TO BE DETERMINED

Documentary Discussion Guide & Toolkit

A VIEWING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE ABOUT FINDING PATHS TO OPPORTUNITY
ABOUT ROADTRIP NATION

Roadtrip Nation creates stories and career exploration tools to give you the confidence to be true to yourself. If you’re trying to figure out your life, no matter your background, we’ve talked to someone who has advice and a story that can help. Since 2001, we’ve been sending people out on road trips to talk to inspiring people about what it’s really like to build a life and career in line with your interests.

ABOUT “TO BE DETERMINED”

What does it take to turn your struggles into your strengths? In “Roadtrip Nation: To Be Determined” —made possible by AT&T—Taiheem, Denise, and Chicago native Yasmine are three young people trying to answer this question for themselves. They've each faced struggles that could have kept them from pursuing their dreams—from growing up amid gangs and violence, to being depended on to support their families. It hasn’t been easy to get on a path to opportunity, but through workforce development programs, they've each found a way to develop their skills and find stability.

Now they’re ready to go even further, but they need advice from others who have been in their shoes. Follow these three on a journey across the country with Roadtrip Nation as they explore pathways through workforce training and talk to successful people who used their challenges as fuel for their future, and learn how you can do the same.

To watch the “To Be Determined” series, visit https://roadtripnation.com/workforce/chicago. This guide will help you connect to important themes and resources to help you on your own journey. The questions and activities that follow are designed to be completed on your own, or along with an instructor, facilitator, or mentor, in order to spark meaningful conversations about your future aspirations and how to achieve them.
HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Use this discussion guide during and after viewing the “To Be Determined” documentary series, which is featured on your Chicago & Cook County Young Adult Workforce Development Portal. This guide can be used in a group program or individually, and can either be guided by a facilitator or completed on your own.

Watch
This guide has four sections that dive into the main themes from each of the four episodes in “To Be Determined.” Each section will help you apply the lessons from the episode to your own life and circumstances. Use the link below, or find the documentary “To Be Determined” on your Chicago & Cook County Workforce Development Portal.

Series running time: 4 episodes, 25 minutes each
Link to watch: https://roadtripnation.com/workforce/chicago

Discuss
If you’re completing this guide with a group:
We recommend breaking this guide into four sessions, one session for each of the four episodes.

Option 1: Watch and discuss together
Duration: Four 60-minute sessions
Allow at least one hour if you’re planning on screening the episode together and discussing (25 minutes of viewing, 25-35 minutes of writing or discussion, depending on group size). Watch the episode and complete the discussion prompts. It helps if participants spend time writing their answers down before you discuss. Discussion can take place in smaller groups or all together, led by an instructor or facilitator.

Option 2: Watch before, discuss together
Duration: Four 30-minutes sessions
To prepare, ask participants to watch the selected episode in advance and answer the questions on their own, then spend your time together discussing questions and themes (25-30 minutes of discussion).

If you’re completing this guide on your own:
If you’re completing this discussion guide without a group or facilitator, use the questions here as writing prompts and reflect on your answers. You can also use the questions and your answers to talk to a mentor, friend, or family member about some of the themes you learn about in this series, such as resilience and opportunity.
MEET THE ROADTRIPPERS

Taiheem
Age 26
The Bronx, NY

Taiheem wants to give power and possibilities to young people who feel they have none. He knows what it's like to feel like you have no opportunities to change your situation—he's been there. Raised amid domestic violence and forced to bounce around shelters, foster care, and friends' houses, it took harnessing the strength of his own dreams to get on a path that leads where he wants to go—a career in tech support. He's found support through his training with Per Scholas, but now he wants to share his story and give back so that he can help change the outcomes of other youth who need community.

Yasmine
Age 24
Harvey, IL

Yasmine has faced challenges that would wear down even the strongest person. Gangs and violence were rampant in her hometown, but family, afterschool programs, church, and the training and job support she got through Phalanx Family Services as part of the Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership program, kept her on course. She's in school to become a patient care technician, and while motivation has never been an issue for her, figuring out how to start something, and what steps to take along the way, is trickier. With her family depending on her, Yasmine wants to gain advice and skills she can pass on to her community, to create a cycle of support.

Denise
Age 26
Brooklyn, NY

Hard work and big goals have been the driving forces in Denise's life—and she's determined to lift her whole family up with her. Her parents emigrated from Mexico to give her a better life, and their sacrifices are not lost on her. After attending college for a period and occasionally working eighty hours a week, she decided to take a break to attend the Year Up program and got an internship with their help. As she contemplates going back to school and choosing a career path, she's hoping this time on the road will give her a chance to step back, celebrate her hard work, and see how she can harness it for the future.
Watch
Episode 1: [https://roadtripnation.com/workforce/chicago](https://roadtripnation.com/workforce/chicago)

Discuss
In this episode, we meet Taiheem, Yasmine, and Denise, three young people at the beginning of their journeys. They each have interests, dreams, and goals. They also have challenges, fears, and anxieties about the future and what’s expected of them.

What are Taiheem’s goals? How did he discover his interest in computers?

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What are Denise’s goals? How is she feeling about education? Why?

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What are Yasmine’s goals? What did she do when she was feeling stuck?

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What else did you connect or relate to in their stories?

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Discuss

Like Taiheem, Denise, and Yasmine, we all start somewhere. Our dreams, goals, and worries are all shaped by where we come from and what we’ve experienced so far. Sometimes our fears and anxieties can seem too big to get past, especially when the system and the journey feels bigger than us, or when the things in the world and in our lives feel unstable.

None of us can choose where we come from or the situation we’ve been handed, but we can choose what we do next. How will you use your experiences as fuel to create a better future for yourself, your family, or your community?

Zoom out from your life for a second and think about where you are now. What's your starting point? Answer the questions below.

What's the main thing driving you in your life right now?

What are you most proud of accomplishing?

What are some of the things that you’re worried could hold you back?

How does what you’ve experienced in your life give you a unique or valuable perspective?
EVERY PLANE NEEDS A RUNWAY

“You came to us as planes, with the engines and the wings intact. You showed up on day one with strong engines and strong wings—but every plane needs a runway to take off. Without the runway, it’s really hard for a plane to get off the ground. Runways don’t cause planes to take off. Planes take off because they have what it takes, and each one of you has what it takes...you just needed that path.”
—Gerald Chertavian, CEO, Year Up

Discuss

A plane can’t take off without a runway, and you’re no different. You have the ability to fly, but without a way to take off, it’s impossible to get into the sky.

Think of yourself like the plane that Gerald describes. You already have what it takes, but you just need that runway. What are those qualities, skills, experiences, and values you already have that can help you meet challenges and succeed?

As Gerald tells the roadtrippers, you’re the one who changes your life—you just need an opportunity. Taiheem, Yasmine, and Denise all connected to an opportunity by finding programs that could help them quickly build skills and get a job in a growing field. They each had the drive to work hard and succeed, but finding that opportunity and support gave them the runway they each needed.

What do you think Gerald means when he says that workforce development programs like his provide the opportunity, but you do the changing?

In your life right now, do you feel like you have a runway that’s going to give you the opportunity to take off?

If not, what kind of opportunity do you need? Who can you reach out to for help, or what organizations can you turn to to figure out your next step?

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“Early on, I didn’t have that confidence, but over time I’ve learned that if I don’t believe in myself, I can’t expect anyone else to believe in me.”
—Anel Perez, Solutions Architect, Amazon Web Services

Watch
Episode 2: https://roadtripnation.com/workforce/chicago

Discuss
Before his job at Amazon, Anel was working retail and struggling to support his new daughter. He was spending his free time reading about computers, programming languages, and new technology, so he decided to study for a career in tech.

What sorts of things do you research, watch videos, read about, or do in your spare time?

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When Taiheem jokes that he just scrolls through Instagram in his free time, Anel stops him and says that even Instagram is tailored toward his likes and the environment he’s created by who he’s following.

Think about who you follow on social media. What are some of the common interests and themes that can help you understand what you’re drawn to? How can you push those interests even further?

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Discuss

Taiheem is blown away because Anel has his dream job, but this interview also means a lot because Taiheem doesn’t see many people like him working in tech support. “A lot of places I’ve worked in IT, I’m usually the only person of color,” Taiheem says. “To see him and where he’s at feels great. I don’t feel as lonely as before. I can do this too.”

When people from Anel’s neighborhood found out he was studying tech, they called him nerdy. No one else around him was pursuing tech. “Even after getting a job in tech,” Anel says, “you realize how little people of color are there, how little people of my background are there. So I think that by showcasing that it is possible, it sets a trend. He’s doing it; I can do it too.”

Do you have a role model or someone who inspires you to follow in their footsteps?

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Do you feel certain judgments or expectations about what you should or shouldn’t be pursuing from people around you?

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On our road trips, the people we talk to sign the ceiling of our RV with their advice. Here’s what Anel wrote:

If you can’t fly, run.
If you can’t run, walk.
If you can’t walk, crawl.
Whatever you do, don’t stop!
“How can I give other people pathways to access?”
—Joy King, Managing Director, Per Scholas

Discuss
When Joy first went to college, she struggled with the transition. Between the financial burden and bad grades, she decided to leave school. Back home, she spent two years working in a back office with people who hated their job. Joy realized she had a choice to make: Do I want this to be my reality, or do I want to figure something else out?

Think back to what you’ve done so far. What are some of the key choices you’ve made along your path?

Think of a time that you failed at something, or when things didn’t go as planned. What did you learn? What choice did you make next?
Discuss

Joy’s mission is to create pathways to access. But, so often, the people delivering that message of access don’t look like the people they’re trying to serve, Joy tells them. That’s the benefit the roadtrippers have. They’re representative of the communities they come from and they can have impact by sharing their story.

That message struck Yasmine. “She still reaches back and grabs people from that starting point. That’s the type of woman I want to be. What’s stopping me from pulling other people with me too, to be an example for the people in my community?”

“In the Hispanic community,” Denise says, “it’s looked down upon to talk about failure, but I wish I’d seen someone like myself.”

Think back: What are some of the messages and possibilities you wish you’d been able to see when you were growing up?

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How can you set an example for others?

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How can you start passing these messages on to other people who need to hear them?

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**WHAT IS SUCCESS?**

“Everyone’s journey is different, whether you choose to go traditional or unconventional, you need to figure out who you are and what you want to give to this world, and then you figure out what you need to get there.”

—Regina D’Andino, Sr. Executive Assistant, JP Morgan Chase & Co.

**Watch**
Episode 3: [https://roadtripnation.com/workforce/chicago](https://roadtripnation.com/workforce/chicago)

**Discuss**
Yasmine and Denise both struggle with the expectation that the only way to be successful is to go to college and get a four-year degree.

Denise’s family always dreamed that she’d go to a four-year college and get her degree, so when she left school early, she felt like a failure. Regina tells her, “You’re giving other folks a lot of power over your mindset, and once you take that back and start owning yourself—you know, ‘This is what I want to do and this is how I’m going to do it for myself’—then you won’t be as worried about cultural expectations.”

How do you define success?

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What expectations do you carry about what success is or what you need to do to be successful?

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Do you think you need to have a four-year degree to be successful? What other options have you seen?

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Discuss
Regina lives in the Bronx, but she works in finance in Manhattan. “Have you ever heard of people with dual citizenship?” she says to the roadtrippers. “That’s what I feel like I have. I feel like I have dual citizenship in corporate America and being part of my community.” She uses the knowledge she gains from that proximity to power to help the people in her community and bring that knowledge back to them.

What does it mean to live in two different worlds?

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Have you ever felt like you live in two different worlds? What parts of that are a challenge?

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Do you see any benefit to having access to two different worlds, like Regina does? How does she use her power to help people in her community?

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REMEMBER WHERE YOU CAME FROM

“‘I’m not going to let the circumstances of my past dictate where I’m going to go.’”
—Plinio Ayala, President and CEO, Per Scholas

Discuss
Plinio grew up poor in the South Bronx. He became determined to create a better future for himself, but he wanted to create that better future for other people, too. “Don’t forget where you came from, and if you have a chance to pull somebody along, it’s your responsibility to do that,” he tells the roadtrippers.

What role do you play in your community or for the people around you?

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Plinio started out by helping one person at a time. Then he realized that if he could change the system, his impact would be even greater.

What’s something you want to see changed?

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What would be the first step to start making that change in your community? How could you take that local change even further to affect the bigger system?

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Discuss

In this episode, Taiheem realizes that he’s been striving to take care of his family, but taking care of himself is important for his daughters’ health and happiness too.

“I realize how hard I have become by doing the same things every day. I put achieving a career that would allow me to sustain my family before a lifestyle that would allow me to sustain my own happiness,” Taiheem says.

“This is something I can share with them—doing this to become a better me, to help you become a better you.”

What responsibilities do you have? Do you have people who depend on you for support?

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How do you take time for yourself or recharge when you’re stressed or anxious?

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How do you think taking care of yourself first makes you a better support for others?

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YOU CAN DO ANYTHING ONE STEP AT A TIME

“Your can do anything you put your mind to, even eat an elephant, as long as you do it one bite at a time.”
—Karin Norington-Reaves, CEO, Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership

Watch
Episode 4: https://roadtripnation.com/workforce/chicago

Discuss
As a teacher, Karin saw how education doesn’t actually work for every child. That experience made her want to change the system.

Trying to change something big takes time, but you can’t give up. Her mother always told her that she could do anything—even eat an elephant!—as long as she did it one bite at a time.

Your future and the challenges you face will feel overwhelming at times. All you can do is take it one step and one day at a time. Every journey and accomplishment is the result of the small decisions and actions you take over weeks, months, and years. Sometimes the progress might feel slow—but keep going!

When you think about your future, what feels overwhelming or too big to change?

What are 2-3 small steps you could take to get started right now? (Some ideas are things like reading an article or watching a video, asking someone a question, or finding new people to follow who work in an area you’re interested in.)

Think about a time when things got hard, but you didn’t give up. What kept you going?

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Discuss

Taiheem, Yasmine, and Denise have all overcome struggles that could have held them back. They had moments when things got hard, but they kept going anyway. When they faced setbacks, they bounced back. That ability to come back after a fall is called resilience. Practicing resilience in your life will help you accept the setbacks and come back stronger.

For Taiheem, seeing his own resilience helped him forget about fear. “One thing I’ve learned was to take risks,” he says. “I just feel like I’m not afraid to fail, like I was. I felt like such a failure because I wasn’t where the rest of my peers were. But I didn’t give up. The one thing we all didn’t do was give up when we were met with a wall.”

Think about a time that you faced a challenge or a failure. How did you bounce back?

How do you feel about taking risks? Does it sound scary? Or do you feel comfortable taking on a challenge? Why or why not?

Growth comes from those times when you might feel at your lowest. Yasmine says, “The girl I am now, I feel so phenomenal. But it was because I literally felt like I was at my rock bottom, my last limb—that I reached out and I tried to find another outlet. Now I’m more courageous. I’m gonna be a force to be reckoned with.”

How have challenges in your life led to growth?

What makes you a force to be reckoned with?
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Organizations and Resources from the Series:

Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership: https://chicookworks.org/

Year Up: https://www.yearup.org/

Per Scholas: https://perscholas.org/

Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership Resources:

Learn more about workforce services: https://chicookworks.org/

Find a program for young adults near you: https://chicookworks.org/our-network/find-your-agency/

Check out upcoming events at Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership: https://chicookworks.org/events/

Find paid internships focused on skills and job training: https://chicookworks.org/initiatives/opportunityworks/

Get connected to careers in construction: https://chicookworks.org/initiatives/constructionworks/

See who’s hiring now in Chicago and Cook County: https://chicookworks.org/home/worknow/

Find job opportunities in Illinois with Get Hired IL: https://www2.illinois.gov/GetHired/Pages/default.aspx

Explore short-term training programs that unlock career pathways with Chicagoland CareerPathways: https://www.careerpathways.net/