

White Paper

Job Training Starts Now: Why High School Students Need Youth Employment Opportunities

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Acknowledgements

This paper was made possible by support from The Annie E. Casey Foundation. We would also like to acknowledge the assistance of James Bell Associates and Susan Kellam, and the invaluable insight and expertise of our team of reviewers, though the views contained in the paper are solely those of its authors. Specifically, we thank Ayo Atterberry, The Annie E. Casey Foundation; Jeremy Ayers, Results for America; Katherine Blasik, NAF; Elizabeth Reisner, Policy Studies Associates; Gabriel Rhoads, Project Evident; Martha Ross, Brookings Institution; and Brett Theodos, Urban Institute.

The authors would also like to acknowledge Venture Philanthropy Partners, the World Bank Group, the D.C. Children and Youth Investment Trust Corporation, Strada Education Network (formerly USA Funds), the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and the Fradian Foundation for their support of Urban Alliance's evaluation work, including funding our randomized controlled trial. Finally, we are grateful for the constant support we've received from the Urban Alliance board and staff.

Urban Alliance is a national youth development nonprofit that provides paid, professional internships, job skills training, one-on-one mentoring, and ongoing post-program support to economically-disadvantaged high school seniors. The goal is to expand young people's idea of what is possible for their futures and prepare them for lives of economic self-sufficiency. Founded in Washington, D.C., in 1996, Urban Alliance has since expanded to Baltimore, Chicago, and most recently, Northern Virginia. To date, Urban Alliance has placed over 4,000 students in paid internships and served another nearly 18,000 through job skills training.

As a senior in high school, Andre Williams was determined to take control of his future. His drive to succeed led him to Urban Alliance, a program for high school students that combines intensive soft skills training and one-on-one mentoring with a paid, professional internship. For Andre, the Urban Alliance experience included a paid internship at the World Bank.

While Andre was growing up in Anacostia, one of the highest-poverty areas of Washington, D.C., the types of meaningful internship experiences, like he received at Urban Alliance, weren't readily available to youth like him. Urban Alliance opened a new set of options for Andre's future, and thousands of youth like him. Now a Bill and Melinda Gates Millennium Scholar in graduate school at the University of Southern California, Andre credits the early work exposure in high school with teaching him the skills he needed to succeed in work and in life.

“ Urban Alliance really provided students with the tools necessary to not only succeed in a professional environment, but within life.”

Andre Williams
Urban Alliance Alumnus

Andre shared, “It wasn't just an internship program; it was much more than that. The overall things that they provided students in terms of career development, workshops that ranged anywhere from financial literacy to effective communication to living healthier lifestyles – those were the sort of things that were provided to students ... Urban Alliance really provided students with the tools necessary to not only succeed in a professional environment, but within life.”

Internship opportunities, like those provided by Urban Alliance and similar programs, offer access to a world that most teenagers – regardless of neighborhood – would not otherwise experience. Traditional high schools lack resources and structures to provide youth with the workforce experience and job skills training needed to succeed in life after high school. Without job skills, youth transitioning from high school to college or careers may be at risk of disconnecting from school or employment.

How do programs and schools reach students before they disconnect from school or employment, and how can students navigate within school systems which are not currently equipped to address the issue? Research suggests that finding one's way into the job pipeline must start in high school – before these young people miss future connections to school or work, and while students are a captive audience. Preventing this disconnection should be a priority for policymakers, schools, philanthropic organizations, and businesses.

The Problem

Successfully transitioning American youth from school to career has proved problematic for decades, despite federal legislation and state initiatives. Opportunity youth, also referred to as disconnected youth, are young people between the ages of 16 and 24 who are neither enrolled in school nor participating in the workforce.¹ In 2015, nearly one in eight (4.9 million) people between the ages of 16 and 24 were considered disconnected – 12.3 percent of American youth.

Opportunity youth, also referred to as disconnected youth, are young people between the ages of 16 and 24 who are neither enrolled in school nor participating in the workforce.

From an economic perspective, the cost of youth being disconnected from school and the labor force is devastating. In the landmark 2012 study *The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth*, researchers found the aggregate cost to society of opportunity youth – from lost earnings, lower economic growth, lower tax revenue, and higher government spending – is over \$1 trillion.² This staggering figure makes it clear that reversing this trend in innovative ways should be a priority for policymakers at the local, state, and federal levels.

Waiting to address disconnection once it has already occurred isn't an efficient or economical solution. After high school, youth are scattered without a common convener, so programs to mitigate disconnection are already starting at a disadvantage, often requiring youth to seek them out rather than working with a captive audience.

High school is the last universal, publicly-funded institution on a typical young person's path to adulthood. It's also the last chance for schools and governments to prevent youth disconnection on a large scale. But the traditional public education system

yields uneven results. One obvious cause of disconnection from school or work is failure to graduate high school, but disconnection is not just a drop-out problem. According to a recent Brookings report, 70 percent of disconnected young people aged 20 to 24 have completed high school – and 20 percent have taken college courses.³ If so many disconnected youth have finished high school and even attended some college, what is missing in the high school experience to help them transition to the next step?

Why can't high schools do more?

Traditional high school interventions focus on helping youth earn their diploma. As college readiness has grown in importance, high schools have also prioritized college application and financial aid assistance. Although public schools are improving graduation rates – over 80 percent now graduate⁴ – and widening their focus to college readiness, they haven't succeeded in connecting many students to the next phase of life. Few interventions exist at the high school level that focus on transitioning students into self-sufficient adulthood.

Martha Ross of the Brookings Institution argues that the current college-readiness push in public schools is skewed toward having students meet a rigid set of academic requirements. Not enough schools view soft, professional skills, such as collaborating with coworkers and professional etiquette, to be a core competency or have resources to provide this type of support. Consequently, many non-college-bound teens leave the school system without the wherewithal to secure and keep a job, which has tremendous consequences.

According to a Brookings study from 2000 to 2011, the employment outlook for youth has grown dimmer. On several employment markers, such as employment, labor force underutilization, unemployment, and year-round joblessness, teens and young adults have continually struggled.⁵ However, teens with previous work experience and higher education are more likely to be employed than those without.

Benefits of work-based learning are clear but can be difficult to implement in traditional public schools. Robert Lerman of the Urban Institute sums it up, “We have an architecture for higher education. There’s a framework for accreditation, tuition, and courses. We lack an architecture for what we should be talking about in the workforce [development] field.” Graduation requirements, coupled with pressure to take prescribed courses, leave little flexibility for students to pursue alternate paths. The stigma of career and technical education as a pathway for only non-college-bound students also prevents students from exploring nontraditional learning opportunities.

Work-based learning also includes another hurdle, the participation of external employers. Employers and schools are not typically

engaged in partnerships to support internship opportunities. These relationships are difficult to build and require constant maintenance – a task that already stretched schools and districts are ill-equipped to tackle, and businesses may be hesitant to undertake.

“Urban Alliance is introducing people to a segment of the workforce that they would otherwise not encounter. It takes a lot of work to convince these companies that high school kids can do something valuable,” says Martha Ross.

But the biggest challenge in scaling up and encouraging more corporate and educational partners to engage in workforce opportunities is that schools do not have a system or resources to manage these types of relationships.



The Evidence

The effects of disconnection and challenges to overcoming it are clear. But how do schools and policies change course? Fortunately, evidence is emerging highlighting the effectiveness of early workforce interventions to meet these needs.

MDRC, a research organization, recently conducted a scan of the evidence on what works for disconnected youth. Although the focus is on the population of young people aged 16 to 24 who are not connected to work or school, approaches that can help this population and prevent youth from disconnecting in the first place overlap.

Successful programs share common features such as—

- Paid opportunities and financial incentives
- Connections among education, training, and the job market
- Using youth development approaches
- Comprehensive support services
- Continued support after the program ends⁶

Evidence on programs to prevent disconnection in high school is also growing. According to a recently completed 6-year Urban Institute evaluation, the Urban Alliance program increased the probability of college attendance by 12 percentage points for young men offered the program and by 23 percentage points for young men who completed the program.⁷

This success rate with young men is particularly impressive because, among disadvantaged youth, men traditionally perform so much worse than women, according to Brett Theodos of the Urban Institute, “The program raises males to the level of females.”

The Urban Alliance evaluation also proved successful for a group of students often overlooked in education interventions: the “quiet middle” — students who aren’t failing or dropping out of high school but also are

not earning very high grades. These students are the ones not crying out for help, but who can’t get ahead either and are in real danger of being left behind — particularly if they graduate high school without a secure plan. The evaluation found completing the Urban Alliance program increased by 18 percentage points the likelihood of targeted students (2.0 – 3.0 GPA) enrolling in a 4-year college.

An MDRC evaluation of the Career Academies also points toward improved outcomes for high school male students. The 2008 report is the culmination of a 15-year random assignment study that followed students attending nine different urban high schools from freshman year to 8 years after their scheduled high school

Urban Alliance Randomized Controlled Trial

In 2011, Urban Alliance received a grant from Venture Philanthropy Partners through the federal government’s Social Innovation Fund. This award funded a \$1.2 million randomized controlled trial (RCT) measuring the program’s impact on youth served. Urban Institute, an independent research organization, followed 1,062 youth from 2011-12 and 2012-13 school years who applied for Urban Alliance’s High School Internship Program.

The RCT results showed completing the High School Internship Program boosted the likelihood of young men attending college by 23 percentage points and of middle-tier students (2.0 – 3.0 average GPA) enrolling in a 4-year college by 18 percentage points, and resulted in greater comfort with and retention of soft skills, especially among young men.

graduation. Findings showed that earnings for young men in the Academy group increased 17 percent annually—nearly \$30,000 over 8 years.⁸

A decade ago, the study also provided rigorous evidence indicating that investments in career-oriented programs and experiences for high school students can have a long-term payoff in the labor market. Importantly, the employment and earnings gains did not come at the expense of post-secondary enrollment and completion.

James Kemple, one of the lead researchers of the study, notes, “These findings suggest that pitting academic preparation against career development in high schools may be a false dichotomy.”⁹

With recent dramatic drops in the teenage employment rate – 43 percent of teenagers were employed in 2000, compared to 26

percent in 2014¹⁰ – the onus is on high schools, businesses, government, and philanthropy to reverse this trend. The current research shows promising ways to tackle the problem.

As more than a dozen evaluations are currently underway, our understanding of what works is expected to advance significantly in coming years. Urban Alliance is continuing to work with the Urban Institute evaluators to track the progress of youth who completed the program across all regions in which Urban Alliance operates by tracking the answers to the following questions: How many youth graduate with post-secondary education degrees? Is the earning power of the treatment group greater than that of the control group? Do any disconnect? Continued research will provide a road map to help support school systems and refine programs that could reach youth before they disconnect.

Innovative Programs – Urban Alliance

Urban Alliance and other programs such as Genesys Works, Year Up, Career Academies, and state-run apprenticeship programs offer a potential solution to disconnection. At Urban Alliance, students receive early work experience, skills training, mentoring, and intensive case management. Urban Alliance provides training on hard and soft skills to youth with no previous professional exposure. Soft skills include behaviors and activities that help people navigate the workplace, such as networking, professional etiquette, and how to interact with others. These can apply across industries.

By teaching these soft skills, which complement technical, vocational, and academic skills, founder of Urban Alliance Mary Zients realized, “We became a bridge to self-sustainability.”

“I was able to obtain so much information on how to be professional in the corporate world, from learning basic office etiquette, business attire, and how to properly write a resume. Urban Alliance gave me the tools I needed to be successful at my job site,” shared Marie De Messou, Urban Alliance Alumna.

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Urban Alliance Alumna

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Where schools have heightened focus on college readiness, Urban Alliance

has stepped up efforts to keep youth connected and provide job skills. Urban Alliance and similar programs work with public schools to prepare disadvantaged youth for both college and work.

As with Andre Williams, internship opportunities during the senior year of high school encourage youth to conceptualize a different future, for which Urban Alliance supplies them with the necessary skills. Sometimes that future requires a long route with a college degree, or sometimes a shorter one through a vocational path, but all avenues require the same basic set of soft skills.

Early access to employment and professional environments can help students smoothly transition to the next phase of their life, and better prepare them for a life of economic self-sufficiency.

“ I never would have thought that I would have been majoring in a degree such as [Psychology]. However, once I completed my internship, I knew exactly what I wanted to do... ”

Naomi Johnson
Urban Alliance Alumna

Urban Alliance has placed over 4,000 young people like Andre in professional internships over the past two decades. The program now operates in Washington, D.C., Baltimore, Chicago, and Northern Virginia.

Similar Programs in Youth Workforce Development

- Genesys Works provides internships, job training, mentoring, and post-high school planning for students from low-income backgrounds in five regions of the country. Recent research has shown a social return on investment of 13.46 times for each dollar invested in the program.
- Year Up provides internships and job training for disconnected youth aged 18-24 who have graduated high school but not college. Year Up offers youth a 6-month training program followed by a 6-month internship in large corporations.
- Career Academies operates over 8,000 “school within a school” centers for high school youth, offering career preparation and planning. They partner with local employers who sponsor career awareness and work-based learning opportunities.
- Statewide apprenticeship programs provide alternatives to the traditional high school diploma in states such as Colorado, Wisconsin, and Georgia. They offer work-based learning with employers in addition to classroom instruction.

Urban Alliance's Youth Employment Prescriptions

The evidence is clear: comprehensive efforts to introduce youth to employment are a promising solution to help high school students avoid disconnection. Early access to job training, networks, and opportunities can help students connect and persist in any pathway— college, career, or vocational training. Unfortunately, too few students are getting such opportunities in high school.

As a society, we need to rethink what it means to fully prepare youth for life after high school. Students require different paths to achieve their individual goals. Flexibility at the high school level must be integral to the process. Finally, we need to align the institutions accountable for a young person's success. To start this process, we offer the following Youth Employment Prescriptions.

For Schools

1 *Enhance the high school experience with credit-bearing internships*

Access to early employment opportunities in high school can help disadvantaged youth find post-secondary success. Presently, many obstacles exist in high schools that could discourage participation in such work-based learning. Schools should examine how to initiate such programs in the curricula. Frequently, students who struggle academically or economically are often pushed to bolster their transcripts with traditional classes and non-work-based extracurricular programs. These students are the ones who could most benefit from internships.

Schools should also allow for more flexibility for students to participate in internships and other forms of work-based learning. Student schedules could permit using traditional class hours for professional and soft skills training. As

school districts continue to intensify academic requirements, many students are struggling just to meet those core competencies and have little time on their schedules for this type of training.

Another option is to create alternate tracks for meeting graduation requirements by allowing internships and substantive employment opportunities to count for credit. School districts, with support from intermediary workforce organizations, can design academic experiences around employment opportunities to give them more weight. This approach has been successful in some of the school districts with which Urban Alliance has partnered, such as Arlington Public Schools in Virginia. In Arlington, students have a senior project as a graduation requirement. The Urban Alliance internship program can fulfill this requirement. Similarly, in Chicago, all Urban Alliance students share one teacher-of-record who grades and assigns credits for student training and internships.

We recommend breaking the dichotomy of work opportunities versus graduation requirements. Students should be given an opportunity to experience an internship while progressing toward graduation. The argument that a traditional class schedule is the straightest path toward college can no longer go unopposed.

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2 *Partner with youth employment specialists to support work-based learning*

When a school or district includes work-based learning in its curricula, it can be a heavy lift. Schools must navigate the complex number of individuals involved in employing youth. They need to manage relationships with students, employers, and parents, while juggling academic requirements with post-high school



planning. Business staffing needs and funding gaps add further complications to the already-packed daily schedules of educators.

The tasks of traditional college- and- career counselors do not typically include the programming needs of a youth employment initiative. Schools and districts can certainly tackle these hurdles in-house, but committing to a successful internship program requires a dedicated staff along with a bolstered curriculum. Staff need to understand the local employment landscape and serve as liaisons between the job site and students. Partnering with outside organizations can take that burden off already cash-strapped and overworked public schools. Comprehensive programming that combines employment experiences, work-skills training, and youth coaching needs specialization and consistent oversight.

We recommend schools consider tapping into the existing expertise of an organization, such as Urban Alliance, that specializes in youth employment. These organizations have already done the ground work building relationships and developing training modules. As an alternative, schools can consider available state apprenticeship programs.

For example, Urban Alliance runs a program in partnership with Baltimore City Public Schools. The school system, hoping to tap into the staffing needs of local construction and contracting companies, relied upon Urban Alliance to deliver soft skills training and case management services to a cohort of students from vocational schools in the city, while the businesses provided work-based learning in the form of paid internships. The students were given the opportunity to put the training they received in the classroom into practice on the job.

For Philanthropists

3 *Keep youth on track in high school— before they have a chance to get off track*

The philanthropic sector has traditionally responded to the plight of youth disconnection by allocating funds to interventions specifically reserved for out-of-work and out-of-school youth. On the federal level, the 2014 federally funded Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) updated the 1998 Workforce Investment Act (WIA) by increasing the percentage of dollars spent on out-of-school youth from 30 percent to 75. Though reconnecting opportunity youth is vital work, it is an inefficient approach to dedicate most funds to addressing only one part of the solution.

By the same logic that high schools should focus more on preventing youth disconnection before it happens, so should philanthropists. Philanthropists and government appropriators should increase their focus on in-school youth, targeting the transition to post-secondary pathways to keep at-risk students from disconnecting before it happens. By preventing just one youth from disconnecting, philanthropists can save society more than \$700,000 over the youth's lifetime, according to The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth. Prevention is simply a more effective and economical solution to disconnection than spending money to reverse a situation that is already costing taxpayers money.

Philanthropists can also underwrite research to fine-tune and improve prevention strategies. Rigorous evaluations such as randomized controlled trials (RCT) and other program assessments can be prohibitively expensive for the nonprofit organizations operating prevention programs. Additionally, philanthropic sponsorship can help organizations better understand the details of exactly what makes youth employment interventions work—the type of skills, experiences, industries, or employers that make the greatest impact to a young person at risk of disconnection.

4 *Encourage the business community to invest in youth*

Effective internship programs rely on strong corporate partnerships and should be mutually beneficial to the organization, interns, and businesses. Philanthropists can help nonprofits provide benefits that go beyond the obvious boost to a brand's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) that comes along with such a partnership. By investing in a nonprofit's infrastructure needs—management, communications, evaluation, etc.—the philanthropic field can enable a nonprofit to offer greater customer service to their corporate partners. Their support can make it possible for nonprofits to generate media coverage for their partners, develop feedback loops that can inform their corporate culture, and help businesses build a recruitment pipeline.

Further, despite the benefits for corporations to engage in work-based learning programs, partnerships will have a certain amount of risk and cost. Corporations often want to feel confident that the benefits of such a partnership outweigh the risks, and public, early buy-in from philanthropists can help to convince them.

We recommend philanthropic organizations invest in building strong partnerships by championing a nonprofit, both financially and publicly. Urban Alliance funders such as Venture Philanthropy Partners, the Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer Foundation, and Strada Education Network have all recently publicized the positive outcomes of their investment in youth employment. This public endorsement helps to make potential partners more comfortable. Businesses need assurance that they aren't investing in an unknown quantity, and in the process, putting their brand at risk. When philanthropic organizations support nonprofits, they add credibility to youth employment programs. This philanthropic backing can put prospective employers at ease, and businesses can then align themselves with a good cause and with a philanthropic foundation already known in the local community.

For Policymakers

5 *Redefine post-secondary success*

Both federal and state policies are focused on ensuring high schools graduate students who are prepared to succeed in college or a career. Schools are held accountable through standardized assessments and course requirements. For example, the 2016 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires all states to adopt college- and career-ready benchmarks and to annually assess how well students are meeting those standards while in high school.

Although tracking an initial connection to college post-graduation is important, that narrow focus on high school graduation and college enrollment as markers of success discounts other valid, longer-term connections.

We recommend states, school districts, or local governments consider creating policies aimed at assessing and tracking graduates for up to 2 years post-graduation. In this way, high school success can measure not only initial connection post-graduation, but persistence. This additional accountability for post-high school success will encourage district leaders and principals to consider interventions and partnerships that set students up for success well into adulthood, not just getting students from graduation to their immediate next step. A lengthier assessment period would also broaden the definition of success beyond the students' in-school performance and graduation status. While we recognize that tracking students for an extra 2 years may be resource-intensive, it is critical to really understand how graduates are engaging with college and the workforce.

Policymakers should also create a strict benchmark for success by clearly defining



“connection,” and detailing the numerous options young people have for staying on a pathway to success after high school. State and local governments must provide schools with clear guidance on the education, career-training, and workforce opportunities available to students after graduation, considering regional differences and the local job market. Then policymakers need to make post-high school planning mandatory – requiring students to prepare for a specific pathway before graduation. For example, Chicago Public Schools requires each graduating student to create a personalized plan outlining the various pathways to which he or she can connect, including college and career. This data can be tracked and publicly reported in the same manner as high school graduation rates.

Finally, to reinforce the concept that internships should be treated as distinct learning opportunities within the high school experience, states and localities should mandate workforce participation for schools, allowing them a sufficient transition period to get their student body up to full participation. We believe that all students should have some work experience during high school to enforce the notion of being college- and career-ready. However, district- or state-level policy is often required to ensure that schools make the changes needed to smoothly incorporate work experience into the curricula.

6 *Increase collaboration among data sources*

One of the challenges in tracking young people post-high school is the sheer multitude of data points. Traditional pathway options, like college, can be tracked through administrative databases such as the National Student Clearinghouse. But employment and enrollment in career-training programs are not reported in such easily accessible, centralized databases. Additionally, nonprofit organizations who are supporting youth with workforce opportunities often don't have access to data which could support their programming and research efforts.

To meet tracking and accountability recommendations, data systems must be

sophisticated enough to help policymakers understand and evaluate various student outcomes, differentiating among college, career, or a combination of the two.

The federal government is currently taking steps to make data more accessible and streamlined at the national level. The Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act, which seeks to establish a more secure, transparent, and efficient data system to help federal agencies better assess the effectiveness of their programs, has received bipartisan support and is on its way to congressional approval. States and localities would also benefit from such a commitment to transparency and increasing accessibility of data.

Local policymakers should seek out collaboration among data systems that include education, employment, wage, and social welfare data points, such as anonymized and privacy-protected criminal justice and government subsidy statistics. Working to establish data sharing agreements can ensure confidentiality and protection of sensitive data, while still reaching programmatic and research goals. Many of these data points already exist within jurisdictions, but are largely scattered among numerous agencies, and inaccessible to the public. Nonprofits, school districts, and philanthropists should collaborate and find ways of sharing data to better work together in evaluating and building city-specific initiatives and efforts.

Working to establish data sharing agreements can ensure confidentiality and protection of sensitive data, while still reaching programmatic and research goals.

States and localities can use this approach to begin creating benchmarks to evaluate school- and district-level progress on college and career readiness that combine education and employment successes in one metric, making it easier to understand whether a

school is successfully transitioning students into adulthood. These outcomes should also be made public, increasing transparency for students, families, and communities. Publicly available college and career data will encourage new school partnerships and innovations as districts adjust to new post-high school benchmarks.

For Businesses

7 *Realize the potential of young workers*

Workforce development nonprofits rely on the corporate sector's willingness to open its doors to youth workers and interns. But as mentioned previously, the relationship must benefit businesses, and internships must fit within the standard business structure. It is up to nonprofits to highlight the benefits to businesses.

We encourage the business community to consider the full range of benefits when assessing the value of internships. Increasingly, companies consider their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as a recruitment and engagement tool for employees.¹¹ Community development and youth mentoring are both ingrained in workforce programs and have the added benefit of fulfilling CSR.

“ [Urban Alliance] interns have changed the way we do our work and have helped me to refine almost everything I do. ”

Jim Egenrieder
Director of the Qualcomm Thinkabit
Lab at Virginia Tech

But the benefits extend beyond CSR. They can provide corporations with eager and energetic workers with fresh perspectives. Internship programs increase the diversity of staff— not just in age and race, but in life experience as well. Employers can benefit from the variety of perspectives. “[Urban Alliance] interns have changed the way we do our work and have helped me to refine almost everything I do,” said Jim Egenrieder, director of the Qualcomm Thinkabit Lab at Virginia Tech.

Internships can also increase productivity. The supervision of interns can be used to train junior-level staffers in staff management. Done well, these supervisors will be setting work product expectations, managing deadlines, and offering feedback—real, hands-on training that cannot be duplicated elsewhere. Finally, employers can realize the benefit of the extra support. Urban Alliance interns are available to work 600 hours during their 10-month experience. Imagine what can be accomplished with the staff free to use that time elsewhere.

8 *Invest in workforce development now*

It is common for corporations to face an excess of unskilled applicants. Solutions need to provide young people with skills and experiences employers seek before they leave school. The consequences of this skills gap weigh heavily on employers. Along with educators, employers should share some responsibility for a solution.

Businesses can first identify what applicant skills are most valued and needed and then share this information with educators and workforce intermediaries in a position to train young people. By sharing their needs, they build relationships with the educators and nonprofits directly positioned to respond to their needs. Then, businesses should build on those relationships and invest in training and work-based learning programs. For a better future workforce, invest in youth workforce development now.

Conclusion

All young people—regardless of school or zip code—should have the opportunity to pursue a pathway to economic self-sufficiency after high school. High schools need to propel their graduates to further training or education. Programs like Urban Alliance can pave the way. Not only do these job-training programs help young people achieve their dreams, youth-training programs have the potential to develop a world-class workforce for the 21st century.

Urban Alliance has embraced a ‘culture of continual improvement’ to ensure that students are receiving the highest-quality youth employment services. The RCT evaluation offers many insights into how to keep improving and expanding our program.

But internal improvements are only one piece of a larger whole. Youth employment intervention doesn’t work in a vacuum. Nonprofits work in tandem with schools, philanthropists, businesses, and policymakers to form a community of change.

This communal approach to change is represented through the importance of mentoring in our program – and is a lesson we teach all our interns. We want them to walk away from Urban Alliance with a network of support, and the knowledge that success is just as much about your own hard work as it is about accepting help from others.

“I wouldn’t be at the University of Southern California if it weren’t for all the people encouraging me,” said Andre Williams. “We can’t do it without others.”

This larger community is vital to the future success of programs that can intercept at-risk youth before disconnection. The more that different forces—public, private, philanthropic—combine to redirect youth in a productive direction, the more we can, as adults, help the next generation succeed.



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