Untapped Talent: Fulfilling the Promise of Youth Employment Programs for a Growing Economy

September 2017
Nearly a decade since the onset of the Great Recession, many of the world’s major economies have stabilized their footing, and employment rates have surpassed pre-2008 levels. However, the benefits of the recovery have not been broadly shared. One-third of the world’s 1.8 billion young people are not engaged in employment, education, or training.¹ Youth unemployment rates globally are about three times higher than the rates for adults.² In the United States, teen labor force participation has fallen from a peak of 58% in 1979 to 34% in 2017, a decline that cannot be fully attributed to young people being in school.³
At the same time, there has been a tightening of some labor markets, particularly in the developed world. For example, U.S. unemployment in June 2017 hit a 16-year low. This combination of a tightening labor market and persistently high youth unemployment presents a uniquely opportune moment to expand the private sector’s role in tackling youth unemployment to strengthen the global workforce pipeline.

These are not the only reasons employers are taking a second look at the youth workforce. Supporting best-in-class youth employment programs, high-quality skills training and effective career pathways can help employers improve recruitment pipelines and increase access to new talent. A talented, diverse workforce can also benefit businesses by bringing new perspectives, ideas and connections to growing communities.

These programs benefit more than just youth. When administered effectively, youth workforce programs give employees an opportunity to participate in meaningful activities that increase their connection to the mission and values of the company. They also allow businesses to give back to the communities where they operate.

Simply put, helping young people gain the skills they need to compete in the labor market is a powerful strategy for expanding access to opportunity and promoting economic growth.

The private sector’s increased commitment to supporting workforce systems has fostered innovative strategies that bridge diverse stakeholders from the education, workforce and youth development fields. These innovations have led to improved skills training, work experiences and other supports that can lead to meaningful career pathways for young people.

Drawing from interviews with practitioners, business leaders and experts, as well as previous research, this report explores the spectrum of business engagement in the youth employment field and is intended to serve as a resource for program practitioners, business leaders, policymakers, philanthropists and other stakeholders in the field.

This report provides a road map for businesses interested in doing more. The private sector stands to benefit from increased investment in preparing young people to meet current and future demand for a skilled global workforce. However, engaging young adults may introduce a new kind of complexity for some businesses. Bringing young people into the workplace means potentially dedicating staff time to this work, increasing budgets for supervision and training, and refining other policies. Despite these challenges, the strategies highlighted in this report, along with many other examples of effective collaboration between the private sector and youth employment field, have laid the foundation for a more integrated workforce system that increases opportunity for young people and supports business growth.
Good for Youth and Good for Business

Today’s generation of young people is the largest the world has ever seen. One billion more young adults will begin looking for employment over the next decade. However, in cities around the globe, this potentially huge source of talent, vitality and innovation has not translated into a stronger workforce pipeline that contributes to global growth.

While macroeconomic conditions are improving in many countries, albeit unevenly, the employment picture for youth still looks grim in comparison. Just under half of Americans aged 16–24 were employed in 2016, and youth employment rates have yet to recover fully after the Great Recession. In fact, by 2015, the teen labor force participation rate had declined to about 34%, which is lower than the Great Recession’s 40% rate. Unemployment rates for young people aged 16–24 are double the national average in the U.S. In other countries, circumstances are similarly troubling.

The youth employment crisis persists even at a time when many businesses are struggling to find the right employees to deliver on business needs. During the depths of the Great Recession, most companies enjoyed the selectivity afforded to them by an enlarged pool of skilled workers looking for work. However, by last year, 36% of employers worldwide were reporting difficulty in finding talent, the highest percentage in seven years. This comports with the overall contraction occurring in many developed countries’ labor markets. Some major cities, like New York, are witnessing the lowest unemployment rates on record since reporting began. The confluence of this trend with underwhelming youth labor force participation rates signals a prime opportunity to invest in youth employment.

For many young people around the world, youth employment programs are the best entry point to accessing meaningful work and developing their careers. Historically, these programs have helped to fill the gap between a high school education and the training and skills needed to be successful in the workplace. They also have demonstrated real, long-term results. For instance, participating in a youth employment program has been shown to increase a young person's salary by 11% for up to eight years after high school. These initiatives are especially critical in helping to close the access divide between low-income youth and their higher-income peers with respect to acquiring professional connections and networks. According to the Urban Alliance, a young person's chance of getting a job increases by 86% when they have work experience during the previous year. By removing some of the barriers to securing a first job, youth employment programs can represent a critical bridge in the transition to adulthood.

Global Youth Unemployment Rates

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Rate</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arab States</td>
<td>30.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Africa</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Northern, Southern and Western Europe</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Central and Western Asia</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America and the Caribbean</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Europe</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern America</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Southern Asia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eastern Asia</td>
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</table>
36% of employers worldwide were reporting difficulty in finding talent during 2016.

A young person’s chance of getting a job increases by 86% when they have work experience during the previous year.

60% of American employers express concern about jobseekers’ lack of preparation for work, even for entry-level jobs.

Investing in youth employment efforts helps businesses address human capital needs and contribute to thriving economies. About 60% of American employers express concern about jobseekers’ lack of preparation for work, even for entry-level jobs. By connecting to workforce systems that support youth, the private sector can help strengthen workforce pipelines by identifying new talent, providing relevant in-demand skills training and increasing diversity.

Finally, young adults bring fresh energy, ideas and connections to cultures and communities that may offer new opportunities for the private sector. Therefore, increasing and improving engagement with young employment efforts can create lasting, long-term value for businesses.

Why Youth Employment Matters...

Only 49% of Americans between the ages of 16 and 24 were employed last year. Recent federal data depicts very uneven recovery for youth employment across all the states.

The youth unemployment rate in Northern America, at 11.5%, and the number of unemployed youth (2.6 million) in July 2016 changed minimally from the previous year.

As of early 2017, the employment-to-population ratio for youth workers has only recovered halfway from its recession-era decline.

Employers tend to overlook young adults who have finished high school and did not attend college.

There are over 5.5 million young adults in the U.S. who are disconnected from work and school.

If they do not secure steady employment before 25, youth will earn 44% less over their lifetime than their peers, negatively impacting their well-being, their futures and their communities.

A Snapshot into How Programs Are Effectively Addressing Youth Career Readiness

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Futures and Options</th>
<th>Dr. Reddy’s Foundation</th>
<th>The Fellowship Initiative</th>
<th>JOBLINGE</th>
<th>CareerConnect</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New York City</td>
<td>India, Vietnam, Indonesia, Sri Lanka</td>
<td>Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles, New York</td>
<td>Germany</td>
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<td>Sector: Multiple</td>
<td>Sector: Technology</td>
<td>Sector: Finance</td>
<td>Sector: Multiple</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The program trains 26,000 youth every year. In the last 15 years, DRF has impacted 350,000 youth with an average job placement of 70%.</td>
<td>The program targets young men of color in the academic middle and has achieved 100% high school graduation with all of the Fellows college bound. Collectively, the Fellows earned more than $28 million in financial support for college.</td>
<td>75% of participants get jobs, and 80% stay at those jobs, results that are almost three times better than those achieved by some other programs.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>50% growth in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) over two years.</td>
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90% of all participants successfully complete their internships; graduate from high school and pursue higher education.

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The CareerConnect Model has over 6,000 participating students, over 150 company and higher education partners, received $20 million in grants since 2014, and has seen a 50% growth in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) over two years.
Early business engagement efforts often focused on businesses’ sense of social responsibility in an effort to encourage them to hire young people. However, the field has since evolved, with new strategies and partnership models emerging to realize both the social and economic benefits of robust youth employment programs.

With a greater emphasis on collaboration, youth-focused workforce development efforts today are increasingly designed to meet the demands of a modern economy, with greater focus on priorities like leveraging data, building systems and developing in-demand skills. This change in mindset, along with creative programs, has created a moment of opportunity for businesses to generate a system that anticipates their needs, expands promising models and fosters the innovation needed to keep pace with the changing world.

Defining levels of engagement — from light-touch career exploration efforts to high-touch, often more intensive employment programs — helps to conceptualize the different ways the private sector can contribute to youth employment efforts. Though programs often combine multiple approaches to business engagement, this framework can help potential partners identify what is required to meet their needs and the needs of the youth they support.
Light-Touch Engagement

Career Awareness and Exploration

These programs are designed to support young people as they learn about careers and identify potential educational pathways that fit their interests and abilities.

Some employers leverage career awareness and exploration interventions for all of their involvement in youth employment, while others use these programs as a launch pad to a more intensive level of engagement. Through awareness programs, employers can create lasting relationships with youth employment programs, education systems and communities.

Advisory Boards and Curriculum Assistance provide opportunities for employers to inform curricula and help students develop valuable skills.

Workplace and Industry Tours allow youth to explore businesses, their day-to-day operations and the types of jobs that are available in an industry.

Career Fairs and Classroom Visits allow employers to provide personal, relatable snapshots into what they do, spark interest in career opportunities and alert youth to available pathway programs.

Networking Events provide youth with avenues to develop soft skills training, helping them solidify knowledge and confidence in the workplace.

Job Shadowing gives youth a window into the daily work responsibilities and business culture.

Futures and Options
New York City

**Mission/Values**
Of the nation’s 20 largest cities, New York has the lowest percentage of working teens, with blacks and Latinos the most underrepresented. Futures and Options aims to both connect New York City’s low-income, minority youth to job opportunities and provide them with the skills and training they need to succeed.

**Summary**
Along with a robust, high-touch internship program, Futures and Options provides career readiness training for students who have not yet reached the age and skill level to be placed in internships. It also has a college guidance initiative to assist junior and senior high school students with the college application process.

**Structure**
Nonprofit

**Target Population(s)**
New York’s low-income youth

**Employer Engagement Lesson**
“In order for [program participation] to be a value add for our students, it has to be a value add for the business. Whether it’s creating a volunteer event or helping to create a job description for what’s helpful at job site, we want everyone to walk away feeling that it’s worthwhile.”

**Patty Machir**
Executive Director, Futures and Options

[www.futuresandoptions.org/fao](http://www.futuresandoptions.org/fao)
Moderate-Touch Engagement
Skills Development and Mentoring

Programs focused on skills development and mentoring help youth with interest in specific career paths by connecting them with professionals in the field or giving them the opportunity to experience the work firsthand.

At this level, employers often make a long-term commitment and take a more hands-on role, and programs require some degree of planning and investment at an organizational stage from employers. Employers help with the development of curricula, as well as offer young people training, skills development, education and mentoring.

Mentoring Programs engage employees of an organization to provide professional development guidance while also serving as advisors and counselors.

Career and Technical Education serves as a direct link between education and employment for young people through career-focused curricula and skills development.

JOBLINGE
Germany

Mission/Values
JOBLINGE is committed to reducing unemployment and improving skills development by giving disadvantaged young adults professional development training and connecting them with internship and apprenticeship opportunities.

Summary
JOBLINGE applicants demonstrate their motivation and work ethic through charitable project work. Once accepted into the program, they gain social and professional skills through hands-on projects, individual coaching and working with mentors. As the participants demonstrate the necessary skills, company partners may choose to train them further and/or hire them.

Structure
Local partner networks implement programs, supported by a national, nonprofit umbrella organization that assumes control and support tasks.

Target Population(s)
Disadvantaged youth, often with “multiple placement barriers.” Over half come from an immigrant background, and over 70% are on social welfare.

Employer Engagement Lesson
“We offer a broad variety of employer engagement for the companies — that’s important because it gives them the chance to meet our participants, and it’s easier to integrate them into a company. We work on so many different levels with the company that we can show them how we work and it’s very transparent for them. This is what makes it professional and what convinces the company — the transparency and the success we have.”

Christiane Schubert
Deputy Regional Director, JOBLINGE

www.joblinge.de

JobsFirstNYC
New York City

Mission/Values
JobsFirstNYC works to reduce the number of out-of-school and out-of-work young adults by serving as a coordinating and organizing mechanism for the various community, corporate, human, organization, private and public resources aimed at bringing out-of-school and out-of-work youth into the New York City economy.

Summary
JobsFirstNYC serves as an intermediary, helping to create and maintain innovative collaboratives that work to provide young adults with academic and professional opportunity. JobsFirstNYC provides technical assistance, neutral facilitation and additional funding to identify and implement best practices and effective strategies that create and support opportunities for young adults. In particular, JobsFirstNYC supports the Lower East Side Employment Network (LESEN), which brings together community resources in the Lower East Side of the city and works closely with the hospitality sector to provide training and employment opportunities to local residents.

Structure
Public-private partnership

Target Population(s)
Out-of-school and out-of-work young adults in New York City

Types of Employers Engaged
NYC area employers

Employer Engagement Lesson
“Employers also have to look at how their message is transmitted across their organization — about what they want to do, what they can do. Leaders can say they want to do something, but unless they get other key positions on board, they won’t get the results they are looking for, nor the drive towards those results.”

Marjorie Parker
Deputy Executive Director, JobsFirstNYC

www.jobsfirstnyc.org
The Fellowship Initiative
Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles and New York City

Mission/Values
The Fellowship Initiative provides young men of color from economically distressed communities with academic and leadership training to help them complete high school prepared to succeed in college and careers.

Summary
The Fellowship Initiative provides 270 hours of learning time outside of school each year, for three years, including preparation for college — SAT and ACT prep classes, opportunities to visit colleges, financial aid assistance and help with scholarships, personal statements and college applications — and programming focused on leadership and career development. Along with these activities, participants are paired with a JPMorgan Chase mentor to advise them throughout high school and provide support for their social and emotional development.

www.jpmorganchase.com/TFI

Structure
Private business (JPMorgan Chase), in collaboration with nonprofit organizations such as the National Mentoring Partnership (MENTOR), Outward Bound, Mental Health Association and Experiment in International Living.

Target Population(s)
Young men of color from economically distressed communities

Types of Employers Engaged
JPMorgan Chase & Co.

Employer Engagement Lesson
“When a corporation sets up the design in advance, and provides resources, tools and support that employees need to feel supported — that’s when it goes well.”
Elizabeth Santiago
Senior Director of Programs, MENTOR

www.jpmorganchase.com/newskillsatwork
High-Touch Engagement Employment Programs

Programs that directly employ youth in some capacity – as interns, apprentices or employees – require a high degree of planning and commitment from employers, while offering the greatest potential impact and value for both employers and youth.

Experts find that employers participating in these types of programs plug young people in to fill vital gaps and spur innovation on the job. Youth provide a service for the employer while also learning on the job, generating benefits for both parties. Even when youth employment programs are explicitly temporary, as with an internship or summer job, the relationships established allow for the employer to seamlessly connect to potential full-time talent for the future.

Employers often manage programs themselves, taking on all of the costs and associated planning. In other cases, employers use intermediary programs to manage administrative tasks and handle liability issues or employment requirements.

Internships and Summer Jobs often fit networking, mentoring, job shadowing and workplace training all under one umbrella, and fall on a spectrum from summer jobs that offer youth a first-on-the-job training to short-term work experience in a chosen career field.

Apprenticeships refer to an “earn and learn” model of on-the-job training, often managed directly by employers or employer associations. Frequently in collaboration with local educational institutions or labor groups, apprenticeships result in a portable credential.

Internship Facilitation and Scaling

Many programs and intermediaries aim to ease the difficulty of developing new internship programs by enabling employers to use their suite of services. These programs often combine many elements of youth employment into one, and offer them at scale. For example, the structured, high-touch model of Urban Alliance combines paid internships, formal training and mentorship to support career pathways for under-resourced youth in the Baltimore, Chicago, Northern Virginia and Washington, DC regions. Similarly, Genesys Works offers skills training, paid internships, college and career coaching, and alumni support in five regions across the U.S.

STL Youth Jobs

St. Louis

Mission/Values
STL Youth Jobs is committed to connecting the growing number of disengaged youth in the city with employers looking for skilled workers to fill vacant positions.

Summary
After identifying candidates from target neighborhoods, program staff assess their skills and interests and pair them with a job coach. Before starting work, candidates participate in training and skill-building programs targeting financial literacy, essential skills and job readiness. Once they’re placed in a position, the employer provides specialized training, employment oversight and feedback, while the program pays the salary and job coach, who continues to mentor. After their internship, job coaches continue to work with participants to help find employment.

Structure
Initially incubated by a grant from the city, STL Youth Jobs is a collaboration of funders, individuals, businesses, nonprofits and civic leaders.

Target Population(s)
Youth ages 16 to 24, from St. Louis neighborhoods with high rates of youth unemployment, poverty and juvenile crime, and low graduation rates.

Types of Employers Engaged
Local businesses and nonprofits

Employer Engagement Lesson
“They [employers] may think, what can an 18 to 19-year-old with only high school diploma and little work skills do at the company? Some organizations aren’t used to working with entry-level employers. We solve this by saying that youth may not be filling positions that are 100% essential. Emerson, for example, has youth working in some departments that are filling in support positions for folks that are already in positions.”

Patrick McCulloch
Director of STL Youth Jobs Programs, MERS/Goodwill

www.stlyouthjobs.org
Children First Fund – Chicago Public Schools Foundation Youth Summer Certification and Employment Initiative

Mission/Values
The Chicago Public Schools want to ensure that every child in every school is on track to graduate with the tools, skills and experience they need for success in postsecondary education and employment.

Summary
The Children First Fund out of the Chicago Public Schools Foundation partnered with the CPS Career Technical Education department to create a program that allows high school students to gain workplace skills and experience high-demand sectors like information technology (IT), healthcare, manufacturing and transportation. Students participate in a certification program in skills such as manufacturing, auto body or IT, then complete a job-shadowing experience in their field of study.

Structure
Nonprofit in partnership with public school district

Target Population(s)
Chicago Public School students

Types of Employers Engaged
Employers in high-growth, high-industry sectors like IT, healthcare, manufacturing and transportation.

Employer Engagement Lesson
“Longer term, I think a lot of what is happening is coming from the youth side — nonprofit, schools, funders — we’re trying to figure out connecting youth with employers. Eventually, it’ll have to shift to the employer side. We’re hoping that employers can provide some kind of workforce-ready plan, retention, connection to the opportunity youth.”
Michelle Scott
Project Manager, Early College & Career Education Office of College & Career Success, Chicago Public Schools

http://chooseyourfuture.cps.edu/career-technical-education/cte-clusters-pathways

Denver Public Schools CareerConnect

Mission/Values
Denver Public Schools CareerConnect program aims to provide students with high-demand skills and prepare them for career pathways in high-opportunity industries.

Summary
In addition to career-focused pathways already in place, CareerConnect is launching CareerResidency, a program that combines education with work experience. Beginning in 11th or 12th grade, students in the three-year program split their time between working and attending classes at community college. The students are interviewed and recruited by local companies, where they work during the program. In addition to gaining work experience, at the end of the program students receive a stackable two-year degree that they can use to complete a four-year program.

Structure
Program based in public school district; funded by federal grants.

Target Population(s)
Denver Public School students

Types of Employers Engaged
Employers from four high-demand industries: advanced manufacturing, business, healthcare and technology.

Employer Engagement Lesson
“Youth culture really matters. It’s probably one of the most important things. If you want to fix the talent pipeline, you need to court young people to fall in love with your industry. Help the student culture around your industry thrive by supporting orgs, student leadership there, make it an enticing thing for them to be doing. It’s more like coaching a team than doing a workforce training program. They value employee culture, this is no different, they need to help people fall in love with the field.”
Joe Saboe
Director, Denver Public Schools CareerConnect

www.dpscareerconnect.org

http://www.dpscareerconnect.org

www.jpmorganchase.com/newskillsatwork
Best Practices for Effective Employer Engagement

Businesses, programs, intermediaries and government each have distinct roles to play to ensure effective participation by employers in workforce programs. Sharing best practices across these actors can help better support the goals of youth workforce development.

While all collaboration and coordination among actors has improved, there are still crucial gaps that need to be filled. These include establishing metrics of successful employer engagement; standardizing effective practices to recruit and retain employers; and developing long-term data collection, such as through employer and youth surveys in individual programs.

Employers

Much support exists for employers as they develop and implement employment programs for young people. Best practices include:

1. **Thinking Expansively About Available Resources, Including Intermediaries**

Programs, intermediaries, government, philanthropy and academia can offer insights, best practices and resources to overcome common barriers to effective youth engagement approaches.

“We can help [companies] think through what they need. We try to make it really easy for them.”
Joe Saboe, Director, Denver Public Schools CareerConnect

2. **Communicating Goals and Needs**

Employers report that clearly communicating their goals and constraints for involvement in programs with their workforce development partners creates programming that is more beneficial for all. For instance, when employers work with schools to identify the key skills and information that would be helpful for participants to have at the start, participants are more prepared and programs can be more successful.

“I’m the voice of industry in a lot of those meetings [of the Denver CareerConnect Advisory Board]. A lot of people talk, pontificate, we actually do it — that’s the biggest difference.”
Jon Kinning, COO and Executive Vice President, RK Mechanical

3. **Building Multiple Benefits, Including Diversity, into Program Design**

Employers say that youth employment is more than just a means to source additional talent. It can also be an effective way to increase the diversity of an organization’s staff demographically, geographically and beyond, and provide otherwise unrealized pathways to young people. Through targeted efforts to attract underrepresented populations, employers have gained the benefit of new perspectives, reduced turnover and increased creativity.

“Both [labor shortage and social motivations] are advantageous as it benefits both youth employees and employers – the former gaining experience, while the latter helps to address a workforce challenge.”
Trinh Nguyen, Director, Boston Mayor’s Office of Workforce Development

4. **Planning and Preparation**

Taking the time to develop sound plans for youth employment programs that align with an employer’s goals and needs is also vital. Appropriate planning can help mitigate thorny challenges in the future, such as underprepared youth participants or a mismatch between employer needs and participant skill sets.

“We set up a daily plan of where they’re going to be... we know exactly what they’re supposed to do every day and that they will put some of their skills to use.”
Linda Rapacki, Managing Director of Visitor Services and Building Operations, Museum of American Finance
Finding Internal Champions

Building momentum from leadership within the employer’s organization was noted to be critical to ensuring a youth employment program’s success. At the same time, employers that find and leverage champions throughout the organization can help ensure seamless planning and implementation for a program.

Providing Feedback

It is often helpful for programs to include a feedback mechanism that allows employers to communicate with participants and program facilitators how the program has helped or can be improved. This feedback could come through formal processes, like a post-program survey, as well as more informal conversations between partners.

“Last summer we had a coach who was highly engaged. During the summer, that coach was on-site during the eight weeks — she was there one or two times during the week supporting the youth and communicating with us and our leaders with how things were going, and what could be improved. We had rich communication and rich partnerships.”

Tom Levanos, Director of Volunteer Services, SSM Health

“You need passionate, intentional people in the roles to make this happen.”

Scot McLemore, Manager of Talent Acquisition and Deployment, Honda North America, Inc.
Programs and Intermediaries

Programs and intermediaries need employers to be effectively engaged in youth employment efforts in order to create meaningful experiences for young people. Youth employment programs and intermediaries can help to ensure effective employer engagement through the following:

1. Recognizing and Reducing Barriers for Employers

To facilitate employer participation in youth employment approaches, programs and intermediaries should keep a steady eye on easing barriers employers face, including uncertainty on how to start youth employment efforts, the range of efforts available to employers, and how to manage and maintain efforts. Programs and intermediaries may be able to assist, for example, where there are opportunities to reduce financial and logistical costs for the employer, like paying interns, processing payroll paperwork and navigating liability concerns.

“I think it’s very important to have [mentors] for interns, as a resource where students can feel comfortable interacting with someone who isn’t their supervisor.”

Mallory Bowers, Corporate Engagement and Communications Manager, Swiftpage

2. Integrating Soft Skills

Developing the soft skills around employment — everything from timeliness to deciding on worksite-appropriate clothing — is a part of effective programs that should not be overlooked. It can be particularly necessary for young people who are new to a workplace environment, and who do not have access to advice from mentors or professional role models. Making a distinct effort to provide training in soft skills can fill these gaps and create an environment where employers can fit young employees into positions with ease.

“We can see a difference from when a kid walks in the door at the beginning of July to when they leave in August after six weeks. Most of them say thank you because they learned something. The takeaway is anything from their own self-confidence grown to their ability to understand a little bit more about the museum.”

Linda Rapacki, Managing Director of Visitor Services and Building Operations, Museum of American Finance

3. Creating a Support System for Participants

As young people may not always know where to go with questions, programs and intermediaries can provide a point of contact outside of the worksite while also offering assistance with work-related challenges like conflict resolution, transportation and childcare. Additionally, intermediaries can complement internal networks in the worksite with external networks that youth can draw on for support.

“[Participating in the program] is not costing us anything. We’re not doing payroll — that’s taken care of. We only have to worry about the work and creating assignments and getting to know the kids... [not having to do payroll] definitely takes away from what would be a bigger task.”

Jim Myers, Manager, Melrose Center for Technology, Innovation, and Creativity at the Orlando Public Library

Philanthropy and Academia

Funding for youth employment and related programs has seen a decrease since a recent high after the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act in 2009. Particularly in a shifting political and policy environment, philanthropy and academia may be called on to provide increasing support to the field of youth employment. As in other fields, foundations can help spur innovation and experimentation in youth employment programming, testing and assessing solutions that employers can replicate in a variety of locations.

Additionally, philanthropy and academia can play central roles in highlighting what is currently working and building momentum to continue similar approaches. Coalitions and agreements like the 100,000 Opportunities Coalition and the #FirstJob compact have seen foundation support, for example.
Government

Spurring employer participation in youth employment helps government to improve outcomes for young people, businesses and the economy overall. Government actors can facilitate employer engagement in youth employment in many ways, including:

1. **Offering Financial Incentives**

Incentives to lessen youth employment costs for employers can draw additional organizations to effective efforts. Partnership grants between sectors, tax incentives such as a hiring tax credit and more novel funding mechanisms like social impact bonds are all options to help employers work toward successful programs. At the same time, the incentives can be tied in compliance with important program design elements like including underserved young people as a target population.

“**You have low-level and high-level [employer engagement] – you need to meet employers where they are. It’s really smaller businesses that want to engage, but often they do not benefit from government tax credit incentives or have the capacity to navigate and understand tax credit programs. [We need to be] creating greater incentives for smaller businesses.”**

Kisha Bird, Director of Youth Policy, CLASP

2. **Matching Funding to Demand**

Government can ensure funding allocations are targeted to programs that have a proven connection to in-demand skills from employers. Such matching helps to ease perceived barriers of being unable to find young employees with needed skills.

“If I were advising the government — when we are talking in general for all countries, what I can advise is you need to understand the demand of market... That doesn’t mean that the government must be beholden to the market, but it must be involved.”

Clecios Vinicius Batista e Silva, Technical Advisor, SENAI-SP

3. **Connecting Government Departments**

Ensure departments focused on education are connected to those focused on youth development, workforce development and all other related fields. Viewing youth employment holistically and across departments will help to alleviate burdens faced by employers in a multifaceted challenge.

“My suggestion for other cities is that you can’t just push getting a job; rather, you’ve got to promote a career pathway. And you have to promote education alongside that.”

Trinh Nguyen, Director, Boston Mayor’s Office of Workforce Development

4. **Incubating and Supporting Effective Intermediaries and Programs**

Intermediaries’ positioning, serving as a connector between employers, participants and government, plays a critical role in effective youth employment efforts. Governments can support intermediaries by providing funding, connecting intermediaries to share best practices, and collecting and disseminating data on the successes and barriers of youth employment efforts. With robust data collection, governments are also well positioned to support effective programs and advise ineffective programs on potential improvements. Given the role of intermediaries, this support also helps to facilitate effective employer engagement.

“The government ought to create the conditions that make the good [programs] work and the not good ones go out of business. It should be setting the parameters, talking about what it thinks is important for business to get involved in.”

David Johnston, CEO, Social Mobility Foundation

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Sample Policy Opportunities

A variety of policy opportunities exist for those in government to consider in detail, with an end goal of supporting employer engagement in youth employment. Examples include:

- A five-year competitive demonstration project with funding levels that mirror stimulus spending in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.
- Sophisticated program assessment for federal youth programs.
- Soft skills requirements in youth employment programming.
Youth employment programs that effectively involve employers have seen tremendous achievements ranging from high levels of employee retention to improved innovation at firms. There are many entry points to youth employment, and empirical evidence demonstrates that no matter the level of engagement of the employer, programs and youth alike see immediate benefits.
Whether an employer sponsors a site visit to give students a firsthand glimpse into a workspace; launches a mentoring program to build soft skills in youth and help them develop and grow; or creates an internship program that allows youth to effectively learn and perform simultaneously, the current and future value to both youth and employers is clear.

A number of best practices can make these programs even more impactful. Early employer involvement in the development and maintenance of programs leads to well-rounded, supported curricula. Programs that are planned carefully with employers and include opportunities for feedback are ultimately the most useful for youth, as they ensure clear alignment of goals and avoid potential miscommunication. And by collaborating across sectors to increase exposure and contact between local employers and youth, communities can begin setting the building blocks to meet long-run workforce needs and to ensure economic vitality for the generations to come.

Communities and employers are increasingly focusing on using and improving the skills of the people around them to meet the needs of their local economies. Supporting the development of effective youth employment programs can help accelerate this trend. By focusing on the skills development of young people, communities will not only be able to grow their talent pools from within, but also to support an economy that fosters opportunity and mobility for a broader, more diverse group of residents.

While this report lays out the best that the field currently has to offer, to realize the promise of this community-focused model, employers, government and community organizations alike will have to continue developing and experimenting with innovative ways to build and harness the talents of the next generation of the workforce. Youth employment programs provide an important foundational tool in these efforts, helping lay the groundwork for a future workforce that is more competitive and more adaptable to rapidly changing regional economies and business needs.
List of Interviewees

Tim Aldinger
Director of Workforce Development Services, Foundation for California Community Colleges

Clecios Vinicius Batista e Silva
Technical Advisor, SENAI-SP

Kisha Bird
Director of Youth Policy, CLASP

Mallery Bowers
Corporate Engagement and Communications Manager, Swiftpage

Charlotte Cahill
Associate Director for Pathways to Prosperity Network, Jobs for the Future

Steve Dackin
Superintendent of Schools and Community Partnerships for Columbus State Community College

Melissa Ehlinger
Managing Director of Industry Engagement, Educate Now

Jessica Ferguson
EMEA (Europe, Middle East and Africa) Employee Engagement and Volunteerism, JPMorgan Chase

David Fischer
Executive Director, NYC Center for Youth Employment

Hillary Frey
Executive Director, St. Louis Youth Jobs

Flora Maria Garcia
President and CEO, United Arts of Central Florida

James Gurney
Program Director, Futures and Options

Leah Hebert
Director of Intergovernmental and Program Partnerships, NYC Center for Youth Employment

Nancy Hoffman
Senior Advisor and Co-founder, Pathways to Prosperity Network

David Johnston
CEO, Social Mobility Foundation

Lindsay Kalis
Director of Quality, Learning and Development, RK Mechanical

Jon Kinning
COO and Executive Vice President, RK Mechanical

Tom Levanos
Director of Volunteer Services, SSM Health

Patty Machir
Executive Director, Futures and Options

Patrick McCulloch
Director of STL Youth Jobs Programs, MERS/Goodwill

Scot McLemore
Manager of Talent Acquisition and Deployment, Honda North America, Inc.

Louis Miceli
Chief Program Officer at Semper Fidelis Young Adult Leadership Academy

Joanna Munoz
Program Director, Futures and Options

Jim Myers
Manager, Melrose Center for Technology, Innovation, and Creativity at the Orlando Public Library

Trinh Nguyen
Director, Mayor’s Office of Workforce Development, City of Boston

Marjorie Parker
Executive Director, JobsFirstNYC

Maricar Ramos
Senior Manager, Workforce and Partnership Development, Early College & Career Education Office of College & Career Success, Chicago Public Schools

Linda Rapacki
Managing Director of Visitor Services and Building Operations, Museum of American Finance

Linda M. Rodriguez
Head of The Fellowship Initiative and Program Officer for Youth Initiatives, JPMorgan Chase

Martha Ross
Fellow, Metropolitan Policy Program, Brookings Institution

Joe Saboe
Director, Denver Public Schools’ CareerConnect

Elizabeth Santiago
Senior Director of Programs, MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership

Jose Ricardo Mendes Dos Santos
Head of IT School, SENAI-SP

Christiane Schubert
Deputy Regional Director, JOBLINGE

Michelle Scott
Project Manager, Early College & Career Education Office of College & Career Success, Chicago Public Schools

Rebecca Jackson Stoeckle
Vice President, Education Development Center

Shamik Trehan
CEO, Dr. Reddy’s Foundation

Jason Tyszko
Executive Director of the Center for Education and Workforce, US Chamber of Commerce Foundation
Notes


19. Ibid.


22. Ibid.

23. Futures and Options. Who we are. Futures and Options. Retrieved from https://www.futuresandoptions.org/soo/fso/


29. Who We Are (2016). Retrieved from FutureEmploymentoptions.org


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