-year roadmap, the stage gates, and the board decisions live. Where the two documents describe the same thing, the plan is the current source of truth on strategy and this report is the source of truth on what has actually occurred.

The Roundtable Series.

Beginning in 2027, BFA plans to convene small intergenerational conversations around the problems young people are navigating. Ninety minutes, about ten seats, a mix of people who all touch the same problem from different sides, parents, students, educators, nonprofit leaders, and people from the corporate world, with young people in the conversation rather than seated in the audience.

The Roundtable Series is not another student program. It is relationship, civic-engagement, research, and thought-leadership infrastructure: a place to listen across the ecosystem, surface gaps, strengthen partnerships, and turn field learning into better questions for BFA's work. We would rather sit down with people around a problem we both care about than send a cold ask to someone who has never heard of us. Nobody would be put on the spot in the room and nobody would be sold to. If there is an invitation, it comes afterward and privately, matched to what that person actually said they cared about.

WHY THIS BELONGS IN A REPORT ABOUT EVIDENCE

It is a fair question for an organization our size to answer: how do we know what young people need. We ask them, we work alongside them, and this is meant to put them at a table with the adults who make decisions about their futures too. The goal is for what comes out of those conversations to feed our thinking the way our other listening already has, and for the series itself to become one of the places new collaborations begin.

HOW WE INTEND TO JUDGE WHETHER IT IS WORKING

Not by how many people came. A full room that produces nothing is a nice evening. Once it launches, we intend to track whether relationships actually progress: introductions made, mentors recruited, partner conversations opened, co-hosts gained, funders and donors engaged, and what we learned about the field that we could not have learned from our own students.

A NOTE ON RECORDING AND CONSENT

Where a Roundtable is recorded, clipped, or quoted publicly, participants are told in advance, and media permission is obtained separately from participation. For anyone under 18, guardian permission is required before any recording is used publicly. Attendance counts are relationship and field-learning data, not evidence of student impact, and we keep CRM relationship tracking, Roundtable insight, student outcome data, and formal research evidence in separate places.

What we are trying to become.

Not a bigger version of what we are now. An intermediary: an organization that builds a young person's foundational readiness while connecting them into increasingly consequential exploration and opportunity, with what they learn from each experience feeding back into their own self-understanding and their next decision. That loop, not a straight line from readiness to a handoff, is the actual shape of it.

We build the readiness. We do not try to build everything a specialized path requires, and we say that plainly rather than overclaiming. We take responsibility for continuity, navigation, reflection, evidence standards, relationship design, and helping a student carry learning from one experience into the next, alongside what we deliver directly such as LaunchLab, mentoring, workshops, and the internship. We partner where another organization already does something well: career exploration, industry exposure, job shadowing, technical training, credentials, specialized financial education, and the internships and jobs employers already run. Exploration matters enough to us that we would rather connect a student to someone doing it well than build a shallow version ourselves. A good referral is not us falling short of the model. It is the model working as designed.

The clearest example is the one path we do not currently prepare anyone for directly: if a student's Navigator result points toward a vocational direction, we will name that as worth exploring, the same way we name any other direction. We do not yet have anywhere concrete to send that student to actually test it. Building those referral partnerships, so a Navigator recommendation comes with a real next door rather than just a suggestion, is part of the intermediary we are trying to become, for vocational paths and for every other direction our students get pointed toward.

THE TWO THINGS THAT HAVE TO GROW TOGETHER

Our own readiness work, and the network of specialized partners we can hand a student to once readiness is built. Neither one works without the other, and this report will keep tracking both.

Come build with us.

There are four ways to partner with Bold Futures Academy in the year ahead. Each one moves a real piece of the work forward.

01 Give Fund a student or a cohort. Tiers run from \$100 for program supplies to \$2,500 to sponsor five students through a full LaunchLab program, and \$10,000 or more for Core Partner recognition. Monthly giving starts at \$10.	02 Partner Bring a readiness series to your young people, or add the professional development layer to an internship program you already run. Schools, youth-serving nonprofits, employers, colleges, and faith communities build it into their existing programming. Quoted as a series.
03 Volunteer Give your skill rather than your money. Volunteer mentors, guest speakers, and Demo Day panelists are the highest leverage gift outside of capital, and companies can send employees as a group. A few hours across six weeks.	04 Refer Send us a student, a board candidate, or a funder you know would care. Our growth depends on warm referrals from people who already understand the work, and most of what we have was built that way.

HOW TO REACH US, AND HOW TO GIVE

TO DO THIS	GO HERE
Give online	givebutter.com/boldfuturesacademy , one time or monthly
Give by check	Bold Futures Academy Foundation, 153 Turner Road, Rockland, MA 02370
Talk it through	Book thirty minutes at calendly.com/ruth-tryfair/30min
Anything else	admin@boldfuturesacademy.org · boldfuturesacademy.org

Bold Futures Academy Foundation · EIN 33-3751028 · A 501(c)(3) nonprofit. All contributions are tax deductible to the fullest extent allowed by law, and donors giving \$250 or more receive a receipt automatically.

A note from our founder.

Bold Futures Academy began as an act of faith. I kept watching young people be handed a future that was changing faster than anything they had been taught to meet it with, and I recognized the pattern. Every time technology leaps, the people without the new skills get left behind. I was not willing to watch that happen to a generation I believe in.

This is also me giving something back. I would not have had the confidence to build a corporate career, or to start ventures of my own, without people who spoke into my life at every stage of it, from childhood right through my career. They gave me room to try, to get it wrong, and to keep going. That is why mentorship sits inside everything we run, and why I want students in the habit of seeking wisdom from people who have already walked the road.

What I want for these students is simple. Know what you are worth and say it out loud. See the root of a hard problem instead of the symptom. Speak for yourself and for your generation in any room you walk into. Be led by your ethics and not only by what pays. And know that whatever you build, somebody is behind you.

If any of that sounds like work you want a hand in, the pages before this one show you exactly where we are and what it would move. I would be glad to hear from you.

Vanessa Ruth Gay

FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR · BOLD FUTURES ACADEMY

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BOLD FUTURES ACADEMY.

Preparing young people for their futures, whatever path they choose.

MASTER IMPACT REPORT · SEPTEMBER 2026 EDITION

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