

# Building and Strengthening Employer Partnerships for Work-Based Learning

A Roundtable Series Convened by the City of New York

April 2023





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# Executive Summary

## Introduction

**JOBSFIRSTNYC PARTNERED WITH THE NEW YORK CITY MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC Initiatives, the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD), and the New York City Department of Education to support the expansion to 100,000 placements of New York City's Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) through increased employer partnerships and capacity building—particularly with small and mid-size businesses. Key to this effort were the NYC Mayor's Office of Talent and Workforce Development, New York City Department of Small Business Services (SBS), business improvement districts (BIDs), and chambers of commerce. Engaging with various stakeholders including government agencies, nonprofits/workforce providers, and employers, this initiative aimed to develop actionable recommendations that would strengthen employers' capacity to provide high-quality work-based learning experiences for young adults, both during SYEP as well as year-round, and sustain and grow the city's relationships with workforce development providers and employers to support greater work-based learning opportunities.**

## Methodology

The recommendations in this report were informed by: background research to understand best practices in providing high-quality work-based learning experiences, including reports from successful programs in other cities; six facilitated sessions from April to September 2022 with key stakeholders in New York City to identify best practices, pain points, areas of opportunity, and understand the broader labor market for young adults; and young adult input via survey responses from 104 SYEP participants in 2022.

## Roundtable Launch

The City of New York launched the roundtable on April 20, 2022 while underscoring the alignment of the goals of this initiative with the Adams Administration, the critical importance of partnership for successful employer engagement, and the importance of work-based learning for young adults. Chief Strategy Officer Mike Nolan also highlighted the efforts the city has taken to strategically expand and strengthen employer partnerships for work-based learning, especially with small and mid-size businesses, through focusing on “more, better, and different” jobs and experiences.

## Background Research

A review of key literature on work-based learning and summer employment programs underscored the benefits of such initiatives for young adult professional development. Research by MDRC, The Urban Institute, Brookings Institution, and Aspen Institute revealed important strategies for: deepening and increasing employer engagement, including identifying champions for the program and securing strong mayoral support; providing strong support for employers and participants through the use of toolkits, coaches, comprehensive surveys, and increased collaboration; and communicating effectively by tailoring the message of the benefits of summer employment programs to local industries or audiences.

## Roundtable Session Findings

The six roundtable sessions unearthed a variety of pain points and areas of improvement for strengthening relationships with small and mid-sized businesses. For employer recruitment and engagement, participants highlighted a need for greater cross-stakeholder collaboration, an expansion of communication channels to other stakeholders and communities, greater and more consistent messaging around the value add of SYEP to employers, and innovation in data gathering on the employer experience. Regarding program experience and implementation, participants underscored the need for greater training of employers and young adults (including core skills and HR support), coordination among the various community based organizations and employer partners, and a balance between SYEP expansion and quality of experiences.

## Young Adult Input

The results of a survey conducted among SYEP participants highlighted the overall success and satisfaction among young adults of the SYEP program, especially in terms of exposure to career exploration and workplace experience. The young adults surveyed also underscored the benefits of having an SYEP participant for employers—namely by introducing new perspectives, bringing valuable technology know-how, and helping employers learn to work with younger workers and train a new pipeline of talent. The young adult feedback on areas of improvement also complements the findings of the roundtable by noting that a greater variety of internship opportunities in different sectors, as well as greater agency among participants in choosing a work site, would help improve the SYEP experience for both parties.

## Recommendations

One area of recommendations focused on **employer recruitment and engagement** of new employer partners. Recommendations include: expand and build **employer communications tools**, increase access to a robust infrastructure for **young adult participant training alongside employer training**, and foster **recruitment and network engagement** for attracting new employers. The second area of recommendations focused on improving **program experience and implementation** to foster retention of employer partners. Recommendations include: **employer resource development** for creating supportive work environments for young adults, resources and support for fostering strong **educational experience at employer placements**, and strategies for optimizing **employer retention** at SYEP and other work-based learning programs.



### SHORT-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ Strengthen and proactively engage existing and new partnerships with city agencies to increase awareness of SYEP and other work-based learning programs.
- ▶ Improve the accessibility of training resources and incentivize participation.
- ▶ Target messaging to convey SYEP's value-add to employers .
- ▶ Collect and disseminate testimonials on how young adult participants have been able to tangibly improve the work of their employer.
- ▶ Add new training topics and resources that employers could benefit from to the existing toolkit.
- ▶ Help employers ensure that their job descriptions provide a clear and detailed set of skills, core competencies, expectations.
- ▶ Work with employers to develop a list of skills and core competencies that young adults will receive through their work experience.
- ▶ Implement new strategies for employer retention by treating worksites as respected partners, including events to boost morale.



### MEDIUM-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ Tap into new vehicles for messaging to strengthen outreach.
- ▶ Build a pre-program orientation infrastructure in partnership with CBOs and other stakeholders that provides an expanded menu of options .
- ▶ Develop strategies for tapping local neighborhood employers and canvassing communities in order to understand local trends in employment.
- ▶ Implement additional onboarding training and support for employers (e.g., anti-bias training and young adult/first-time employer management assistance).
- ▶ Provide work portfolios that give young adult participants a structured blueprint for gaining experiences and opportunities while contributing to the company from day one.
- ▶ Engage the mayor to communicate directly with employers.



## LONG-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ Develop or procure a discrete communications platform that enables text messaging or other direct communication to employers
- ▶ Offer young adult participants advanced training opportunities and formal certifications tailored to their placements, along with regular skill development opportunities
- ▶ Develop expanded, ongoing partnerships with small to midsize employers in the areas of technology, healthcare, and finance to meet young adults' career exploration interests.
- ▶ Provide employers with advance information on the experience level of their incoming youth participants.
- ▶ Provide increased funds to CBOs so they can provide young adults with additional support.
- ▶ Introduce employers to work-based learning programs they can be involved in throughout the academic year, and expand the possible menu of opportunities.

## Conclusion

This report provides City Hall and SYEP stakeholders with actionable recommendations for building and strengthening partnerships with small to mid-size businesses throughout New York City. Collaboratively taking up these recommendations will help to expand, diversify, and strengthen the pool of prospective small to mid-size businesses participating in SYEP, and, more broadly, the number of high-quality work opportunities available for New York City's young adult population.



Photo: NYC Department of Youth & Community Development



# Introduction

## **JOBSFIRSTNYC PARTNERED WITH THE NEW YORK CITY MAYOR'S OFFICE OF STRATEGIC**

Initiatives, the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD), and the New York City Department of Education to support the expansion of New York City's Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) through increased employer partnerships and capacity building. Over the long term, the strategy is to improve the work-based learning experiences of young adults and employers, via small and midsize private sector employer partnerships, beginning with SYEP and then continuing on to year-round work-based learning opportunities.

More employers are needed to expand access to work-based learning opportunities, including internships, paid work experiences, and research opportunities. The New York State Board of Regents defines work-based learning as "learning activities that take place in the workplace or in the school in collaboration with the community to provide a service or produce a product that meets industry standards. The successful design and implementation of work-based learning experiences require the collaboration of education and business and industry stakeholders." There is high demand among New York City's young adults to participate in work-based learning, and city agencies, educational institutions, and community-based and workforce development organizations currently partner to offer these experiences. Though employers—whether for-profit companies or nonprofit organizations—are critical to offering young adult work-based learning experiences, it can be challenging for the city to recruit and retain employer partners for this end. This is because employers may have other priorities for growing their business or meeting their missions, or they may not fully appreciate the value of such partnerships.

The collaboration between JobsFirstNYC and the Mayor's Office resulted from Mayor Eric Adams's 2022 initiative to provide an unprecedented 100,000 good-quality jobs over the summer for young adults, and New York City needing to ensure an increased pool of employers were signed on to support this growth. This expansion, from 75,000 in the summer of 2019, was the most significant



**New York City's Summer Youth Employment Program** is the nation's largest youth employment program, connecting young adults between the ages of 14 and 24 to paid work opportunities. SYEP placements run for six weeks in July and August annually and allow participants to explore careers; gain professional experience; and develop social, civic, and leadership skills.



expansion of SYEP to date. Instrumental for increasing the number and quality of employment opportunities for young people is building and strengthening employer partnerships to collaborate with city agencies and community-based organization providers. Every year across New York City, thousands of young adults seek high-quality year-round and summer work experiences. Meanwhile, many employers are interested in working with young adults but are uncertain how to best work with them and provide high-quality work opportunities. This is particularly true for small to midsize businesses, which make up 98% of all businesses in New York City (with 89% qualifying as very small, or under 20 staff).<sup>1</sup> Without adequate support and training, many of these businesses lack the capacity to onboard young adults. To help dismantle these barriers, **JobsFirstNYC convened a five-month roundtable—the Roundtable on Building and Strengthening Employer Partnerships for Work-Based Learning—with two goals in mind:**

- 1 Strengthen employers' capacity to provide high-quality work-based learning experiences for young adults.**
- 2 Sustain and grow the city's and workforce development providers' relationships with employers by implementing supports based on individualized employer needs.**

The roundtable consisted of multiple stakeholders (namely, government agencies, employers, business improvement districts, chambers of commerce, and nonprofit workforce development providers) who worked together to identify how best to build a supportive work-based learning system for employers, providers, and young adults. The roundtable launched on April 20, 2022, and met monthly through September 20, 2022, with communication and work ongoing between meetings.

JADE GRIEVE, CHIEF OF  
STUDENT PATHWAYS AT NEW YORK  
CITY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION NOTED,

**“Work-Based Learning is a key component of preparing our students for successful postsecondary opportunities. The expansion of SYEP is instrumental for ensuring that more students gain access to work experience key to helping them make the right choice.”**

# Goals of the Roundtable

## **THE ROUNDTABLE'S PRIMARY AIM WAS TO DEVELOP ACTIONABLE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STRENGTHENING EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT IN SYEP AND YEAR-ROUND WORK-BASED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES, SPECIFICALLY AMONG SMALL (0-100 EMPLOYEES) AND MIDSIZE BUSINESSES (UP TO 500 EMPLOYEES).**

Participating stakeholders included the New York City Mayor's Office, city agencies, SYEP employer partners, chambers of commerce, business improvement districts (BIDs), and community-based organizations (CBOs) that provide workforce development services to young adults (referred to interchangeably in this report as either CBOs or providers). Meeting this goal will help SYEP and other work-based learning programs connect more young adults over the long term with opportunities to gain work experience in a variety of fields, sectors, and specializations.

IN A JOINT STATEMENT, ENDORSING THE PARTNERSHIP, THE FIVE CEOs OF NEW YORK CITY FIVE-BOROUGH CHAMBER ALLIANCE EXPRESSED THEIR EXCITEMENT TO PARTNER WITH THE ADAMS ADMINISTRATION TO SUPPORT THE EXPANSION OF SYEP IN NYC.

**"We are very supportive of the strategy to engage small and mid-size businesses, which comprise the majority of our members, in accessing talent while providing a high quality work experience for young adults in New York City."**



### **The roundtable facilitated results-oriented activities among stakeholders to drive action around the following areas:**

- ▶ understanding current best practices among small and midsize businesses that work with young people
- ▶ creating differentiated strategies to engage small and midsize businesses and to increase the number of employers who provide work-based learning opportunities, including via SYEP
- ▶ identifying key resources to educate employers on how to work with young people and provide a high-quality work-based learning experience
- ▶ promoting alignment between all stakeholders, including employers, BIDs, chambers of commerce, workforce development providers, and city government
- ▶ determining what structures providers and small and midsize employers have in place to provide high-quality work-based learning experiences and develop recommendations to scale these practices
- ▶ enhancing the systems needed to onboard and train employers to be better prepared to work with young adults
- ▶ ensuring that more small and midsize employers are committed to providing work-based learning opportunities in the long term

# Methodology

This effort utilized a three-pronged methodology: (1) background research on the current state of work-based learning and employer engagement; (2) stakeholder engagement and sharing via facilitated sessions; and (3) young adult input.

**Background research:** JobsFirstNYC, along with future Roundtable participants, began with an investigative phase aimed at deepening the collective understanding of what high-quality work-based learning looks like and what structures providers and employers must have in place to provide such an experience. This research included learning from other cities with strong summer youth employment programs and employer partnerships.

**Stakeholder engagement and Learning:** Six facilitated sessions between April and September 2022 allowed roundtable participants to share ideas and explore specific themes together. The first two sessions focused on employer engagement—identifying what works well, key pain points, and potential activities for improvement. The third session highlighted opportunities for collaboration by presenting a successful employer-CBO partnership and facilitating a discussion of how to better enable cross-stakeholder collaboration. At the fourth session, participants explored the economic and labor market conditions facing young adults in New York City. Recommendations for building and strengthening employer partnerships with small to midsize businesses were workshopped and refined at the fifth meeting. The sixth and final session involved a review of the roundtable’s recommendations.



**Sourcing young adult input:** Given the importance of centering young adult voices in programs that aim to serve them, JobsFirstNYC conducted a survey of 104 SYEP participants in August 2022. This survey included quantitative questions about young adults' experiences with their employers, as well as qualitative questions about how their participation benefitted employers. Questions included the following:

- ▶ How has your employer (your supervisor and/or the workplace) grown from having you there? What new values and perspectives have you brought to your team?
- ▶ Why do you think an employer should participate in SYEP, and how does this program benefit them?
- ▶ How could we improve your overall work experience in this program?


PAUL ORTEGA,  
PRINCIPAL  
AND FOUNDER,  
MOTIVATIONCHECK

**“NYC’s young adults are an untapped talent resource for its employers. Employers who participate in work experience programs will facilitate the exponential growth of an engaged workforce within New York from an untapped yet hyper-capable segment of our population.”**



# Roundtable Launch


The roundtable was launched by the City of New York on April 20, 2022. At the launch, First Deputy Mayor Sheena Wright noted how the **goals of the roundtable align with the goals of Mayor Adams' s administration:**




*One of the big priorities of this administration is to ensure that young people have pathways to economic mobility, that they have pathways to realizing their full potential. We announced this summer that there would be a historic investment in summer youth employment.*

She also expressed the **critical importance of employer engagement** throughout the city:

*You have to have a direct link to employers and workforce opportunities that enable [young adults] to develop and explore, and also bring all of their talents and gifts to the marketplace.*




She conveyed the **importance of partnership for success:**



*This administration fundamentally believes that government cannot do it alone; we have to work in partnership across sectors, with the nonprofit community, with the business community, and co-create and build together the best initiatives and efforts to achieve our collective goals.*

Lastly, First Deputy Mayor Wright made it clear that this effort was not just about SYEP but about **work-based learning and young adult hiring more broadly:**

*We expect that the summer initiative and the historic work we are doing over this summer is part of a longer-term strategy. This summer is the first big step. We are looking to the years to come to iterate, grow, develop, and refine what we collectively need to do.*



Michael Nolan, chief strategy officer at the New York City Mayor's Office for Strategic Policy Initiatives, provided context for the roundtable. He stated that the tremendous growth that resulted in the largest commitment ever for summer youth employment jobs means that the "number-one priority for us is **employer engagement**; those two words I've heard spoken more in the past three months than I've heard them spoken in the past several years. A youth employment job is only as valuable as the experience the young person gets. Because of this, we need a diverse portfolio of opportunities."

**Nolan shared that New York City has undergone a number of developments around employer engagement for work-based learning opportunities, including the following:**

- 1. Increased staff capacity**
- 2. Centralized strategy**
- 3. Sectoral focus**
- 4. New infrastructure**
- 5. Stakeholder outreach**

The city is focused on youth in high-need, low-income communities, particularly youth in public housing, youth who are systems involved, and youth with disabilities.

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The strategy for employer engagement could be summarized as "more, better, different."

- ▶ **More jobs and experiences** - substantial investment and program growth;
- ▶ **Better jobs and experiences** - focus on increasing program quality and aligning with labor market trends; and
- ▶ **Different jobs and experiences** - increased differentiation and specialization across ages/stages.

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First Deputy Mayor Wright shared that this roundtable's focus on small and midsize employers is meant to increase our understanding of how to ensure the best experiences for 14- to 24-year-olds who do not have opportunities for meaningful work experiences outside of SYEP. She noted that some of the most impactful work experiences are to be found in small and midsize employers where young employees can contribute meaningfully across the company through their creativity, technological know-how, and other skills.



**"A small business will sometimes lean on a young person and give them responsibilities they may never get in a large system. What systems and structures can be put in place so that small and midsize businesses are really the bread and butter of our employer pool going forward?"**

-MICHAEL NOLAN, MAYOR'S OFFICE

# Background Research

## **ON THE WHOLE, THE LITERATURE REVIEW CONFIRMED THE SIGNIFICANT BENEFIT OF**

summer employment programs for youth. As noted by one report, such programs “allow[ ] youth to develop employability skills, academic and professional aspirations, and an understanding of the demands of a workplace.”<sup>2</sup> In particular, these programs can provide an important foundation for young people who may not have such an opportunity elsewhere.

However, there are also many challenges to the effective implementation of summer employment programs for youth. According to a 2017 MDRC report on the New York City SYEP specifically, the program’s large size makes it difficult to ensure a high-quality experience for all participants. The report acknowledges that SYEP “is an enormous undertaking that requires year-round planning and coordination.”<sup>3</sup> Placing such a large number of young adults in such a short period of time while attempting to provide a certain amount of individual tailoring to the experience is a tall ask. Other challenges facing summer employment programs include a lack of capacity and resources among employers and providers alike.<sup>4</sup> This naturally results in a wide variety of experiences, even within the same sector or employer.

Nevertheless, the literature reveals that efforts to bolster employer engagement and support, as well as support to providers and young adult participants, can increase the overall quality of experiences and serve as a useful recruiting tool for future employers—especially small and midsize ones.

## **Deepening and Increasing Employer Engagement**

The literature review uncovered numerous concrete strategies for increasing engagement with employers and providing robust support over the life cycle of summer employment programs. According to an Urban Institute report, “finding ways to deepen employer engagement in [summer employment programs for youth] strengthens overall programming and helps facilitate youths’ connections to the workforce.”<sup>5</sup>

“finding ways to deepen employer engagement in [summer employment programs for youth] strengthens overall programming and helps facilitate youths’ connections to the workforce.”

—URBAN INSTITUTE

While not all employers will engage with programs in the same way, understanding the level of engagement among different employer partners can guide a given program’s future engagement strategy. The Urban Institute identifies three main types of partnerships between summer employment programs and employers:<sup>6</sup>

## Common Characteristics of Different Types of Employer Partnerships with SYEPs

Tier 1: Host partner (most common)	Tier 2: Hands-on partner	Tier 3: Strategic or invested partner (least common)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Hosts youth and provides supervisory support</li> <li>▪ Reviews program curricula, helping to define the needs of local industry partners</li> <li>▪ Maintains contact with SYEP site</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Helps develop curriculum</li> <li>▪ Provides mentorship opportunities for youth</li> <li>▪ Provides supplemental training opportunities for youth</li> <li>▪ Serves as a professional reference for youth following program completion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Participates in cost sharing or leverages funds, including providing scholarships</li> <li>▪ Helps with recruitment</li> <li>▪ Champions or advocates for the program in the community and is willing to host events.</li> <li>▪ Hires youth following program completion</li> </ul>

The Brookings Institution highlights the importance of securing mayoral commitment, as having a mayor who is an enthusiastic supporter of summer programs aids engagement efforts, and a mayor’s ties with various businesses can be a valuable resource for recruitment. New York City Mayor Adams’s work to drive SYEP forward—through public announcements, engaging corporate councils, and employer appreciation events and videos, among other things—is an example of such commitment.



Photo: NYC Department of Youth & Community Development

**While large employers are the least common type of employer partner, securing such partners can help increase engagement with other employers in the same sector. Thus, identifying such businesses can be an important starting point for relationship-building efforts.**

Furthermore, the Brookings Institution highlights the importance of securing mayoral commitment, as having a mayor who is an enthusiastic supporter of summer programs aids engagement efforts, and a mayor’s ties with various businesses can be a valuable resource for recruitment. New York City Mayor Adams’s work to drive SYEP forward—through public announcements, engaging corporate councils, and



employer appreciation events and videos, among other things—is an example of such commitment. Brookings also emphasizes the importance of coordination among city agencies and leveraging connections with agencies and programs that share similar goals.<sup>7</sup>

Additionally, Brookings cites the benefits of year-round engagement with prospective employers, while acknowledging that funding and staffing limitations might make it difficult to engage with employers beyond the summer months. It also cites “strategic partnerships with other entities, such as job training organizations, chambers of commerce, or federally-funded One Stop career centers” as other ways to deepen engagement.<sup>8</sup>

### Providing Support to Employers

Numerous reports reference strategies for improving support systems for employers and young adult participants to enhance the program experience. This is particularly true for small businesses with limited capacity and resources.

The Urban Institute, for example, notes that such support to employers can come in the form of comprehensive toolkits for employers, seasonal “job coaches” who provide tailored assistance to employers and conduct site visits while serving as a main point of contact, and orientations that outline expectations for hosting youth. For youth, supports may include a comprehensive orientation that also outlines expectations, professional development seminars, seasonal “career coaches,” and development workshops throughout the duration of the program.<sup>9</sup>

The Brookings Institution echoes the importance of offering mentoring or coaching for both youth and supervisors in order to maximize positive experiences. Moreover, it emphasizes the importance of quality data collection for continuous program improvement, which can be achieved through performance management systems that allow program coordinators to engage in knowledge building and sharing while streamlining administrative and evaluation procedures.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, the Urban Institute notes that programs can solicit employer feedback about previous summer placements in order to improve the professional development support offered to youth and thus ensure that employers receive placements who best fit their needs.<sup>11</sup>

The Aspen Institute offers additional strategies for strengthening support for employers and participants. Some of these strategies include helping employers tailor their in-house training programs specifically to youth, suggesting that employers with multiple participants organize them into teams that work on collaborative projects in order to minimize supervisory work, and maintaining a centralized point of contact for employers who can be responsive when issues arise.<sup>12</sup>

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION CITES  
**“strategic partnerships with other entities, such as job training organizations, chambers of commerce, or federally-funded One Stop career centers” as other ways to deepen engagement.”**

## Tailoring the Message

The final strategy uncovered in the literature review was the need to tailor summer programs' pitch to local industries or businesses—and emphasize why the program is in the best interest of the employer.

The Urban Institute notes that messaging can take many forms and requires an understanding of various employer motivations (which can be gleaned from surveys and other data-collection efforts): giving back to the community, investing in communities, developing a future pipeline of talent, being able to quickly fill seasonal slots without expending significant financial resources, and supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion goals. The institute also underscores the need to communicate the business value of the program and leverage successful employers as champions.<sup>13</sup>

## Key Takeaways

The literature reveals that the challenges faced by New York City in increasing employer engagement and recruitment in SYEP are the same challenges faced by most summer employment programs across the country—while acknowledging that the city has the distinction of being the nation's largest. The resources and staffing needed to successfully implement a program are significant. However, the findings of this background research and the recommendations offered later in this report can offer concrete strategies for enhancing employer engagement and improving the experience, particularly for small to midsize businesses, moving forward.



Photo: NYC Department of Youth & Community Development

# Roundtable Session Findings

“We do believe that if we build community, and participating in SYEP is a way of us building community, then our entire borough benefits. So by investing in students, we view it truly as an investment. We are smart business people. There’s nothing but benefit from this for our interns, personally for us as employers, and also for us as community partners. I think you can all appeal to businesses by saying: this adds to your brand. This adds to your storytelling. This is you as a responsible community engagement company participating in your community beyond the shores of your business.”

—KRISTINE GARLISI,  
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER,  
NICOTRA GROUP

## THE MONTHLY ROUNDTABLE SESSIONS HELD

between April and September 2022 unearthed a variety of findings concerning pain points and areas for improvement in recruiting small to midsize businesses to participate in SYEP, as well as ensuring a positive experience for all employer partners. These findings helped inform the recommendations outlined in this report. Below is a brief overview of the main findings. (For a more detailed description of these findings, see **Appendix A.**)

## Employer Recruitment and Engagement

- ▶ An “all-hands-on-deck” approach and cross-stakeholder collaboration between city and state agencies, the business community, the City University of New York, unions, and workforce development providers is required to effectively engage employers.
- ▶ There are fewer communications channels to recruit small to midsize businesses. As a result, many are unaware of SYEP’s existence. There is a need to utilize other means of messaging, such as chambers of commerce and BIDs, to reach these businesses.
- ▶ There is a need for greater and more consistent messaging about the value of SYEP to employers. These messages should offer a clear value proposition based on the industry or geographic community. Messages can take various forms, such as by emphasizing corporate

An “all-hands-on-deck” approach and cross-stakeholder collaboration between city and state agencies, the business community, the City University of New York, unions, and workforce development providers is required to effectively engage employers.

social responsibility, the technological and social media skills brought by young people, or talent pipeline development for businesses that are struggling to hire.

- Even then, some small businesses may view SYEP as too heavy a lift for just six weeks; hence, expansion to year-round options should be explored.
- ▶ There remains a need for more **innovation in data gathering on the employer experience** to assess expectations during recruitment, resources for onboarding, and support during the program to enhance recruitment and participation. Greater data gathering could also address the occasional mismatch between employer expectations for SYEP and those of young adult participants.

**"I am trying to gain these experiences before I graduate high school. [...] Your education would not be able to be as important without talking to other professionals and meeting connections. Spending time [in paid work experience], I gained more out of it than in some school lessons."**

- NATALIE, 11TH GRADE STUDENT AND SYEP PARTICIPANT



## Program Experience and Implementation

- ▶ **Training for employers and young adults** in preparation for the program should be expanded. While DYCD has continued to offer more resources for employers and providers, as well as a "bootcamp" for young adults, all stakeholder groups reported:
  - A greater **need for core skills and job readiness skills training for young employees** (e.g., office dress codes, written and verbal communication etiquette, interpersonal skills).
  - A need for **human resources training and greater onboarding support for employers**, including how to work with young adults. Such training is particularly important for small to midsize businesses with limited resources.
- ▶ It is sometimes **difficult to ensure coordination among various partners**. CBOs, for example, cited difficulties in coordination in cases where a CBO has multiple employer partners or where an employer works with multiple CBOs. Communication preferences may also differ (e.g., some employers or CBOs prefer text over email, and vice versa).
- ▶ There is a need to **balance the increasing scale of SYEP with providing a quality experience**; but CBOs and DYCD must have sufficient resources, including funding, to achieve this.

## Overall Positives

- ▶ SYEP builds employers' brand and boosts their storytelling capacity.
- ▶ SYEP young adult participants explore career opportunities and gain access to professional networks, which fosters their long-term economic mobility.
- ▶ SYEP can be an incubator of innovative strategies for improving workplace management and developing new pipelines of talent.

AL LUKAN,  
MANAGING  
DIRECTOR,  
TEACH FOR  
AMERICA

“When it comes to engaging with other employers like us, I highly recommend focusing recruitment efforts on targeting the people who will actually manage and supervise the student interns.

These are the people who will shape the student's experience.

These are the people who will get passionate about the work and want to do it again next year.

These are the people who will spread the word about what a great experience it was for them.

These are the people who will carry the tradition to new businesses as they move to other employers over time.”

IN GOD  
WE TRUST



# Young Adult Input

It was critical to include feedback and recommendations from the most important stakeholder group: young adults participating in SYEP. To this end, JobsFirstNYC, as part of the Roundtable effort, conducted a survey of 104 young adults participating in SYEP during August 2022. Participants' ages ranged from 14 to 20 years, with the majority of respondents falling into the 15–17 range. Most participants (86%) had participated in SYEP for only one year.

SYEP placements among respondents represented a variety of industries, including education (36%), nonprofits (17%), technology (16%), and healthcare (13%). Other industries represented include childcare, business, public service, and food and beverages. (See **Appendix C.**)

## Summary of Findings

Overall, participants reported being satisfied with both their paid work experiences and their work placements. Although many participants could not choose their sites of employment, and 27% felt unsatisfied with the options given, a great majority were satisfied with their placements and the skills gained during the experience. A large majority also reported feeling more prepared for their next job opportunity. It is noteworthy that almost all (91%) of the participants reported believing that their employer

benefited from the skills and values they brought to the workplace—namely fresh perspectives, technology skills, and alleviating stress for other workers.

“This program benefits [businesses] because this allows them to gain an insight on how the younger people work and think. They might also find someone that they like who has potential to work in their company in the future.”

– YOUNG ADULT SYEP PARTICIPANT AND SURVEY RESPONDENT

Furthermore, the majority of participants reported being satisfied with the diversity of their workplace. It is important to note that the survey did not specify what type of diversity was being asked about (e.g., gender, racial, or other).

While most respondents said they would be interested in working in a similar job in the future and would recommend their employer to another SYEP participant, only a little over half of respondents said they would want to pursue a career in that industry.

## Specific Insights from Young Adults

Participants provided valuable feedback in terms of the value-add they feel SYEP participants bring to workplaces, why employers should hire SYEP participants, and ways to improve the program experience.

### SYEP Participants' Contributions to the Workplace

- ▶ **Participants bring in valuable young adult perspectives** and new energy into their workplaces. They also help improve the workplace culture by introducing the notion of self-care.
- ▶ **Participants support colleagues with new technology skills.**
- ▶ **Participants alleviate heavy workloads by taking on tasks.**

### Why Employers Should Hire SYEP Participants

- ▶ Doing so helps SYEP participants by **teaching valuable skills, providing a source of income, helping young adults discover potential careers, and offering connections.**
- ▶ Employers learn how to **work with the younger generation and manage them better.**
- ▶ Participating in SYEP helps employers **recruit young talent.**
- ▶ SYEP helps **shape the younger generation** through mentorship.

Several young adult survey respondents indicated that employers learn how to manage interns better, especially young adult interns, getting to know them more on a personal level. Employers should be prepared and trained to build strong relationships with young adult workers.

### Ways to Improve SYEP

- ▶ Numerous participants recommended **increasing the variety of positions offered** and **allowing participants to choose their placements.**
- ▶ **Employers learn how to manage interns better**, especially young adult interns, getting to know them more on a personal level. Employers should be prepared and trained to build strong relationships with young adult workers.
- ▶ **Improving the organization of the workplace**—some participants reported that their workplaces were not ready to receive participants and suggested that employers better structure the positions, prepare projects in advance, and organize their work environments.
- ▶ **Providing a mix of in-person and virtual options.** At the start of the pandemic, many work experiences were virtual. Currently, there are a mix of in-person and virtual options but it is unclear how long this will last. Young adults expressed that they may benefit from the flexibility of remote options in the future, while others would thrive from the in-person work experience. Therefore, maintaining a mix of options in the long-term would serve a variety of young adult needs.





My employer has grown in dealing with teenagers. I brought with me a mind, opinion and voice of a teenager sharing my opinion and ideas concerning different topics.



– YOUNG ADULT SYEP PARTICIPANT AND SURVEY RESPONDENT



# Recommendations

This section outlines recommendations for short-, medium-, and long-term strategies for building and strengthening partnerships with small to midsize businesses across New York City. These recommendations were synthesized directly from stakeholder contributions and young adult input throughout the roundtable. While roundtable participants and young adults raised many other topics and ideas relevant to strengthening and improving work-based learning more broadly—including how to ensure the inclusion of undocumented young adults, how to make work placements accessible to all young adults in the city who are interested in them as well as all learners with various skills and interests, and how to address staffing and funding shortages at CBOs—the recommendations highlighted below focus on **(1) employer recruitment and engagement and (2) program experience and implementation.**

## Employer Recruitment and Engagement

With the support of the Mayor's Office, DYCD has ramped up its internal capacity to conduct outreach and overhaul its communications strategy for employer recruitment. The effectiveness of this effort is clear: greater recruitment efforts helped increase SYEP placements from 1,800 in 2021 to 5,000 in 2022, and over 80 different employers. The following recommendations can help SYEP and its stakeholders build from this work and continue to expand the pool of prospective employers.

## Employer Communications Tools

To effectively reach prospective and current employer partners throughout the city, SYEP stakeholders determined that communication tools and messaging vehicles need to be expanded. SYEP has partnered with various city agencies, including the NYC Department of Small Business Services, and other partners, such as chambers of commerce and BIDs, to begin exploring new communication channels. However, there is still room to engage a greater number of employers and tap into innovative methods for raising employers' awareness of work-based learning programs like SYEP..

Presented below are key short-, medium-, and long-term activities for strengthening communications tools to reach employer partners.



### **SHORT-TERM** Improve Citywide Communication Channels

Partnerships with city agencies and other stakeholders are key resources for raising awareness about SYEP and other work-based learning programs among prospective employer partners. Individual agencies and institutions have diverse and expansive networks through which they can engage a variety of small to midsize businesses across New York City. By strengthening current partnerships and building new ones, SYEP could extend its reach into untapped networks of prospective employers. Strengthening existing partnerships would ensure that channels are used more often and more efficiently for greater outreach.



### **MEDIUM-TERM** Tap New Messaging Vehicles for Stronger Outreach

Digital and visual media tools can be powerful methods of engaging a wider audience of potential participants and partners. For example, roundtable participants reacted positively to a DYCD video promoting SYEP. By drawing on new vehicles for messaging, such as videos, employer and young adult testimonials, social media engagement, and peer-to-peer messaging, SYEP could more effectively tell the story of work-based learning to reach a wider audience.



### **LONG-TERM** Build Communications Platform for Quick, Efficient Communication

Employers noted that email can be a challenging form of communication for small businesses. As an alternative, employers suggested creating or sourcing a text messaging system for quick, efficient communications. Tools such as Slack, WhatsApp, and Discord are example platforms that could be used for such messaging. Alternatively, the city could explore procuring a proprietary platform for hosting SYEP messaging and communications. Long term, a standalone platform for SYEP could ensure a higher level of engagement with current and prospective employers.

## Young Adult Participant Training Alongside Employer Training

Training both young adults and employers participating in SYEP is key to making the experience mutually beneficial and to meeting one another's expectations. In turn, effective training makes for a positive experience with the program and can encourage referrals to future employer partners and young adult participants. SYEP currently promotes online work readiness training modules through Hats and Ladders, a digital platform designed for exploring work-based interests and careers. Training modules include resume writing, career exploration tips, financial literacy, and mindfulness. Continued work to expand training offerings and improve accessibility and uptake will strengthen preparedness at the start of SYEP and guarantee a more positive experience for young adults and employers.

Presented below are short-, medium-, and long-term activities toward building a robust and proactive infrastructure for training opportunities for young adults.



### **SHORT-TERM** Improve the Accessibility of Training Resources

DYCD and other partners work in collaboration with employers to build new training modules on an annual basis based on the needs of young adult participants in SYEP; however, some participants are not aware of the trainings available to them. Efforts should be focused on how best to ensure that all young adults in work-based learning programs have access to and are aware of available resources, tools, and training modules. This includes working with CBOs and other partners to foster young adults' connections to programs and offerings. Additionally, program policies could be enacted to better track and enforce participant training as a condition of participation in SYEP and other work-based learning programs.



### **MEDIUM-TERM** Build Out Pre-Program Infrastructure for Effective Onboarding

To increase the variety of training available and the accessibility of training offered, SYEP should build a system for pre-program orientation and onboarding, drawing on CBOs and other partners to provide programmatic support and capacity. Roundtable participants noted that integrating training into regular school instruction throughout the year would help young adults better absorb lessons and skills. Through a set network of pre-program partners, SYEP could offer an expanded menu of options, such as online training modules with certification, longer bootcamps that run year-round, and near-peer mentorship within and outside of job placements. Expanded capacity would also ensure that young adults are placed with employers as early as possible and that participants are quickly and efficiently connected with resources curated to meet the needs of their placement.



### **LONG-TERM** Implement Advanced Training and Regular Skills Development

Once a more mature stage of the operation has been reached, the pre-program infrastructure and its partner organizations could offer training as proactively as possible to incoming young adult participants. In addition to certified training in advance of placements, efforts should expand to include regular skill development opportunities throughout a young adult's placement. This would allow training to be further tailored to emerging or changing needs within their placement.

## Recruitment and Network Engagement

The last recommendation in this area is proactive recruitment and engagement to connect with networks of prospective employers not currently within SYEP's reach. There is a long list of stakeholders involved in SYEP, and effective systems can help capitalize on this valuable network, as well as further expand its reach.

Presented below are short-, medium-, and long-term activities for building and expanding SYEP's recruitment network.



### **SHORT-TERM** Convey Program Value-Add, Testimonials, and Success Stories

Many unique value propositions for SYEP were highlighted throughout the roundtable series. From young adults bringing fresh perspectives to an organization and helping staff develop new workplace management strategies, to tapping into new skills like social media and igniting a spirit of corporate social responsibility, SYEP has a value proposition for every employer. In addition to honing and disseminating its value-add to prospective employers, SYEP should amplify success stories that showcase the overall impact that young adult participants have had on employers and their businesses. These stories and testimonials could be collected through post-program surveys, focus groups, and exit interviews. Stories could demonstrate the benefits of participation in SYEP and help recruit small and midsize businesses. Finally, alumni success stories could be tracked and shared through online networks as a form of network building and recruitment.



### **MEDIUM-TERM** Canvass Communities for Targeted Recruitment

Chambers of commerce, BIDs, and minority- and women-owned businesses are powerful local institutions with a wealth of knowledge about their local neighborhood economies, as well as strong relationships with small employers. These institutions are close to the ground in communities across the city's five boroughs and are acutely aware of young adult labor demand and the supply of local employment opportunities. SYEP should engage in partnerships with these institutions to develop strategies for recruiting local employers and canvassing communities to better understand local trends in employment, key employers and businesses, and other unique contexts necessary for more targeted outreach and recruitment.



### **LONG-TERM** Recruit in New Industries and Sectors

In the long term, SYEP should consider strategies for expanding the pool of potential employer partners to reflect the emerging career demands of young adult participants. Throughout the roundtable, stakeholders noted that young adult participants have demonstrated a burgeoning interest in fields such as healthcare, technology, finance, and hospitality. SYEP should tap into pre-existing network of small to midsize companies working in these high-demand fields, from professional organizations to industry collaboratives, in order to offer more placements of interest to young adults.

Wall St Station

Enter with MetroCard  
or see agent across E

Street Station  
town & Brooklyn  
town & The Bronx



## Program Experience and Implementation

Ensuring that young adults and employers alike have a positive and enriching experience through SYEP and other work-based learning programs is critical to the retention of existing employer partners and the recruitment of new ones. To this end, DYCD and other stakeholders have begun constructing a toolkit for employers that helps them ensure a supportive workplace experience for young adults. By adopting the following recommendations, SYEP and its stakeholders can strengthen the structures and resources available to employers to promote an affirming experience for young adults and employers.

### Employer Resource Development

For employers new to work-based learning programs, SYEP may be their first experience employing a young adult or someone with little to no prior experience. Effective management and engagement of young adult workers requires a uniquely tailored set of resources, training, and information. While an initial toolkit of resources for employers has been created, additional steps can be taken to expand such offerings for employers.

**Presented below are short-, medium-, and long-term activities for developing robust resources to ensure that employers are prepared to provide young adult participants with an invaluable work-based experience that yields real results for their company.**



#### **SHORT-TERM Continue Developing and Building Toolkit of Resources for Employers**

DYCD should continue developing its toolkit of resources for employers by identifying additional training topics and resources that employers could benefit from (e.g., additional sample job descriptions, day-one schedule template, check-in agenda, last-day checklist, exit interview template, and letter-of-recommendation template for college applications) and ensuring that this toolkit is readily available to employers. Additionally, SYEP should assist employers in ensuring that job descriptions provide a clear and detailed set of skills, core competencies, expectations, and limitations of a short-term work-based learning placement, for the efficient onboarding of young participants.



#### **MEDIUM-TERM Implement Additional Training for Employers**

Managing and building relationships with young adults can be a less tangible, more holistic area of skills development for employer partners. Some supervisors may be new to the experience, and ongoing training can help support managerial and leadership skills development in work-based learning. SYEP should implement additional trainings for employers—such as anti-bias training and young adult/first-time employee management assistance—to help employers create a positive, welcoming, and supportive work environment for young adults.



#### **LONG-TERM Improved Information Sharing on Participant Experience Level**

Having the proper context and background on new hires can help an employer right-fit their expectations, plans, and work demands for incoming employees. Long term, SYEP should explore methods for connecting employer partners with information on the experience level, skills, and competencies of their incoming young adult participants. This could be done by having participants create a LinkedIn profile, using a SYEP-supported platform, or using other mechanisms for tracking and disseminating information about participants. Such information could also be useful in helping SYEP proactively match young adults with employers that meet their interests, skills, and experience.

## Educational Experience at Employer Placements

Building a comprehensive educational experience at employer placements can ensure that young adults are building critical skills and gaining work-based experiences from the program. While some standardized values, skills, and competencies can be applied across placements, more targeted and curated resources may be necessary to meet the diverse needs of different industries, sectors, employers, and participants. By developing a robust and comprehensive set of support tools, partnerships, and resources, SYEP stakeholders can establish positive and educational work experiences for the growing number of young adults at their work sites.



### **SHORT-TERM** Develop a Standardized Set of Core Competencies

Establishing a baseline set of competencies and a strategic roadmap for imparting them to young adult participants through their work-based learning experience would be a strong first step toward strengthening the educational experience of SYEP placements and, by extension, work-based outcomes for employers. SYEP should develop a standardized list of skills and core competencies that young adults will receive through their SYEP placement. Additionally, SYEP should provide information and resources on how to teach certain competencies (e.g., creating an agenda, note-taking, networking, etc.). SYEP and its stakeholders could explore existing standards for core competency development, such as the National Association of Colleges and Employers core competencies. Examples of competencies include critical thinking, professionalism, leadership, teamwork, and communication.



### **MEDIUM-TERM** Provide Structured Work Portfolios at Start of Placement

To ensure that young adult participants can begin contributing on day one of their SYEP placement, employers could maintain a log of surplus tasks and projects accumulated across the company or organization prior to the start of an SYEP placement. This would create a readymade portfolio of substantial work for the young adult to take on immediately. Successful work portfolios could be used as templates for other employers in the program to model in their own offices. Over time, these templates could form a standard blueprint for gaining experiences and opportunities through SYEP. Additionally, portfolios could provide lessons learned on what works, what does not, and what can feasibly be implemented at analogous employer sites.



### **LONG-TERM** Build Capacity through CBO Funding and Partnerships

Throughout the roundtable series, participants flagged capacity as a significant obstacle to meeting the goals and aspirations of SYEP. Over time, SYEP should explore ways in which CBO partners and other stakeholders could be funded to expand their role within SYEP to provide additional support to young adult participants. Support could come in the form of direct case management of young adult participants, providing guidance and resources, and offering as-needed assistance and troubleshooting.



## Employer Retention

The city's efforts to increase the number of employer participants each year rely heavily on retaining current employers. This year, DYCD encouraged all employers, even those not participating in SYEP, to participate in enrichment activities, thus helping increase enrollment in the next SYEP cycle. Building on these efforts, further engaging the Mayor's Office, and exploring structural changes to SYEP can help foster a sustained and loyal pipeline of SYEP employer partners.



### **SHORT-TERM** Adopt Strategies for Boosting Morale and Reinforcing a Positive Experience

To foster positive morale among employer partners, SYEP could show consistent appreciation and direct a high level of attention to these partners to show that they are valued and important. SYEP could reinforce consistent and open channels of communication with employer partners. Other opportunities for morale boosting include events and other opportunities to engage employers regularly and show gratitude for their partnership and participation.



### **MEDIUM-TERM** Engage the Mayor

The mayor and the Mayor's Office, as figureheads championing the citywide push for greater work-based learning for young adults, could play a more direct role in evangelizing current SYEP employer partners. SYEP should explore opportunities, including events, meetings, and other touchpoints, for the mayor and the Mayor's Office to directly engage with SYEP. By showing gratitude and reminding employers of the vital role they are playing in developing and preparing New York City's young adults for success in their future careers, the Mayor's Office could help promote greater employer retention in SYEP.



### **LONG-TERM** Expand SYEP and Work-Based Learning Broadly

The short-term nature of work-based learning and SYEP specifically can make it challenging to routinely ensure an effective experience for young adults and employers alike. Onboarding and training new hires requires significant time and effort. Expanding SYEP to be year-round could help deepen and enrich the experience, while giving employers and other stakeholders more space and time to address challenges, iterate planning, see impactful returns on their time and effort, and ensure an overall positive experience. The city could consider connecting current SYEP employers to other work-based learning opportunities throughout the year to ensure that they can take on a greater number of young adult participants year-round.

For a matrix view of these recommendations, see [Appendix B](#).

# SYEP in Summer 2022

## Creating Opportunities for Youth Who Need Them Most

*Equity was at the forefront of outreach to young adults in 2022. SYEP's Community-Based Organization Partners (CBOs) stepped up the recruitment of young people from historically underserved communities.*

Over 13,300 participants were NYCHA residents; nearly 4,700 young people were part of the **SYEP Emerging Leaders Program**, which provides specialized experiences for youth who are justice-involved, low-income, experiencing homelessness, in foster care, and who have disabilities and attend DOE District 75 schools.

90% of participating young adults in SYEP 2022 reside in high-need communities including those identified by the Racial Inclusion and Equity Taskforce.

## Connecting Summer Jobs to School-Year Learning

*CareerReady SYEP allows students, school leaders, and CBO program staff to align the SYEP experience with high school academic learning.*

SYEP 2022's "school-based model" served 21,000 students through 226 NYC high schools, up from 12,000 students and 88 high schools in 2021.

DYCD created the Credit Pilot in 2022 to allow for participants to earn academic credit for paid work experience with a goal to serve 1,000 students across 25 schools. DYCD exceeded the original goal and 1,721 students participated across 38 schools and earned an elective credit.



*Photo: NYC Department of Youth & Community Development*

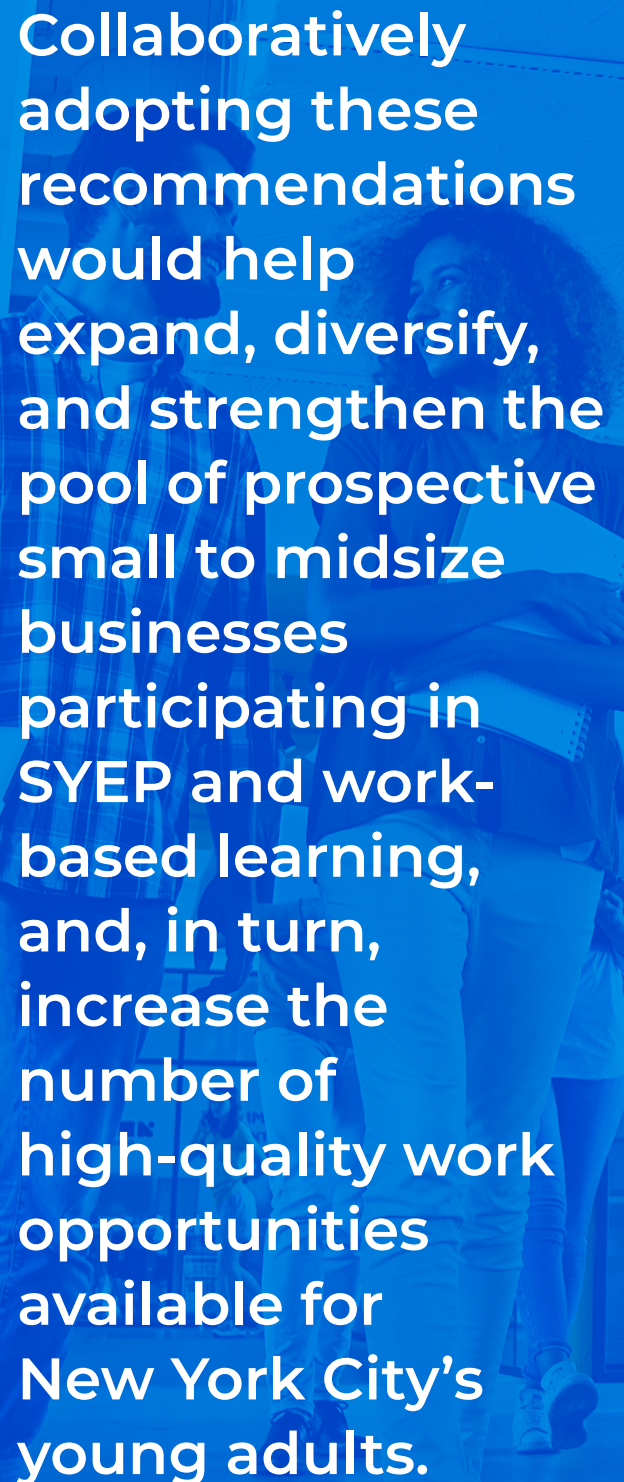
# Conclusion and Next Steps

## **THIS REPORT IS INTENDED TO PROVIDE**

all New York City work-based learning stakeholders with actionable recommendations for building and strengthening partnerships with small to midsize businesses throughout New York City. Collaboratively adopting these recommendations would help expand, diversify, and strengthen the pool of prospective small to midsize businesses participating in SYEP and work-based learning, and, in turn, increase the number of high-quality work opportunities available for New York City's young adults. In preparation for the summer of 2023, stakeholders, City Hall, and DYCD should utilize these recommendations to update and strengthen the many stakeholder partnerships, tools, and resources developed to date.

A recent bill that would require the Department of Small Business Services to coordinate with DYCD on the expansion of summer employment opportunities for young adults while creating a year-round mentorship program represents a significant step in the overall strengthening of the program.

As of August 2022, the Adams administration had placed 90,000 young adults in work-based learning opportunities through SYEP. Continuing the work started by SYEP stakeholders and supported by the SYEP roundtable series will help ensure that the city not only meets its goal of 100,000 work-based learning placements but that it connects more young adults to more high-quality, diverse, and rewarding work experiences across New York City.



**Collaboratively adopting these recommendations would help expand, diversify, and strengthen the pool of prospective small to midsize businesses participating in SYEP and work-based learning, and, in turn, increase the number of high-quality work opportunities available for New York City's young adults.**



# About JobsFirstNYC

**JobsFirstNYC was created in 2006 as a neutral intermediary to address the workforce needs of out-of-school, out-of-work young adults and the communities in which they live. Our mission is to create and advance solutions that break down barriers and transform the systems supporting young adults and their communities in pursuit of economic mobility. We bring together—effectively and efficiently—community, corporate, human, organizational, private, and public resources to connect young adults and their communities to better economic opportunities.**

JobsFirstNYC was founded through a collaborative process, and this approach defines our work. Our approach—fine-tuned over the last 16 years—is organized through a clear innovation process rooted in deep engagement and collaboration with local communities, government, intermediaries, philanthropy, employers, young adults, and other stakeholders. We build innovative, community-driven partnership networks, citywide and employer-led employment networks, and policy-solutions networks, all of which have improved economic mobility for young adults and the communities they live in. We have a proven record working across multi-stakeholder systems to reduce the number of out-of-school and out-of-work young adults and to strengthen the workforce development capacity. We are a leading voice on policies and best practices, advancing awareness and garnering support for systems change to benefit young adults.

We work with more than 160 organizations and institutions across New York City and State. Our partnerships have reconnected over 10,200 out-of-school, out-of-work young adults to economic opportunities. Our solutions have collectively raised and leveraged nearly \$30 million of public and private investment and developed new models for place-based solutions that have been replicated and integrated across the workforce system.



Photo: NYC Department of Youth & Community Development



# Appendices

## APPENDIX A

# Building and Strengthening Employer Partnerships: Detailed Findings

## Overview

This appendix details the findings from roundtable sessions. Roundtable participants identified a need for stronger partnerships and communication when recruiting and engaging employers for SYEP, as well as a need for more capacity building and resources for program stakeholders, including employers, young adults, and CBOs.

## Employer Recruitment and Engagement

Roundtable participants identified opportunities to improve and increase the messaging around SYEP, especially in terms of marketing the value-add that SYEP brings to employers. They also identified areas where city agencies could better partner with program stakeholders to increase engagement.

## Communications and Messaging

- ▶ **Expanding the city's marketing campaign to spread the word about SYEP to local employers.** Participants identified ongoing, public, and consistent messaging as a top priority for the summer of 2023. As a whole, the group wants to expand the methods for communicating with employers and recruiting new partners. Having the mayor make announcements early and often is critical for connecting the excitement at the beginning of the program to the rest of the summer session.
- ▶ **Articulating the purpose of SYEP.** There is a need to ensure that employers are prepared to work with young adults and meet their needs.
- ▶ **Improving upon existing communications and identifying new tools.** To build on the progress of existing communication efforts, chambers of commerce and BIDs can continue to serve as an efficient network to get messages out to local businesses and to create meaningful relationships in local communities. Chambers of commerce and employers expressed a personal preference for text messages over emails and suggested the use of messaging platforms like Slack and WhatsApp. Proactively engaging and strengthening partnerships with the Department of Small Business Services, chambers of commerce, and BIDs is an essential component of building effective communication channels.

- ▶ **Expanding recruitment efforts using SYEP success stories and building an alumni network in the process.** Stakeholders emphasized the importance of sharing the accomplishments and overall impact of young adult participants with prospective employer partners who may not understand what young adult hires can do for them. Success stories and testimonials can be documented through post-program surveys, focus groups, and exit interviews. Messaging using success stories can be a strong proof of concept and a valuable tool in recruiting small and midsize businesses.
- ▶ **Understanding the local context when recruiting.** It is important to canvass communities to understand where the demand and opportunities lie and to tailor messages appropriately.
- ▶ **Utilizing social media.** Young adults, employers, and CBOs can document their success stories across different social media platforms using hashtags to allow anyone the ability to scroll through SYEP experiences. By maintaining a social network of participants and employers, DYCD can better track SYEP alumni and strengthen future recruitment efforts.
- ▶ **Identifying strategies for recruiting employers in leading industries, such as finance, healthcare, professional and business services, information, and food and beverages.** Employers see the importance in identifying strategies by sector. Stakeholders suggested creating a referral program with added incentives to capitalize on each employer's network.

## Establishing Value-Add to Employers

- ▶ **Considering unique value propositions for SYEP** and how they may need to be tailored to fit prospective employers.
  - Roundtable participants responded positively to the reframing of the perception of SYEP participants as not just free labor but a valuable resource for the future of businesses and the community at large. They also mentioned the importance of communicating the return on investment that SYEP provides, especially for small businesses.
  - Developing value propositions would help expedite the education and prospecting process for providers to get employers on board. Value propositions will vary from business to business, with no one-size-fits-all message.
- ▶ **Highlighting how SYEP builds employers' brand and boosts storytelling.** Participation in SYEP often has effects that go beyond a young adult gaining valuable career experience. SYEP participation adds to an employer's brand and storytelling capability because it shows how the employer is engaging with the community through work-based learning. This investment in young adults has the potential to generate external goodwill for the employer and benefit the whole neighborhood. Employers that invest in their communities show young adults local opportunities and are better positioned to retain local talent.
- ▶ **SYEP and work-based learning as a tool for developing a strong talent pipeline.** This may require a reframing of the messaging to employers, many of whom are currently working hard to hire talent.

- ▶ **SYEP as an incubator of innovative strategies for improving workplace management.** Young adults temporarily employed at a company or organization can provide a fresh perspective on office culture and management practices, giving employers an opportunity to reexamine practices and, in turn, scale any new solutions for improving overall management. For example, an employer could reexamine its onboarding practices to more quickly and efficiently set expectations with young adult participants, enabling them to learn and begin performing quickly. These strategies, if successful, could be used for any and all new hires at the organization. One stakeholder validated this finding, noting that having summer interns has pushed their organization to document knowledge and learnings from the SYEP experience more closely to benefit the entire organization.

## Building Stronger Partnerships with Stakeholders

- ▶ **Reforming how the city works with employers.** There is a need to dedicate more funding, capacity, and support to incentivize employer retention. Requests coming from the mayor are taken more seriously and lead more businesses to sign up.
- ▶ **Extending SYEP to include an entire academic cycle.** Many employers take the time to train youth participants yet only get to keep them for the six-week summer period. Stakeholders expressed their interest in having young adults return to the workplace in the beginning of the school year to create a more educational experience and to continue building off of their learned skills.
- ▶ **Changing the city contract.** One stakeholder noted that weekly assessment visits feel like an audit to small and midsize businesses; instead, biweekly or virtual visits would be a good alternative. Additionally, stakeholders suggested making the Department of Education site visits more like a coaching session rather than an audit.
- ▶ **Creating incentives to work with small and midsize businesses.** Paying providers more money could help increase advertising and engagement with small and midsize businesses. To engage small businesses, each CBO could have a contact person at the BIDs within their catchment areas.

## Program Experience and Implementation

In order to improve the overall SYEP experience, roundtable participants identified a need for increased capacity and resources in order to set up all parties for success. Particular themes that emerged were a need for more training, evaluation systems to learn and improve, and workplace-specific resources to assist with logistics. Below is a summary of stakeholders' comments around increasing capacity and resources for program stakeholders, including specific supports for employers, young adults, and CBOs.

### Increased Capacity for Stakeholders

- ▶ **Job readiness training for young adults prior to connecting them with an employer.** Participants reported that content- and skills-based training does not really exist at worksites and suggested that this area could be a permanent CBO responsibility, such as through near-peer mentorship. A near peer



would be a young staff member at a CBO who can provide ongoing training for SYEP participants in a specific skill that employers have deemed useful, like social media. This near peer could support up to ten SYEP young adult participants who need assistance or training in this area.

- ▶ **Assessing the system to find ways to better support young adults** and troubleshoot personal, professional, or developmental issues in order to stem attrition.
  - CBOs would like to be able to intervene before young adults are terminated from a placement. Some employers do not understand that CBOs are able to troubleshoot issues that arise during the summer and could benefit from training on how to work with young adults. Employers should also consider the varied backgrounds of the youth entering the program. Some youth with troubled backgrounds and difficulties learning workplace skills require patience from employers and expanded time for personal and professional development.
- ▶ **Improving existing communication tools between providers and employers.** A centralized line or chat that employers could use to contact the relevant CBO if they have issues with participants would be a useful tool in bridging communications gaps. Stakeholders suggested that a system to track data related to what kind of employers experience the most issues would also be helpful. Employers working with multiple providers poses a coordination challenge due to the different rules and procedures that come with each provider, and training could alleviate some of these issues. Stakeholders mentioned that they sometimes encounter issues with DYCD Connect and experience a lag in dealing with requests.
- ▶ **Developing corporate partnerships to meet young adult career exploration interests.** City Hall reported that young adults frequently express interest in placements with global companies in fields such as technology, healthcare, and finance; however, these companies mostly recruit at an experience and education level that is often beyond that of the SYEP participant demographic. The city should explore strategies for building incentive programs or crafting unique value propositions for global companies based in New York City that promote participation in SYEP and other work-based learning efforts.
- ▶ The CBO-employer panel discussion with the SYEP alumni revealed how **cross-stakeholder collaboration can enable young adult participants to explore career opportunities**, supplement their education with valuable professional skills, and gain access to connections to professional networks otherwise unavailable to them outside of the program.
- ▶ City agency stakeholders mentioned an evaluation of the employer experience with SYEP as a short-term priority to **ensure that employers feel engaged, supported, and valued** throughout their SYEP experience.
  - Employers could be evaluated about their experience with SYEP to assess how expectations are set during recruitment, how resources are provided during onboarding, and how employers are supported throughout SYEP implementation. Stakeholders observed that this area has potential for the most innovative work. While employer data are tracked and both employers and participants complete surveys and attend focus groups following the program, there is room to improve information gathering.

- ▶ **Working with employers to build an optimal work-based learning experience for young adult participants for effective skill-building.** Programming could be aligned to build specific competencies, including critical thinking, professionalism, leadership, teamwork, and communication. Establishing a baseline set of competencies and a strategic roadmap for imparting them to young adult participants through their work-based learning experience would be a strong first step toward strengthening the educational experience of SYEP and, by extension, work-based outcomes for employers.

## More Resources for Program Participants

### Young Adults

- ▶ Employers **emphasized a need for greater resources**, particularly when it comes to **training, onboarding, and right-fitting workplace expectations** for young adults. They pointed to **challenges associated with young adult participant preparedness** to meet the needs of the placement, including core skills such as professionalism, interpersonal skills, and communication.
  - **Need for youth participant training to improve core skills.** Employers have found it challenging when young adults arrive unprepared and then require the employer to take extra time out of their day to teach soft skills such as engaging with customers over the phone, writing short memos, and responding to emails. Youth participants need basic communication and interpersonal skills before starting their work experience to ensure an easier onboarding process for all. Employers have stopped working with SYEP in the past because the onboarding of young adults is such a challenge.
- ▶ **Work portfolios that give SYEP participants a structured blueprint for gaining experiences and opportunities.** Roundtable participants communicated the importance of exposing young adults to the different types of work conducted by employers in order to give them a comprehensive work experience. One strategy proposed is to maintain a log of surplus tasks and projects accumulated across the organization. This could create an immediate portfolio of substantial work for the young adult participant to take on, allowing them to meaningfully contribute from day one. Successful work portfolios could be used as templates for other employers in the program to model in their own offices.

### Employers

- ▶ **Employers need support to overcome their biases and appropriately support young adults.** The roundtable sessions revealed the need for some employers to evaluate both the realities of short-term work-based learning programs and their personal biases toward young adults in professional settings. Employers have a key role to play in mentoring and supporting young adults in becoming successful workforce participants. The city can also explore resources to help support employers, such as a mandatory anti-bias training for employers.
- ▶ **Employer training.** A significant hurdle for the city will be finding the right balance between adding new program requirements and not diminishing employer retention or new participation.

- ▶ **Developing resources and guides to support SYEP employers in creating a welcoming and supportive work environment for young adults.** DYCD should continue to build on and share the resources it has created with employers. It could enhance its current toolkit by including sample job descriptions, day-one schedule template, check-in agenda, last-day checklist, exit interview template, and letter-of-recommendation template for college applications and other employment opportunities. These resources should be regularly updated to ensure that they are responsive to the changing and evolving needs of employers. Workplace guidance should be easy for small employers to digest given their limited time and resources.
- ▶ **Expanding the work-based learning placement time frame.** SYEP's short time frame is prohibitive for some employers. Adding the option of year-round placements could help bring more employers on board. This longer period would also help maintain working relationships between providers and employers.

## CBOs

- ▶ There were requests for DYCD to **give providers a list of the employers** currently signed up for SYEP and the provider(s) they are working with, in order to decrease duplicate outreach efforts and competition.
- ▶ **Creating structured work portfolios based on surplus tasks and needs identified by employers prior to the start of the program.** Such portfolios could be shared across stakeholders to inform future placements.
- ▶ **Connecting CBOs to BIDs** in their geographical areas. This would help broker relationships with small businesses.

APPENDIX B

# Building and Strengthening Employer Partnerships: Recommendations Matrix

## Employer Recruitment and Engagement

Recommendation Area	Short-Term	Medium-Term	Long-Term
<b>Employer Communication Tools</b>	Strengthen and proactively engage existing and new partnerships with city agencies to expand and <b>improve communication channels</b> to increase awareness of SYEP and other work-based learning programs.	Tap into <b>new vehicles for messaging</b> to strengthen outreach (e.g., DYCD video, program participant testimonials, employer testimonials, and social media).	<b>Develop or procure a discrete communications platform</b> (e.g., Slack) that enables text messaging or other direct communication to employers about SYEP and other work-based learning programs.
<b>Young Adult Participant Training alongside Employer Training</b>	Build out and expand available training resources for young adult participants, <b>improve the accessibility of training resources</b> , and institute policies to incentivize and participation in trainings prior to SYEP placement.	<b>Build a pre-program orientation infrastructure in partnership with CBOs and other stakeholders</b> that provides an expanded menu of options (e.g., online training module(s) with certification, longer bootcamps that run year-round, and near-peer mentorship within the job) that can be targeted to meet the needs and requirements of each young adult participant’s placement.	Offer young adult participants <b>advanced training opportunities</b> and formal certifications tailored to their placements, along with <b>regular skill development</b> opportunities throughout the duration of the placement.
<b>Recruitment and Network Engagement</b>	Target messaging to <b>convey SYEP’s value-add to employers</b> (e.g., brings in new perspectives, incubates workplace management improvement strategies, taps into skills like social media, and encourages corporate social responsibility).  <b>Collect and disseminate testimonials</b> on how young adult participants have been able to tangibly improve the work of their employer during the program. Additionally, track and monitor alumni trajectories—whether through social media, LinkedIn, events, or other methods—to generate success stories following participation in SYEP and other work-based learning programs.	In partnership with local chambers of commerce, BIDs, and minority- and women-owned businesses, develop strategies for <b>tapping local neighborhood employers and canvassing communities</b> in order to understand local trends in employment, key employers and businesses, and other factors necessary for targeted recruitment.	Develop expanded, ongoing <b>partnerships</b> with small to midsize employers in the areas of technology, healthcare, and finance to meet young adults’ career exploration interests.

## Program Experience and Implementation

Recommendation Area	Short-Term	Medium-Term	Long-Term
<p><b>Employer Resource Development</b></p>	<p>Continue developing DYCD's toolkit of resources for employers and add new <b>training topics and resources</b> that employers could benefit from (e.g., sample job descriptions, day-one schedule template, check-in agenda, last-day checklist, exit interview template, and letter-of-recommendation template for college applications). Help employers ensure that their job descriptions provide a clear and detailed set of skills, core competencies, expectations, and limitations of a short-term work-based learning placement, for the efficient onboarding of young adults.</p>	<p>Implement additional <b>onboarding training and support for employers</b> (e.g., anti-bias training and young adult/first-time employer management assistance).</p>	<p><b>Provide employers with advance information on the experience level of their incoming youth participants.</b> This could be conducted by having participants create a LinkedIn profile, using a SYEP-supported platform, or using other mechanisms for tracking and disseminating information about participants.</p>
<p><b>Educational Experience at Employer Placements</b></p>	<p>Work with employers to <b>develop a list of skills and core competencies</b> that young adults will receive through their work experience. This may include directly aligning the work with an existing framework of work-based core competencies (e.g., National Association of Colleges and Employers).</p>	<p>Provide <b>work portfolios</b> that give young adult participants a structured blueprint for gaining experiences and opportunities while contributing to the company from day one (e.g., a clearly defined set of tasks and duties to have ownership over). Work portfolios could be shared and accessed by other employers in the program to demonstrate what works, what doesn't, and what they can implement with their own young adult participants.</p>	<p>Provide <b>increased funds to CBOs</b> so they can provide young adults with additional support (e.g., close case management and troubleshooting of youth participants in SYEP through onboarding, challenges, and obstacles).</p>
<p><b>Employer Retention</b></p>	<p>Implement new strategies for employer retention by <b>treating worksites as respected partners</b> (e.g., consistent communication, positive reinforcement, and opportunities and events to boost morale).</p>	<p><b>Engage the mayor to communicate directly with employers</b> participating in SYEP, either through events or other mediums, to show gratitude for their participation.</p>	<p>Introduce employers to work-based learning programs they can be involved in <b>throughout the academic year</b>. Expand the possible menu of <b>work-based learning opportunities</b> across the city for the duration of the entire academic year.</p>

APPENDIX C

# Young Adult Feedback Report

For the complete survey results, see [Improving Employer Engagement for NYC Young Adults Survey](#).

FIGURE 1  
Age ranges of SYEP survey respondents

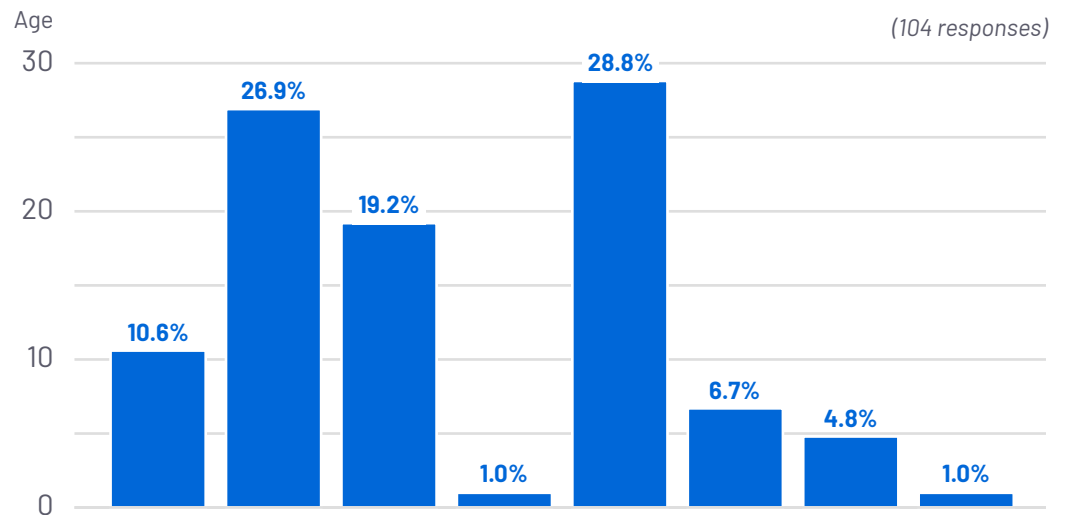
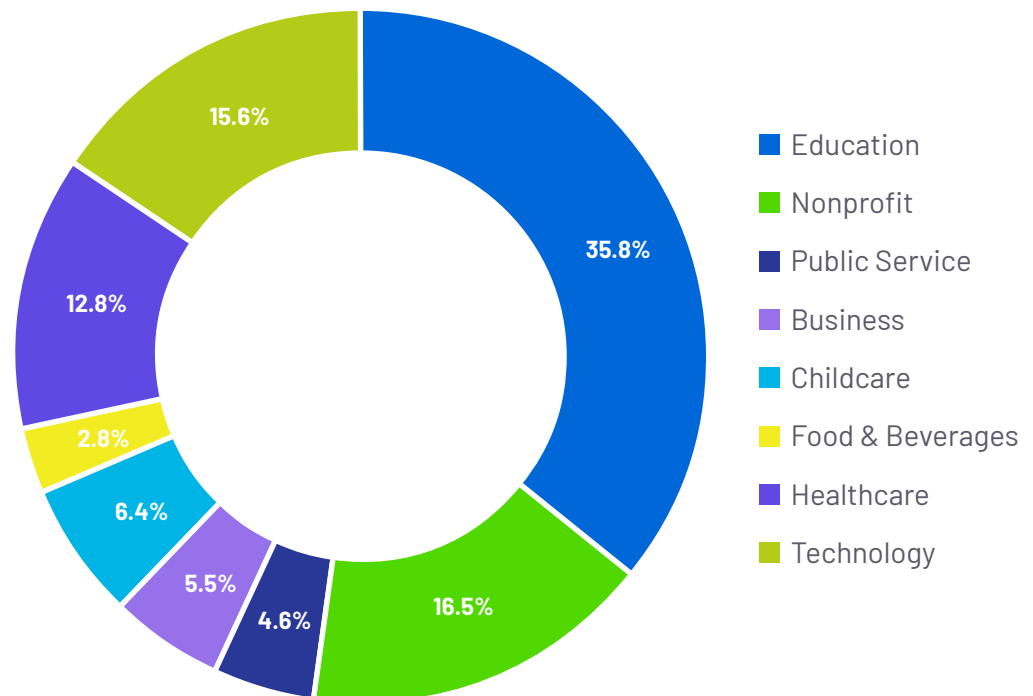


FIGURE 2  
SYEP survey respondents by sector





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Angela Lesane, *United Activities Unlimited*

Marilyn Zayfert, *United Activities Unlimited*





# Endnotes

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