



INNOVATIONS IN THE FIELD



Impact and Lessons from
the Young Adult Sectoral
Employment Project



JUNE 2025



JobsFirstNYC creates and advances solutions that break down barriers and transform the systems supporting young adults and their communities in the pursuit of economic opportunities. Our innovative approach to developing new partnership models has helped shape public policy, private philanthropic investments, and the practices of employers, colleges, workforce development service providers, high schools, and others. Over the last 18 years, JobsFirstNYC has worked with more than 200 organizations and institutions across New York City and State to build innovative solutions that connect young adults to economic opportunities.



The Young Adult Sectoral Employment Project (YASEP) was a demonstration project to test how sector-based strategies, previously shown through research to directly benefit jobseekers in terms of earnings over time, could be most effectively adapted to better serve young adults.

The project took place between September 2013 and September 2018 and featured 11 partnerships (each of which brought together at least one community-based organization, one industry skills training entity, and at least one sector-specific employer or employer intermediary group) aimed at creating customized pathways to employment for young adults while providing concrete, measurable value to employers. By the end of the demonstration period, these partnerships helped connect 1,121 young people to jobs with New York City-area employers.

YASEP was the first initiative of its kind nationally to create effective, employer-driven programs specifically for unemployed and underemployed young adults using a sectoral approach. Today, seven of the eleven original partnerships remain strong.

INNOVATIONS IN THE FIELD

Innovations in the Field is a series showcasing JobsFirstNYC's pioneering projects and partnerships that drive economic mobility for young adults and the communities they call home. Through this series, we spotlight dynamic cross-sector collaborations for increasing economic opportunity. These initiatives highlight groundbreaking approaches for scaling effective solutions.

Note to readers: The affiliations and job titles of the individuals quoted in this paper are those held at the time of their contribution.

YASEP Partners

BronxWorks

C+C Management

CitiStorage

Complete Management Solutions

Comprehensive Youth Development

Con Edison

Cooperative Home Care Associates

CUNY Borough of Manhattan Community College

CUNY Hostos Community College

Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation

The Door

FEGS Health and Human Services

Green City Force

Hostos Community College

International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees

Jacob A. Riis Neighborhood Settlement

The Knowledge House

L+M Development Partners

Montefiore Medical Center

New York Alliance for Careers in Healthcare

New York City Housing Authority's Office of Resident Economic Empowerment and Sustainability

Ocean Bay Community Development Corporation

Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute

Per Scholas

Phipps Neighborhoods

Queens Community House

Roundabout Theatre Company

St. Nicks Alliance

Sunnyside Community Services

Total Transportation Corp.

Wildlife Conservation Society

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Letter from the CEO and President

JobsFirstNYC strives to bring practical value to the field by sharing what we learn from the projects and initiatives we have developed. Documenting the results of our work serves to lift progress and share success factors and lessons learned. It is through this transparency that we hope others can learn and adopt their own approaches to create multi-sector learning communities.

This paper builds on two previous publications: [*Innovations in the Field: The Young Adult Sectoral Employment Project*](#) and [*Optimizing Talent: The Promise and the Perils of Adapting Sectoral Strategies for Young Workers*](#).¹ It focuses on the results and systemic impacts of the Young Adult Sectoral Employment Project (YASEP), a demonstration project that ran from 2013 to 2018, as well as the learnings gleaned from this effort. Like all publications in JobsFirstNYC's *Innovations in the Field* series, this paper is intended to inform public and private funders, policymakers, researchers, practitioners, and employers of the potential of innovative practices for wider use.

Building on the lessons from earlier sectoral employment approaches with adult populations, YASEP sought to apply industry-specific workforce development approaches to address the needs of

young adults who are out of school and out of work in New York City. The project incorporated a results-based framework that sought to measure systemic change. It was the first instance in the country's workforce development system in which a Learning Community was built to support this effort, one that brought employers to the table from the outset.

During its five-year lifespan, YASEP achieved noteworthy results in connecting young people to training and employment and in providing valuable services to employers in various sectors of the New York City economy. As of September 2018, a total of 2,135 young people had been served through YASEP, of whom 1,121 acquired employment and 883 earned relevant industry credentials.² By 2020, more than 3,100 young adults had been served by the partnerships initiated under the YASEP model.³

As we continue to integrate the learnings from this important work into our practices and projects, we look forward to hearing from others about their approaches to young adult talent development and welcome questions and dialogue about our efforts.

Marjorie D. Parker
CEO and President
May 2025



Executive Summary

When the Young Adult Sectoral Employment Project (YASEP) launched in 2013, one in seven young adults in the United States was out of school and not working. YASEP began with a question—Could and should industry-based workforce training programs be adapted to better serve young adults?—at a time when not a single young-adult-only sectoral training program existed in the country. This publication outlines the process and results of the five-year YASEP initiative, sharing key learnings and scalable effective practices to inform workforce development efforts in New York City and nationwide.

YASEP'S MODEL

YASEP's collaborative model was tested through 11 partnerships, each consisting of at least one community-based organization and/or one industry skills training entity, and one or more sector-specific employers/employer intermediary groups. Supported by JobsFirstNYC, these partnerships worked together to design workforce solutions that were not only tailored to specific industries and employer needs but also deeply informed by the youth development principle of meeting young people “where they are.” The partners worked together over a five-year demonstration period to design, launch, and share learnings from each of their solutions.



YASEP'S PARTNERSHIPS

Under YASEP, 11 partnerships were created to develop tailored career pathways across high-demand sectors:

Creative Economy

- ▶ The Roundabout Theatre Company partnered with the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees and The Door to provide training for and access to careers in technical theater.

Green Economy

- ▶ Green City Force partnered with Con Edison, L+M Development Partners, C+C Management, and the New York City Housing Authority's Office of Resident Economic Empowerment and Sustainability to offer young adults career pathways into the sustainability sector.

Healthcare

- ▶ Comprehensive Youth Development and the City University of New York (CUNY) Borough of Manhattan Community College prepared students for careers in healthcare, enabling them to earn a certified medical assistant credential.
- ▶ Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute partnered with Cooperative Home Care Associates to train young adults for healthcare jobs.
- ▶ Phipps Neighborhoods collaborated with Hostos Community College and Montefiore Medical Center to prepare young adults for careers in allied healthcare.

Hospitality and Food Service

- ▶ Queens Connect (a coalition between Queens Community House, Jacob A. Riis Neighborhood Settlement, Ocean Bay Community Development Corporation, and Sunnyside Community Services) prepared participants for success in the food industry.
- ▶ The Stanley M. Isaacs Neighborhood Center partnered with employers to train young adults for careers in hospitality and food service.
- ▶ The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), working together with FEGS Health and Human Services and BronxWorks, developed a system for the training, hiring, retaining, and promoting of young adults from the Bronx in various job sectors—hospitality, food services, and retail—at WCS's Bronx Zoo.

Technology

- ▶ The Knowledge House created the Bronx Digital Pipeline with CUNY Hostos Community College and Per Scholas to develop pathways into cutting-edge technology jobs.
- ▶ Per Scholas and The Door launched TechBridge, a preparatory course to help 18- to 25-year-olds meet the admissions requirements for high-impact information technology training programs.

Transportation and Logistics

- ▶ Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation partnered with transportation employers to develop career pathways into the transportation sector with a robust career ladder, living wages, and union protections.

YASEP'S IMPACT FRAMEWORK: MEASURING RESULTS

To measure the demonstration project's achievements, YASEP partners worked with JobsFirstNYC to develop an impact framework that would track four levels of results: people, institutions, partnerships, and systems-level results.

Key wins achieved by YASEP partnerships between July 2014 (when the project's first cohort launched services) and September 2018 (when the demonstration period concluded) are outlined below:



PEOPLE

- ▶ **2,135** participants enrolled in industry training
- ▶ **1,535** participants completed training*
- ▶ **883** participants attained in-demand industry credentials
- ▶ **1,121** participants obtained employment

**This does not include 164 participants from cohorts 1 and 2 who were still in training at the time of reporting.*



INSTITUTIONS (EMPLOYERS)

- ▶ **100% of employers** reported an improved onboarding and training process, as well as reduced employee turnover and costs associated with turnover, as a direct result of their participation in their respective YASEP partnership
- ▶ **100% of employers** cited tangible services and resources made available to them through YASEP (such as updated labor market intelligence, exposure to business practices among contemporary or competitor organizations, and skills-building among supervisory staff overseeing younger frontline workers)
- ▶ **100% of partnerships** increased the number of unique employer partners within their sector or industry of focus



PARTNERSHIPS

- ▶ **10* of 11** partnerships (91%) sustained their program models throughout the duration of the demonstration project
- ▶ **10* of 11** partnerships (91%) incorporated their employer partners from the inception of their work to design, implement, and refine programs
- ▶ **11 of 11** partnerships (100%) expanded their strategic organizational relationships, adding new, complementary relationships to their work
- ▶ **11 of 11** partnerships (100%) formally incorporated and integrated the YASEP approach into their ongoing array of programs and services
- ▶ **11 of 11** partnerships (100%) utilized their YASEP programming to build new programs in the same sector or in new sectors of the economy

**WCS ultimately did not proceed with its planned partners; instead, it strengthened its internal onboarding and training protocols and refined its approach to connecting Bronx young adults to careers in hospitality, food services, and retail.*



SYSTEMS

- ▶ **11 of 11** partnerships (100%) created new mechanisms to benefit both the communities they serve and their employer partners. Examples include:
 - A transportation sector business intermediary in Cypress Hills/East New York
 - A customized training program to strengthen supervisors' effectiveness when supervising younger frontline workers in the largest healthcare employer in the Bronx
 - A tech-hub intermediary effort that connects tech companies with budding technology and small-business entrepreneurs in the South Bronx
 - A customized talent pipeline that ensures that younger workers have first-line access to technical theater jobs
 - A revamping of New York City's largest young adult employer, the Wildlife Conservation Society, to improve quality and conditions for young people working in seasonal-to-permanent customer service jobs
- ▶ **7 of 11** partnerships (64%) influenced employer practices in a way that had a measurable impact on job quality for key occupations. Examples include:
 - Increase in base wages for key occupations
 - Improvements in employee benefits and training
 - Company-level policy changes facilitating ease and flexibility of employee scheduling, directly benefiting young workers concurrently participating in training or education activities while employed
 - Increased employer contributions to training and onboarding expenses

YASEP'S LEGACY

Practitioners, employers, and funders alike have cited the value of learning through the work of YASEP and have noted that the youth employment field overall is in a different place in New York City because of the strengthening of sector-based training strategies. The success of YASEP had a large influence on publicly funded programs in New York City, including the Department of Youth and Community Development's Train & Earn initiative and the New York City Human Resources Administration's workforce training programs.

As noted by Roderick Jenkins of the New York Community Trust, "While many institutions have been working effectively on an employer engagement agenda for many years, YASEP was the first such effort to really spread best sectoral employment approaches and overall employer engagement and support strategies across the field in New York City specific to youth programming; a tide that has risen all boats." In addition to the influence that YASEP had on workforce organizations across the city, the initiative also fundamentally shaped JobsFirstNYC's own practices when it comes to designing, implementing, and evaluating new partnerships. Although the demonstration period ended in 2018, YASEP went on to inform several subsequent JobsFirstNYC initiatives, including Benchmarking for YASEP, SectorBOOST, the Transfer to Career Collaborative, and our Sector Networks. To this day, YASEP's model serves as a blueprint for how institutions can integrate sectoral strategies into youth workforce programs. More broadly, it demonstrates how rigorously designed, implemented, and evaluated approaches can better connect young adults to upwardly mobile careers and lives.

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—Roderick Jenkins, New York Community Trust



Introduction

Over the past decade, sector-based training programs designed specifically for young adults have gained traction, shaping workforce initiatives at local and national levels alike. In New York City, youth-focused agencies such as the Department of Youth Development (DYCD) and the Center for Youth Employment have expanded sectoral opportunities for young adults through programs such as Train & Earn, Advance & Earn, and CareerLift. Nationally, initiatives such as Annie E. Casey's Generation Work and the National Fund for Workforce Solutions' Youth/Industry Partnership Initiative have further solidified the role of sector-based training in connecting young adults to meaningful and gainful careers. Today, sectoral employment strategies are widely recognized as an evidence-based, effective approach to workforce development. In 2013, however, there wasn't a single sector-based training program in the country designed exclusively for young adults.

This paper tells the story of the Young Adult Sectoral Employment Project (YASEP)—the first field-level effort to adapt and test sector-based strategies, previously proven to work for adults,⁴ for young adults. By depicting YASEP's development, implementation, and impact, as well

as the challenges faced and lessons learned along the way, this paper serves as a roadmap for other collaboratives seeking to develop, test, and scale systems-level solutions to better connect young adults to upwardly mobile career pathways.

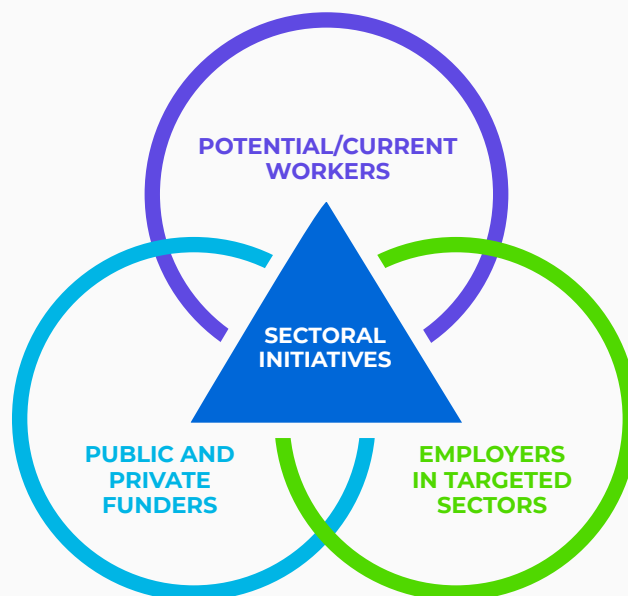
In 2013, at the time of YASEP's rollout, the national unemployment rate for 16- to 24-year-olds with a high school diploma or less was a massive 35.5%—more than five times higher than their peers with a bachelor's degree or higher.⁵ In New York specifically, as many as 35% of 18- to 24-year-olds were either unemployed and not in school, or substantially underemployed.⁶ Compelling evidence highlighted the long-term negative impacts of youth unemployment—exacerbated by the Great Recession—on individuals' well-being, health, and job satisfaction later in life.⁷ In addition to these individual-level impacts, the high rate of young adults who were out of school and out of work signaled present and future challenges at the city and state level. Indeed, in 2014, JobsFirstNYC calculated the aggregate cost of lower earnings, lower economic growth, and foregone tax revenues, including increased government spending and social costs, to be nearly \$300 billion over the course of these young adults' lifetimes.⁸



The Origins and Development of YASEP

BUILDING ON THE PROMISE OF SECTORAL APPROACHES

When JobsFirstNYC and its partners were planning YASEP, efforts to link young people who were out of school and out of work to employment had seen limited success. Even the strongest youth-serving workforce organizations often struggled to partner with employers beyond a transactional job placement relationship. In light of this, JobsFirstNYC leadership and the wider workforce development field agreed that testing the use of sectoral employment strategies held promise.



Defining a Sector Strategy: A Working Definition for the Young Adult Sectoral Employment Project

Sectoral employment strategies refer to a set of practices used by workforce organizations, employer intermediaries, and training organizations that:

- ▶ Target a specific industry or cluster of occupations to understand industry dynamics and workforce needs.
- ▶ Intervene through a credible organization or set of organizations, crafting solutions tailored to that industry and its region.
- ▶ Help workers improve their skills and their ability to compete for good-quality jobs.
- ▶ Create lasting changes in the labor market that benefit workers and employers alike.⁹

There are three “systems” that sectoral initiatives typically seek to change or influence:

1. **Industry practices:** How workers are recruited, hired, trained, promoted, and compensated in the workplace and how they fare in the workplace over time.
2. **Education and training infrastructure:** How education and training are aligned with and customized to the needs of employers.
3. **Public policy:** How policies and funding streams support appropriate investments for workers and businesses.¹⁰

Sectoral employment strategies grew out of the experience of a number of community-based organizations in the late 1980s that sought to connect more deeply with local employers to improve job prospects for people underrepresented in the workforce and who struggled to get a foothold in the labor market. Today, sectoral employment programs are a model that many workforce organizations are striving to implement in some form, and sectoral employment has emerged as the approach of choice for public workforce development funding streams at the federal and local levels.

JobsFirstNYC carefully considered the success factors highlighted from the Sectoral Employment Impact Study, a landmark impact study by Public/Private Ventures whose results were published in 2010.¹¹ The study was the first random assignment research effort for sectoral employment training programs in the workforce field, and its results garnered significant interest from investors: while the study confirmed the effectiveness of sector-based approaches, it also demonstrated that young adults aged 18–24 in multi-age sector training programs did not do as well as their older counterparts.

Notably, the study also demonstrated that investing in an approach that includes shared accountability across programs and institutions was key to success. Many workforce organizations have historically operated in isolation, in part because they are supported by numerous public and private funding streams that often come with differing (and even competing) outcome requirements.

YASEP was designed on the hypothesis that sectoral employment training programs could be adapted to better serve young adults by incorporating a holistic youth development component. In the years leading up to YASEP's launch in 2013, there were no at-scale examples of such a strategy in practice. But by 2016, similar examples had emerged nationally, including the National Fund for Workforce Solutions' Youth/ Industry Partnership Initiative and the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Generation Work. Aspects of YASEP's framework are readily identifiable in the designs of both initiatives.¹²

THE INITIATIVE'S PLANNING PROCESS

YASEP's overall framework emerged through the distillation of the study findings published by Public/Private Ventures in 2010¹³ and through the collection of input from leaders in the workforce development field—practitioners, employers, private funders, and civic leaders—during a series of convenings in the first half of 2013.

During these meetings, attendees identified what supports and strategies would be most helpful in advancing more effective talent development strategies that could both improve services for employers and improve job placement and retention results for workforce programs. These meetings also provided an additional critical function for the development of the initiative: they became a space where relationships and organizational partnerships formed organically and where leaders could envision the potential of their work through shared learning and an understanding of the needs of the communities they serve.

The meetings culminated with a “request to participate” application, inviting potential partnerships to submit proposals. These partnerships—intentionally designed with employers involved from the outset—shared their vision for what they could accomplish through a funded six-month planning and development period. From the applicant pool, JobsFirstNYC selected a group of promising partnerships to move forward. During a funded six-month planning and development phase, JobsFirstNYC supported these selected partnerships by convening their leadership in a community of practice and providing technical assistance as they refined their strategies. At the end of this period, the partnerships presented their finalized strategies to a group of funders convened by JobsFirstNYC. Funders provided further input as project ideas were readied for launch, and ultimately considered these partnerships for implementation funding.

The YASEP demonstration period (2013–2018) consisted of two cohorts, with seven partnerships in the first cohort (two joining after the initial series of convenings) and four more in the second cohort.

A Note on Funding

A major thread that runs throughout JobsFirstNYC's work is the desire to build effective strategies for improving services for young adults who are out of school and out of work and to make sure that these innovative approaches receive the funding they need. A key innovation of YASEP, and a huge driver of its success, was the significant funding dedicated not just to implementation but to planning. YASEP's model has subsequently influenced future large-scale investments, such as DYCD's funding for partnership development.

The funding environment when YASEP was being launched in 2013 was challenging. Public funding for workforce services had been steadily declining since the turn of the century. In terms of federal funding, the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), originally passed in 1998, faced repeated delays in reauthorization, with Congress opting instead to extend it through continuing resolutions. These extensions came with significant funding reductions. Nationwide, WIA allocations plummeted from \$4.7 billion in 2002 to \$2.9 billion in 2013, with New York City experiencing a parallel decline from \$96.6 million to \$62.7 million.¹⁴ One of the only positive developments in federal funding during this time was the short-term infusion of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds into New York City in 2010–2011.¹⁵ Meanwhile, reductions were also occurring at the state level. An analysis conducted by the Center for an Urban Future and the New York Association of Training and Employment Professionals found that between 2003–2004 and 2005–2006, funding for state-originated workforce services declined by more than \$270 million.¹⁶ Further, state funding for workforce programs fell by 5% between 2009 and 2014.¹⁷ Within this overall context, the one silver lining was the significant increase in private funders' support for workforce services in New York City: while WIA allocations for the city were reduced by nearly \$40 million between 2007 and 2018, private philanthropic investments grew from \$40.4 million to over \$77 million during the same period.¹⁸

Given the challenging public funding environment, the leadership of JobsFirstNYC developed a funding strategy focused on raising private-sector money for YASEP's costs—from planning to implementation. The YASEP approach of adapting proven sector-based strategies to a young adult population was one that interested several leading New York City private funders of workforce programs. Business as usual was not an acceptable strategy in the post-Great Recession economy; innovative approaches were essential to effectively serving a larger share of and creating better outcomes for the young adult population, and YASEP promised to do just that. Early conversations with individual funders were followed by funder briefings that outlined the plans of the organizations involved in YASEP. JobsFirstNYC also held one-on-one consultations with YASEP organizations to assist in the design of the fundraising strategies for the implementation phase of the project.

The use of a competitive process to award planning grants to the most promising applicants, the provision of high-quality training and technical assistance, and the commitment by JobsFirstNYC to support the implementation phase of the project were powerful incentives for private funders to consider support for YASEP partnerships. This support was important because several successful YASEP organizations did not have a strong record of raising private funding for new services.

As a result of this intentional and careful process, several funders—including the Pinkerton Foundation and the JPMorgan Chase Foundation—provided lead grants to YASEP organizations, either through JobsFirstNYC or directly to the organizations.

KEY DESIGN ELEMENTS

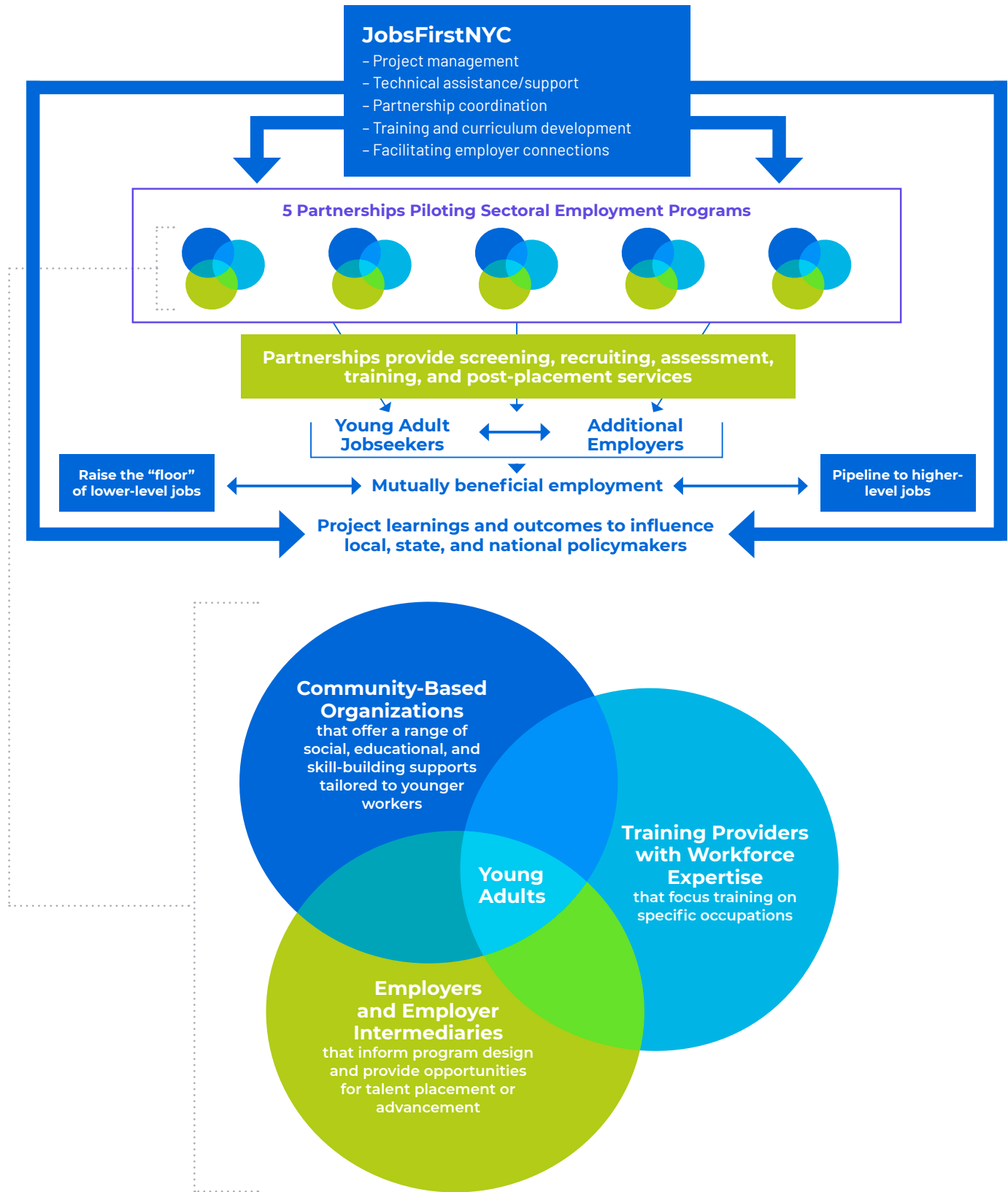
During the aforementioned planning and development period, JobsFirstNYC and partnership leaders identified several core elements, based on promising practices and existing research, that would inform the demonstration project's design:

- **Partnerships would draw on the different perspectives and expertise of participating institutions.** The idea was that more effective results could be achieved for jobseekers and employers if entities worked within a partnership framework, tapping into the unique expertise of each. (See Appendix 4 for the full YASEP logic model.)
- **Employers would be active participants from the start.** Employers would not merely advise as to how best meet their needs but would instead be direct participants in program design, testing, and implementation.
- **Labor market intelligence would be used to inform programming.** "Intelligence" would be more than mere data on jobs and the economy—it would include practitioners' experiences working with employers; employers' perspectives and advice; direct knowledge of businesses and industries; and prevailing labor market research.
- **A space would be created for shared learning, program refinement, and course correction.** Partnerships would create a Learning Community to encourage experimentation and change along the way. (See Appendices 1–3 for more on the YASEP Learning Community.)
- **Ongoing technical assistance and continuous access to customized labor market data would be provided.** This would ensure that programming would be fully in line with employer demand. (See Appendices 1–3 for more on technical support for the Learning Community.)
- **Positive youth development principles would be embedded in workforce strategies.** By incorporating principles such as mentorship, structured support, hands-on learning, leadership opportunities, and long-term career navigation, the initiative would ensure that young adults not only connected to jobs but also built the relationships, skills, and confidence needed for lasting economic mobility.

Partnerships established under the initiative would conform to three criteria:

- **Workforce expertise:** At least one partner (typically a **workforce development organization** or **community college**) would develop and deliver job skills training aligned with industry needs, positioning participants to compete effectively for targeted roles.
- **Industry connection:** At least one partner would be an **employer** or **employer intermediary** with direct access to businesses that would inform program design and provide opportunities for talent placement or advancement.
- **Support services:** At least one partner (typically a **community-based organization**) would be positioned to offer a range of social, educational, and skill-building supports tailored to younger workers.

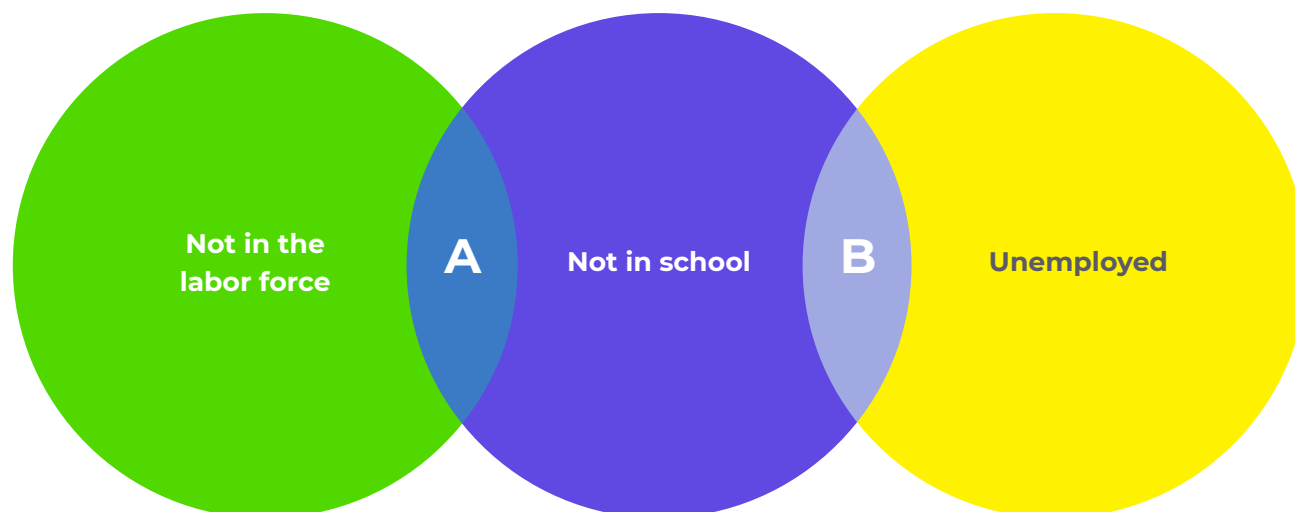
FIGURE 1. CORE ROLES OF ORGANIZATIONS WITHIN YASEP PARTNERSHIPS



THE YOUNG PEOPLE SERVED THROUGH YASEP

As noted in Figure 2, the initiative would engage young adults who were out of school and out of work. The year of YASEP's launch, 22% of New York City's 18- to 24-year-olds (in other words, a total of 187,588 individuals) fell into this category.¹⁹

FIGURE 2. WHO WOULD BE SERVED BY YASEP PROGRAMS?



Young adults who are out of school and out of work = A+B



YASEP Partnerships and the Project's Timeline

PARTNERSHIPS

Eleven partnerships were selected to participate in the YASEP demonstration project (2013–2018). Each partnership brought together at least one community-based organization and/or one industry skills training entity, and one or more sector-specific employer/employer intermediary group. The designated lead of each partnership is highlighted in the list below.



Comprehensive Youth Development and the Borough of Manhattan Community College prepared students for careers in healthcare while earning a certified medical assistant credential.



Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation partnered with transportation and logistics employers to offer career pathways into the transportation sector with a robust career ladder, living wages, and union protections.



Green City Force, with partners Con Edison, L+M Development Partners, C+C Management, and the New York City Housing Authority's Office of Resident Economic Empowerment, focused on the sustainability sector.



The Knowledge House created the Bronx Digital Pipeline with Hostos Community College and Per Scholas to develop pathways into cutting-edge technology jobs.



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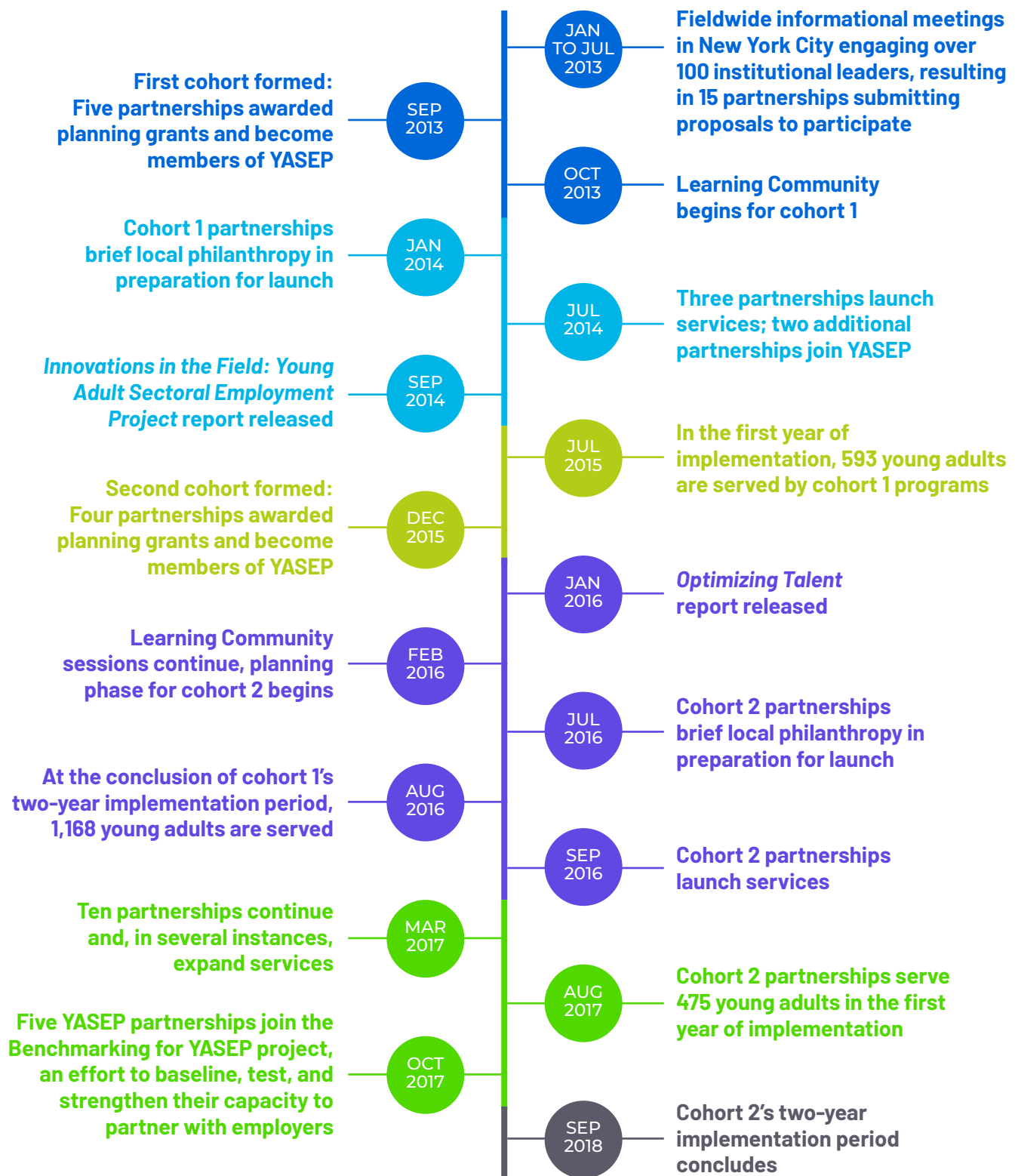


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The Wildlife Conservation Society, working together with FECS Health and Human Services and BronxWorks, developed a system for the training, hiring, retaining, and promoting of young adults from the Bronx in various job sectors—hospitality, food services, and retail—at WCS's Bronx Zoo.²⁰

TIMELINE AND KEY MILESTONES



In total, the two cohorts resulted in 2,135 young adults reconnected to education, training, and workforce opportunities; 1,121 employed; and 883 earning industry-recognized credentials.

YASEP's Impact Framework: Measuring Results

YASEP was designed to test the effectiveness of sectoral employment strategies for young adults and improve the way that workforce development organizations serving young adults partner with and support employer partners. These organizations typically seek to prepare and connect workers to upwardly mobile careers with overall good job conditions, wages, benefits, and opportunities for advancement. The project sought to amplify the effectiveness of this work through a structural approach centered on achieving field-level change that typically cannot be achieved by individual people or institutions.

To measure the demonstration project's achievement of this aim, YASEP partners worked with JobsFirstNYC to develop an impact framework that would track four levels of results: people results, institutional results (specifically employers), partnership-level results, and systemic results (see Table 1).

A comprehensive impact framework was critical for two reasons. First, because the demonstration project was a systems-change effort, it was necessary to track not just easily quantifiable outcomes related to jobseeker results but also less tangible (but equally important) outcomes concerning the strength of partnerships and changes happening at the field, or systems, level. Second, partners understood the importance of tracking quantitative and qualitative impacts on employers, including changes they made in their own practices. Accordingly, the initial framework for the effort—which remained unchanged as YASEP's planning, development, implementation, and evaluation took place—incorporated four major elements, as outlined in Table 1. Partners used this framework to guide their work throughout the implementation process.

TABLE 1. THE YASEP IMPACT FRAMEWORK

 <p>PEOPLE</p> <p>Are more people accessing economic opportunity and achieving economic mobility through education, training, and employment?</p>	 <p>INSTITUTIONS (EMPLOYERS)</p> <p>How have individual employers and companies evolved their own thinking and practice?</p>
 <p>PARTNERSHIPS</p> <p>How has our collective infrastructure strengthened to increase the number and quality of economic opportunities for young adults and their communities?</p>	 <p>SYSTEMS</p> <p>How have systemic conditions—such as increased access, hiring policy changes, and financial investments—changed to better support equitable economic opportunity?</p>

The Results

Highlighted below are the significant outcomes achieved by YASEP partnerships between July 2014 (when the project's first cohort launched services) and September 2018 (when the demonstration period concluded). Although several of the YASEP partnerships continue operating today, the focus of this paper is on the results achieved during the demonstration period.



PEOPLE

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- ▶ **100% of partnerships** increased the number of unique employer partners within their sector or industry of focus



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- ▶ **11 of 11** partnerships (100%) formally incorporated and integrated the YASEP approach into their ongoing array of programs and services
- ▶ **11 of 11** partnerships (100%) utilized their YASEP programming to build new programs in the same sector or in new sectors of the economy

**WCS ultimately did not proceed with its planned partners; instead, it strengthened its internal onboarding and training protocols and refined its approach to connecting Bronx young adults to careers in hospitality, food services, and retail.*



SYSTEMS

- ▶ **11 of 11** partnerships (100%) created new mechanisms to benefit both the communities they serve and their employer partners. Examples include:
 - A transportation sector business intermediary in Cypress Hills/East New York
 - A customized training program to strengthen supervisors' effectiveness when supervising younger frontline workers in the largest healthcare employer, Montefiore, in the Bronx
 - A tech-hub intermediary effort that connects tech companies with budding technology and small-business entrepreneurs in the South Bronx
 - A customized talent pipeline that ensures that younger workers have first-line access to technical theater jobs
 - A revamping of New York City's largest young adult employer, the Wildlife Conservation Society, to improve quality and conditions for young people working in seasonal-to-permanent customer service jobs
- ▶ **7 of 11** partnerships (64%) influenced employer practices in a way that had a measurable impact on job quality for key occupations. Examples include:
 - Increase in base wages for key occupations
 - Improvements in employee benefits and training
 - Company-level policy changes facilitating ease and flexibility of employee scheduling, directly benefiting young workers concurrently participating in training or education activities while employed
 - Increased employer contributions to training and onboarding expenses



PEOPLE

In many respects, achieving value and impact in workforce programming is straightforward and concrete. Did a person served through a workforce program obtain employment? At what wage? For what duration of time? Did they advance in their role or advance to a position of greater pay, responsibility, and benefits? Have they become more economically secure as a direct result of their gainful employment? These are questions answered commonly with a simple yes or no, through straightforward binary metrics.

What is often less clear and tangible is the degree of work involved for both the jobseeker and the program that is working with them to complete the interim steps needed to accomplish their employment goals and to embark on a progressive career path. For example, obtaining the necessary identification and related paperwork for employment—such as a driver’s license or photo ID—can often be a challenge for young people and the programs that serve them. Recognizing these smaller steps toward success is important. In this regard, it is noteworthy that YASEP partners ensured that 883 young adults achieved an in-demand, industry-relevant credential during their sectoral employment program experience. YASEP partners also connected hundreds more young adults to other resources and services to ensure their continued success and growth along their career path once employed.

YASEP partners, as they evolved, also developed a mechanism for sharing referrals and supports with one another. This was a first-of-its-kind effort for New York City’s young adult-serving workforce programs, and the end result was an online system for cross-agency referrals known as the YASEP Network. Thanks to this network, young people who otherwise may not have been an appropriate fit or ready for the initial training that they applied for were successfully connected to organizations within the network, thus ensuring their continued progress.



Taiheem W.

PROGRAM: TECHBRIDGE – PER SCHOLAS

FEATURE

In 2015, Taiheem was working as a security guard, making \$9.75 an hour. Curious about developing his tech skills (he'd recently built a computer after watching a video on YouTube), Taiheem googled "free tech training" and found Per Scholas.

Taiheem wrote an essay and was invited for an interview.

While his reading scores were good, his score on the Math Test for Adult Basic Education did not meet Per Scholas's requirement. Fortunately, Taiheem was identified as a good candidate for the TechBridge program—a collaboration between Per Scholas and The Door that was designed, launched, and funded through YASEP. The contextualized upskilling provided by TechBridge served as a crucial "bridge" into Per Scholas' tech training program—a program in which Taiheem would not have otherwise been able to partake. In addition to helping Taiheem get the math score he needed to be accepted into Per Scholas, TechBridge helped him build essential job readiness skills such as interviewing and note-taking that would ultimately support his successful completion of the program.

After graduating from Per Scholas, Taiheem was hired full time by the Javits Center, where he received a New York State pension plan. He then moved to 2U, where he started in customer support and then made a lateral move to coding one year later.

At 2U, Taiheem was excited about the affinity groups, hackathon events, and game tournaments in the video game room. He took advantage of a company program offering one short course per year and completed a Flatiron School Bootcamp in full stack web application development in the evenings.

"There were times I'd spend my last dollar on Pampers, wouldn't eat," shared Taiheem when reflecting on his livelihood before making his career shift. "Right now I feel so content; I don't occupy my mind with worry. Worry stops you from being able to advance your mind."

His only constructive criticism for the TechBridge program? "I would make the requirements to get in less tough, and make it more about a person's desire to ... complete [the program]."

With his new tech skills, salary and endless drive, Taiheem is well on his way toward realizing his vision of success. For him, this looks like "every member of my family being able to not only provide for themselves financially, mentally, and just basic needs, but to also give that to other people and to their families. When you do that, you've created a legacy that never dies—a way of thinking, a way of being."

Not only does Taiheem's career trajectory highlight the immense power of perseverance when paired with opportunity—it also underscores the value of bridge programs such as TechBridge that remove early barriers, providing individuals access to life-changing training, support, and connections to workforce programs such as Per Scholas.



INSTITUTIONS (EMPLOYERS)

YASEP achieved a number of tangible results that brought direct value to employers. This was the area of achievement that many partners cited as holding the greatest hope for field-level advancement and learning. Examples of these results include the following:



Empire Transit Corporation in partnership with Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation

Empire Paratransit Corporation, a paratransit services company in central Brooklyn, increased its entry-point wages for key driver occupations, providing new hires with better wages and concurrently reducing the company's new-employee turnover rate from 85% at 90 days to just 40% within one year. While these

retention figures may be modest in some industries, in the paratransit services industry in New York, they are quite significant. The employer made the decision to adjust wages at the urging of its sectoral training partner, Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation, which demonstrated through other industry examples a clear relationship between employee retention and starting wages. The dramatic improvement in employee retention reduced direct costs concerning employee recruitment, onboarding, on-the-job training, and probationary period turnover.

"There is no doubt that our relationship with Cypress Hills has helped reduce our overall operating costs—including training, advertising, and screening—for our company because they have customized their training program to directly address our needs, which are challenging given the high level of turnover in our industry," noted John Costa, manager at Empire Paratransit Corporation. "This is the best partnership we have developed to date."

Franklin Energy in partnership with Green City Force

Franklin Energy, an employer partner of Green City Force (GCF), conducted an internal analysis of the costs associated with recruiting, onboarding, training, and compensating new frontline installers for their first three months on the job. The study revealed that retaining an employee for at least 90 days cost the company an average of \$7,800 per hire. If an employee left before reaching this milestone, that \$7,800 investment would be lost, requiring the company to restart the hiring and training process from scratch.

However, Franklin Energy found that GCF graduates had an almost 100% retention rate beyond this critical 90-day period. Recognizing the impact of hiring well-prepared candidates, Franklin Energy adjusted its hiring practices to prioritize GCF graduates and ensure that GCF remained a close partner to new hires, ultimately saving over \$240,000 in one year. These savings were reinvested in employee training, and as a result, two GCF alumni were promoted to leadership roles supporting the company's new-employee orientation process.

"Green City Force has been an invaluable talent-sourcing partner to Franklin Energy over a two-year period. Over two-thirds of our current installer workforce have been successfully referred to us from GCF, and the GCF team remains in touch with and supports our workers once they are on the job. This has led to cost savings in terms of reduced turnover," said Dave Wolk, a senior program manager at the company who oversaw the hire of 25+ young adults from GCF in recent years. "As a consequence, we are looking to replicate these kinds of community-based partnerships in our other markets."

GCF's relationship with Franklin Energy was an illustrative example of good sectoral practice, and Lisbeth Shepherd, GCF's former executive director, cited it as the first effort of its kind in a sector that is rapidly evolving.



“Green City Force has been an invaluable talent-sourcing partner to Franklin Energy over a two-year period. Over two-thirds of our current installer workforce have been successfully referred to us from GCF, and the GCF team remains in touch with and supports our workers once they are on the job. This has led to cost savings in terms of reduced turnover. As a consequence, we are looking to replicate these kinds of community-based partnerships in our other markets.”

—Dave Wolk, Senior Program Manager at the company that oversaw the hire of 25+ young adults from GCF in recent years

Wildlife Conservation Society

WCS, the Bronx's largest employer of young adult employees in seasonal, part-time roles, revamped its employment activities as a result of the technical assistance it received under YASEP, as well as its involvement with the YASEP Learning Community. Specifically, WCS developed and implemented an informed, strategic approach toward young adult employment that includes a Youth Employee Advisory Council focused on improving job quality and the customer experience, enhanced partnership efforts with local schools and community-based organizations, and increased customer services skills training for seasonal employees.

These changes led to improvements in recruiting, retention, and promotion for WCS's young adult employees. The YASEP approach also enabled WCS to assume an active role in city-wide employer-led initiatives, including the Center for Youth Employment's CareerReady NYC, as

well as planning discussions for the formation of the Bronx Private Industry Council.

"Since our involvement with YASEP and participation in the Learning Community, we have been successful leveraging the expertise of WCS's Education Department to serve young adult employees organization-wide," explained Liam McCarthy, former



senior director of institutional advancement and strategic planning at WCS. "This has impacted both our YASEP sector jobs (approximately 700 positions held by young adult employees across hospitality, retail, and food services each year) and our seasonal positions and internships within the Education Department itself, which serves an additional 800 young adults annually through wage-earning positions, internships, and volunteer opportunities. A change at this scale means that this body of work has positively impacted our organization overall, as well as those that we partner with in the communities we serve."



PARTNERSHIPS

“If partnerships were easy, then everyone would be doing them. But they are not easy to do, and not only do they require a lot of up-front work and planning, they also require real legwork to sustain and grow collaborative relationships over time. From our perspective at the Pinkerton Foundation, supporting such efforts is valuable, because collaboration helps ensure longer-term success for the young people served.”

—Laurie Dien, Vice President/Executive Director for Programs, the Pinkerton Foundation

Over the course of the demonstration period and after, the YASEP partnerships had significant success. Some achieved greater scale. Some refined and strengthened their training services. Some created innovative employer-facing services, and some subsequently won competitive public workforce contracts.

Comprehensive Youth Development with CUNY Borough of Manhattan Community College



Comprehensive Youth Development (CYD), in its partnership with the Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC), created customized training to support the talent needs of healthcare employers. As part of the model, CYD re-engaged program alumni who were a good fit for the skills training that was hosted at BMCC—an example of the type of consistency and long-term support central to the youth

development approach embedded in YASEP's partnership design. An important priority for BMCC was thoughtful partnering with local organizations, such as CYD, to ensure that students had access to strong social supports. BMCC's leadership cited the college's partnership with CYD as a model community college/community-based organizational partnership.

The strength of the partnership enabled a near-seamless approach for students as they transitioned through essential skills and technical skills training, providing an array of social and educational supports that directly contributed to graduate success in connecting to jobs. This enabled CYD to successfully work with the largest regional healthcare employer, Northwell Health Systems, to prepare young adults for specific jobs that the company had difficulty recruiting for. Based on the success of this work, CYD was awarded an Out of School Youth workforce contract with the Department of Youth and Community Development. This was the first time the organization won a substantial public contract for its programming.

Green City Force with Con Edison, L+M Development Partners, C+C Management, and the New York City Housing Authority's Office of Resident Economic Empowerment and Sustainability

Under YASEP, Green City Force embarked on a multi-organization, multi-employer partnership that created a direct talent pipeline between Green City Force's skills training program and an array of employers in the rapidly evolving energy field. The work resulted in the organization being able to take on larger employer accounts.

Moreover, Green City Force became a leading voice in the nascent green economy and assisted many of its employer partners in identifying the skills and competencies needed to fulfill newly created roles in the industry. These efforts have helped the organization achieve national recognition, including being honored with an Environmental Champion Award by the Environmental Protection Agency and being distinguished by Mayor Bloomberg as the "Most Innovative Nonprofit in NYC."

Roundabout Theatre Company with the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees and The Door

Roundabout Theatre Company developed a partnership with the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees in New York. This was a rare example of a partnership between an organization providing workforce training and a local union, and one of the only examples of a partnership designed to recruit and support young adults in apprenticeships.

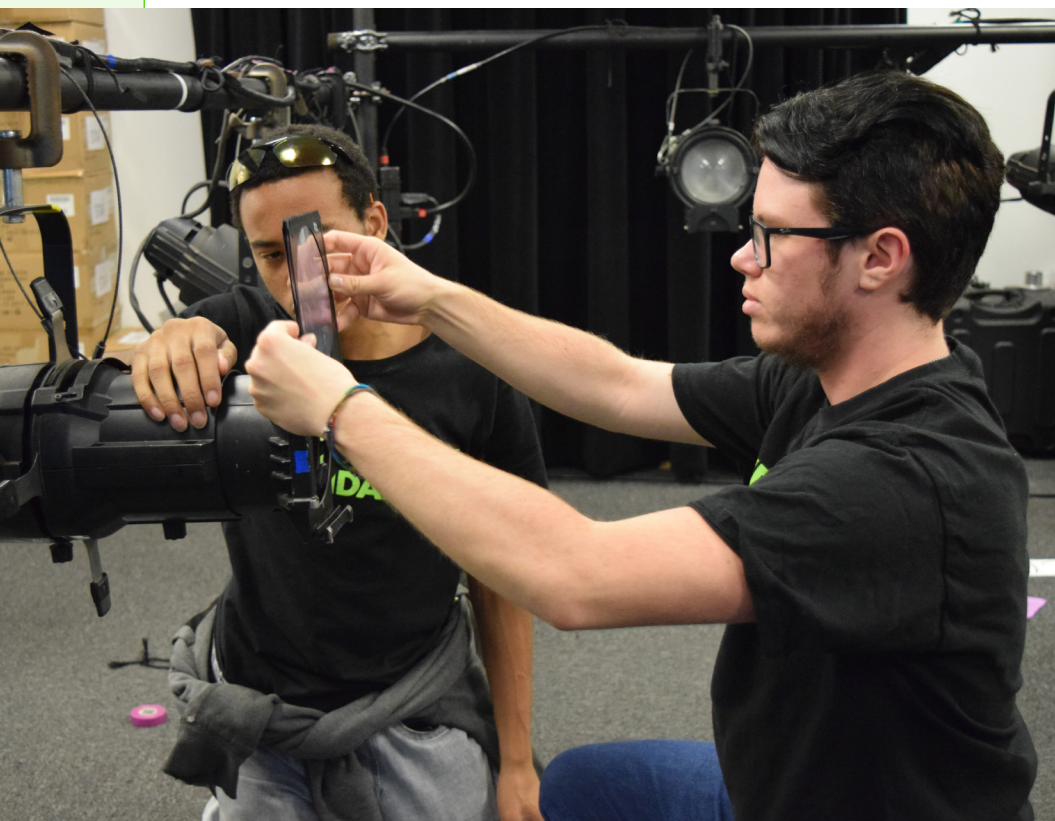
For the union and the employers they work with, this collaboration addressed a critical challenge: finding skilled and reliable technical talent in the face of an aging workforce and a shrinking, less diverse pipeline.

Through the YASEP partnership, Roundabout worked closely with the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees to review and refine its journeyman trainee testing and placement criteria. This collaboration led to the enhancement of Roundabout's Theatrical Workforce Development Program (TWDP) training curriculum and internship component of the program. Several young people from Roundabout's RTC's training program became fully unionized and employed in higher-wage jobs with union representation and a strong benefits packages.

Abrons Arts Center, which partnered with Roundabout to host internships and hire trainees once internships were completed, recognized the impact of the partnership. "We have been able to develop some nuance around the training protocols," noted Jon Harper, director of operations at Abrons Arts Center. "Our interns are really seen as apprentices, and while we pay them less during that phase of training than we do our regular employees, we are compensating them through education in terms of their overall role, but also to help with additional technical training opportunities. These interns leave us with the overall skills needed for a range of occupations in the space, and Roundabout's training program has been key to trainees connecting with employment within the industry."

Rafael A.

PROGRAM: THEATRICAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM



In 2019, Rafael was attending City College in New York, pursuing theater studies with a focus on technical theater, and seeking specialized training in lighting and stage management. Despite their professional stage management experience and their deep passion for technical theater, Rafael faced barriers to completing their degree. Financial realities that necessitated working multiple jobs while studying and a bureaucratic financial aid error ultimately led them to drop out of college. It was during

this time that a classmate handed Rafael a pamphlet for the TWDP, a training initiative that was heavily influenced by the YASEP partnership between the Roundabout Theatre Company, the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, and The Door. TWDP was designed to provide hands-on, industry-aligned training for young individuals seeking careers in technical theater.

“I was excited to find a program that was educational but not college-style teaching, where the metrics of success were different,” Rafael shared. “It was also crucial that I was getting paid to do it. I had never at that point been able to do college without also working three or four jobs at the same time and it just was burning me out.”

In addition to the program’s stipend and hands-on teaching style, Rafael was encouraged by the sense of belonging they felt among staff and program participants. “Entering into this group of like-minded people who were also in my age range, and also many of them in my income bracket ... was really essential to me. I think that was one of the reasons I didn’t succeed at

school the first time. I was going to school with people who didn't have to work and who didn't have to worry about taking care of anyone else, or helping pay for school at all, or paying for their own way to do anything and I found that really difficult," shared Rafael.

Connections forged during the program led Rafael to the three jobs they currently hold. A referral from a TWDP cohort member led to the opportunity for Rafael to interview at Sleep No More, where Rafael works as a lighting operator and receives paid time off and benefits. In addition, a TWDP instructor introduced Rafael to the lighting company IMCD, where Rafael works part-time as a production assistant at large-scale events like New York Fashion Week. Finally, Rafael serves as a teaching artist at Roundabout Theatre—the first fellow to make this leap. They look at this role as an opportunity to pay it forward: "A huge part of my TWDP training year was relying on the fellows as a network and also just sort of being imaginative about what it would look like once it was us who were in positions of power and how we were going to use those positions that we're in now to create pathways for other fellows," they shared. "[In this role] I have been able to do a lot in terms of getting other fellows to work in the places I have worked."

In addition to gaining a strong community, Rafael honed a wide variety of technical skills. Rafael explained that the training they received in lighting was particularly important given the demand for technicians with this particular skill set: "Lighting technicians get the most work ... in theater tech. This is something we were told in our training year. Even if you consider yourself a sound primary or scenic design primary focus, you'll probably do a lighting technician call at some point."

Today, Rafael envisions a future where their work continues to intersect with creativity, technical expertise, and teaching artistry. They're also considering graduate school to further refine their craft and challenge systemic inequities in the theater industry. (Rafael was able to complete their bachelor's degree at City College during the pandemic, thanks in large part to the COVID-era financial support that enabled them to focus exclusively on school for the first time.) Rafael's story highlights the impact of sector-based workforce development programs like TWDP—not just as opportunities to build technical skills and industry connections but as important spaces for young individuals to build a professional community and develop a sense of purpose and belonging.

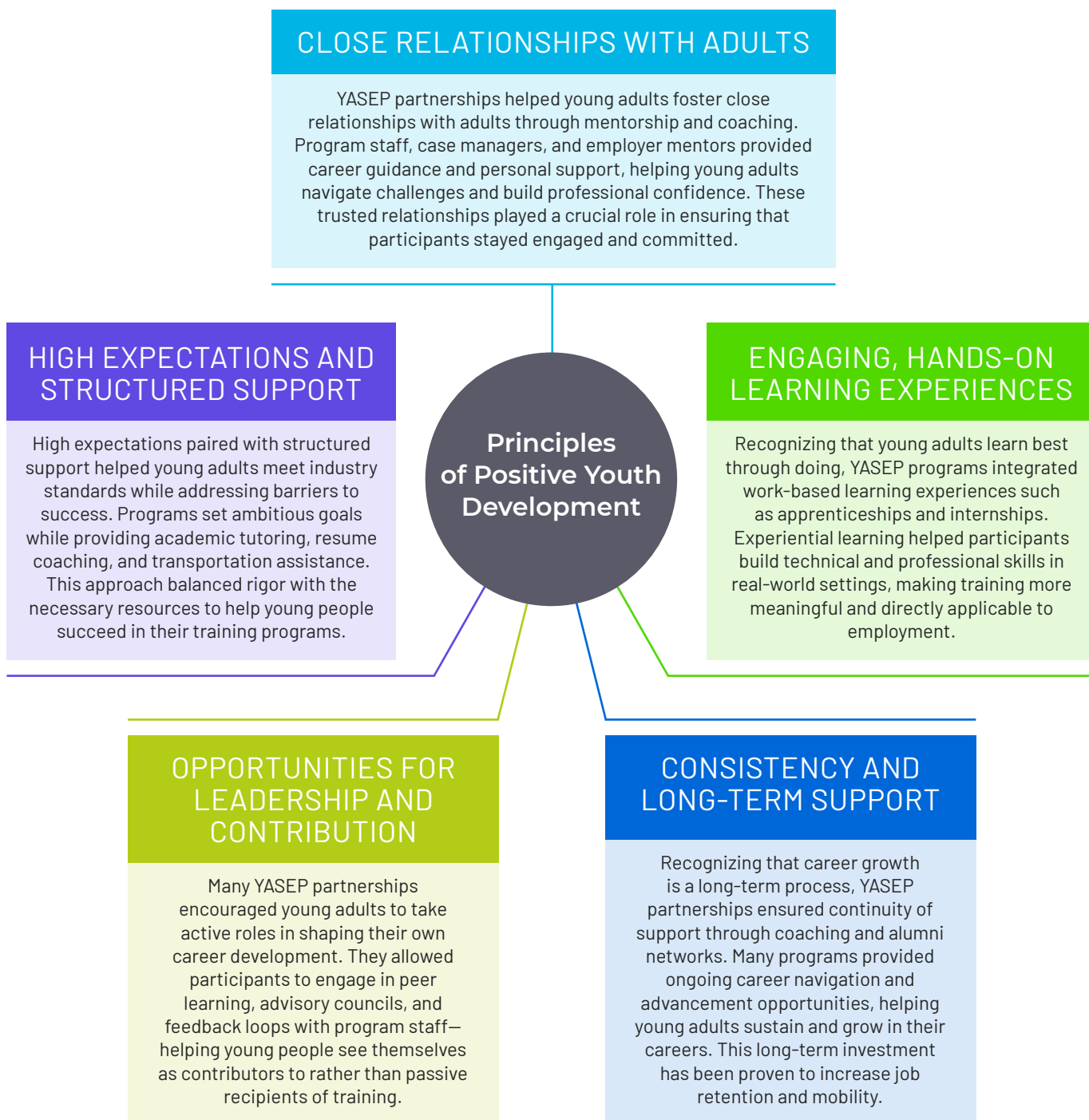


The overall progress and effectiveness of the partnerships not only emerged as an important success factor for the effort but was also fully in line with youth development principles, which call for practitioners and youth-serving organizations to meet young people “where they are.” The fact that many of the partners expanded their array of service offerings thanks to their connections with other youth development-focused organizations meant that young people benefited more than they would have had the organizations been acting on their own.

EMBEDDING YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES IN SECTOR STRATEGIES

Preparing young adults for the workforce requires more than technical skills; effective strategies must also build a sense of belonging, provide access to wraparound services, and create pathways for career advancement. YASEP partnerships received training on core youth development principles to create a comprehensive approach that not only prepared young adults for employment but also ensured they had the support and resources needed to succeed in career pathways over time. These principles came from the Youth Development Institute, which promoted positive youth development in New York City for 25 years through technical assistance and training.





By embedding these youth development principles into sector-based employment strategies, YASEP highlighted the fact that career success for young people is not just about securing a first job—it's about building the relationships, skills, and structures that support long-term economic mobility. While these principles are key for working with youth, their applicability is wide-reaching. By prioritizing holistic support, experiential learning, and long-term career pathways alongside labor market intelligence and employer perspectives, practitioners and funders can work together to strengthen workforce program design and make sure that all jobseekers have what they need to thrive in their careers.



SYSTEMS

Measuring systemic impacts and change, while increasingly important as an overall measure of the value of social service interventions, is still a relatively new area in the workforce development field. Creating effective measures can be challenging, as it requires multiple institutional actors to agree on and track a common set of goals and metrics. Furthermore, because systems-change efforts, by nature, take place over the long term, they are affected by developments such as turnover in staff leadership and changing policy environments. A strong example of YASEP's systems-level results was its influence on publicly funded programs, particularly increased funding for partnership and young adult-focused sectoral approaches.

New York City Human Resources Administration

In 2014, the Human Resources Administration (HRA) undertook an assessment of its workforce programming and decided to revamp its contracting design and process. To inform the agency's effort, HRA leadership listened in on several YASEP Learning Community sessions. Subsequent requests for proposals issued by the HRA, including its YouthPathways request for proposals, included design elements that drew on YASEP's approach. For example, the new contracts placed a premium on using partnerships and applying sectoral principles to the design of new training programs. Thereafter, JobsFirstNYC continued to engage with HRA leadership to help them refine and strengthen their youth-focused funding initiatives.

New York City Department of Youth and Community Development

YASEP's overall framework and partnership-driven approach were acknowledged as a promising practice by the New York City DYCD, the city agency that administers many prominent publicly funded programs designed to benefit young people, such as Workforce Investment and Innovation Act initiatives.

"When it comes to youth employment in New York City, JobsFirstNYC is a trusted resource for us. Their programs, research, and ideas have both focused and strengthened our efforts to ensure that the programs we fund are effectively responding to the needs of employers and therefore connecting young people to better opportunities to get a foothold in the labor market," said Andre White, deputy commissioner at DYCD at the time of YASEP's launch and now executive director and CEO of Phipps Neighborhoods. "YASEP has been a best practice that our leadership has drawn upon in order to inform the design of our Train & Earn programs and the JobsFirstNYC leadership has been an important resource for the organizations within our Train & Earn funding portfolio."

Several of the YASEP partnerships obtained DYCD Workforce Investment and Innovation Act funding in 2015, when the agency awarded multi-year service contracts to connect young adults to training, education, and jobs. These included Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation and Comprehensive Youth Development.

Other Government Offices

YASEP partnerships also obtained government funding from offices other than DYCD and HRA—evidence of increased funding for partnership and career pathways approaches. The Knowledge House, in its partnership with Per Scholas, became a part of the Tech Talent Pipeline initiative launched by the Department of Small Business Services in 2014, and Roundabout Theatre Company won a contract with the New York City Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment.

“YASEP has been a best practice that our leadership has drawn upon in order to inform the design of our Train & Earn programs and the JobsFirstNYC leadership has been an important resource for the organizations within our Train & Earn funding portfolio.”

—Andre White, Deputy Commissioner at DYCD at the time of YASEP's launch and now Executive Director and CEO of Phipps Neighborhoods

Lessons Learned

As a first-of-its-kind effort, YASEP naturally encountered a number of barriers during its implementation, which member organizations addressed with creativity and resolve. The lessons learned from these experiences can be used to inform the development of successful sectoral approaches moving forward:

1

ALLOCATE RESOURCES TO SUPPORT COLLABORATION AT EVERY LEVEL.

To build and sustain inclusive partnerships, resources must be allocated to support collaboration at every level. This includes:

- ▶ **Up-front funding for strategic planning.** The success of YASEP was due in part to the large planning grants each partnership was awarded to join the Learning Community and design new sectoral training programs adapted to effectively serve young adults.
- ▶ **Ongoing funding at the level necessary to sustain collaboration.**
- ▶ **Multiple sources of funding to scale practices.** Private investments alone may not be enough. Committed and consistent public funding must be available to ensure the resources necessary to strengthen existing practices and to share them, ultimately strengthening the field overall.

At the time of YASEP, large up-front grants were less common than they are today to support city-wide and regional approaches. YASEP showed that this form of funding was key and important for securing future large-scale investments, such as DYCD's funding for partnership development. Today, the field is seeing larger up-front grants both at a private philanthropy level, with grants such as the Catalyze Challenge, and at a federal funding level, with grants such as the Good Jobs Challenge.

2

SIMPLIFY DATA MANAGEMENT, REPORTING, AND LEARNING.

Data management processes need to be streamlined to make reporting easier and to create opportunities for shared learning. YASEP partners consistently identified difficulties in effectively handling and utilizing programmatic data. This was a challenge at the institutional level when it came to refining program strategies. It was also a challenge at the field level when it came to reporting progress to a variety of funders in various formats. While many partnerships used data management software or platforms such as Efforts-to-Outcomes and Salesforce, there was a significant adoption curve when it came to fully using the functionalities of these platforms. This curve hindered organizations' ability to collaborate with one another to promptly and efficiently report to both public and private funders.

3

ESTABLISH ROBUST SYSTEMS TO SUSTAIN PARTNERSHIPS' PROGRESS THROUGH STAFF CHANGES.

Practices need to be established to mitigate the effects of staff turnover. Several YASEP partnerships had to contend with staff changes over the planning and development phases of the project, as well as the two-year implementation period. As a result, many partnerships were affected by the loss of institutional memory and, in some instances, disruptions or delays in program delivery. A more robust information management system would have mitigated the effects of this turnover because there would have been less reliance on individuals for the transfer of information.

4

CENTRALIZE LABOR MARKET INTELLIGENCE AND PROVIDE WORKFORCE ORGANIZATIONS WITH THE TOOLS TO USE IT TO BUILD DEMAND-DRIVEN TRAINING.

Currently, many workforce development organizations operate independently in gathering and analyzing labor market intelligence, creating a fragmented landscape where access to high-quality, real-time data varies significantly. A centralized system—potentially funded by city, state, or federal sources—would ensure that all workforce nonprofits, regardless of size or funding capacity, have equal access to the best available labor market intelligence. This is critical, as effective employer engagement relies on the continual collection, review, and application of labor market data. While larger, well-funded organizations can afford premium platforms like JobsEQ and Lightcast to generate real-time insights, smaller community-based organizations—which often serve the hardest-to-reach populations—are left at a disadvantage, relying on publicly available data from sources like the Department of Labor and Bureau of Labor Statistics. **A collective approach to gathering, analyzing, and rapidly integrating labor market intelligence would level the playing field, enabling all workforce organizations to develop high-quality training programs that equip individuals with the skills needed for upwardly mobile careers.**

5

DEFINE AND STANDARDIZE EMPLOYER VALUE METRICS FOR SECTORAL PROGRAMS.

There needs to be a uniform approach to measure and communicate employer value, including a defined set of metrics. In earlier sectoral work, the most commonly cited employer cost was employee turnover.²² Turnover rates are often well documented in larger industries and available by occupation. According to McKinsey's reporting, annual employee turnover among frontline retail workers, for example, has been at least 60% for many years.²³ However, turnover rates are not the only metric that can be indicative of the value of sectoral programs. "Avoided costs" for such things as staffing/placement firms or the labor involved in processing employees through onboarding and orientation are not commonly used measures of sectoral program value, but such cost reductions directly contribute to the company bottom line.

The workforce development field lacks standardized metrics, clear definitions for those metrics, and a straightforward way to convey or apply them within employer-workforce relationships. Establishing a shared set of metrics and demonstrating their value through active employer partnerships is a crucial step in proving the effectiveness of sectoral strategies. Although YASEP partners did not create a unified framework for measuring employer value, they dedicated significant time to discussing and exploring the concept alongside their employer partners. After implementation, Learning Community convenings continued, featuring spotlight presentations and panel discussions where program partners shared effective practices. These sessions covered key topics, such as conducting organizational assessments to strengthen in-house industry expertise, fostering a data-driven and demand-responsive culture, building public-private partnerships, and creating strong feedback loops with employers.



YASEP's Legacy

While the demonstration project concluded several years ago, many YASEP organizations are building on their sectoral employment approaches and relationships through offshoot initiatives, as described below.

BENCHMARKING FOR YASEP

In 2017, JobsFirstNYC partnered with the Workforce Field Building Hub²⁴ at the Workforce Professionals Training Institute to collaborate with a select group of YASEP member organizations to baseline, test, and strengthen their capacity to engage employers using the “Success Drivers” developed through the Workforce Benchmarking Network.²⁵ Success Drivers is a nationally recognized framework consisting of four evidence-based guidelines: adaptive organization, qualified workforce, engaged businesses, and funding sustainability.

YASEP partner organizations that participated in this initiative:

- ▶ Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation
- ▶ Green City Force
- ▶ The Knowledge House
- ▶ Roundabout Theatre Company
- ▶ Stanley M. Isaacs Neighborhood Center

SECTORBOOST

In 2019, JobsFirstNYC and seven YASEP organizations partnered with Change Machine (formerly the Financial Clinic)²⁶ to launch the SectorBOOST project, a two-year financial security ecosystem initiative that brought financial coaching services (such as spending plans, referrals to free tax preparation services, and debt organizing) to young adult jobseekers in New York City. The initiative provided direct services and capacity building to YASEP workforce development organizations and served 900 young adults through integrated financial coaching.

YASEP partner organizations that participated in SectorBOOST:

- ▶ Comprehensive Youth Development
- ▶ The Knowledge House
- ▶ Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute
- ▶ Per Scholas
- ▶ Phipps Neighborhoods
- ▶ Queens Community House
- ▶ Roundabout Theatre Company



TRANSFER TO CAREER COLLABORATIVE

In 2017, JobsFirstNYC and New Visions for Public Schools joined forces to create the Transfer to Career Collaborative (T2C), a four-year pilot project that integrated a continuum of career development strategies into 12 New York City transfer high schools in order to improve postsecondary and workforce outcomes for students. Under T2C, these schools and their community-based partners collaborated with 11 workforce development organizations to embed career development into school design and connect students to sector-specific postsecondary opportunities. Like YASEP, T2C was designed to connect programs and institutions that had traditionally operated in isolation. While YASEP brought together a community-based organization, industry skills training entity, and sector-specific employer or employer intermediary, T2C brought together a school leader, counselor, and workforce practitioner to form school design teams. These design teams worked to develop and implement customized solutions to accommodate the uniqueness of each school and workforce development partner. By the end of the pilot, 3,766 students had engaged in new career development opportunities through T2C.

YASEP partner organizations that participated in T2C:

- ▶ **Comprehensive Youth Development**
- ▶ **The Knowledge House**
- ▶ **Phipps Neighborhoods**
- ▶ **St. Nicks Alliance**

SECTOR NETWORKS

Beginning in late 2020, JobsFirstNYC launched three Sector Networks. The Sector Networks are an expansion of YASEP, focusing on building collaboration across targeted employment sectors. These three networks—which focus on the green economy, technology, and healthcare sectors—seek to organize and expand effective skills training, strengthen collective mechanisms to partner with employers, customize training to meet targeted hiring demands, and increase employment outcomes for young adults and their communities. Many of the organizations that were part of YASEP are now partners in the three Sector Networks. To date, the networks have served over 3,754 individuals.

YASEP partner organizations that are now partners in the three Sector Networks:

- ▶ **Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation**
- ▶ **Green City Force**
- ▶ **The Knowledge House**
- ▶ **Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute**
- ▶ **Per Scholas**
- ▶ **Phipps Neighborhoods**
- ▶ **Stanley M. Isaacs Neighborhood Center**
- ▶ **St. Nicks Alliance**



Conclusion

YASEP set out to determine whether sectoral strategies could effectively connect young adults who are out of school and out of work to lasting employment in New York City. The outcomes of the model have ultimately answered this question: sectoral strategies, when applied in tandem with youth development strategies, can in fact create pathways to education and employment for young adults.

YASEP's impact is evident on many levels. For young adults, it provided pathways to industry training, the opportunity to earn recognized credentials, and access to meaningful, sustainable employment. At an institutional level, YASEP transformed employers' hiring practices to include youth-focused social supports, with reported improvements in onboarding and training processes, as well as reduced employee turnover costs. YASEP also equipped workforce development organizations with the resources and infrastructure to establish and maintain enduring employer partnerships. And at a systems level, YASEP led to changes in how public entities think about and carry out their work, from funding to program design.

One of the most essential pieces of YASEP's model was the flexibility provided to participating organizations to experiment, learn from missteps, and refine their approaches. This flexibility was made possible by YASEP's unique funding structure, which relied on private dollars and therefore operated outside the strictures of public contracts. Additionally, the model demonstrated the enormous impact of bringing in employer perspectives from the outset of program design, thereby ensuring that programs equipped young people with the actual skills and connections needed to not only obtain a job but thrive in their field of choice post-program.

The lessons from YASEP are clear: sustained investment, shared accountability, and a commitment to building lasting partnerships are essential to fostering economic mobility for young people and their communities. As cities across the country lean on workforce programs as a lever for economic mobility, YASEP provides a promising model for how to design and implement programs that meet young adults where they are and connect them to upwardly mobile career pathways, higher earnings, and a continued sense of purpose and belonging.



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Endnotes

- 1 JobsFirstNYC, [Innovations in the Field: Young Adult Sectoral Employment Project](#) (2014); Aspen Institute and JobsFirstNYC, [Optimizing Talent: The Promise and the Perils of Adapting Sectoral Strategies for Young Workers](#) (2016).
- 2 This includes cohort 1 outcomes (July 2014 through August 2016) and cohort 2 outcomes (September 2016 through September 2018).
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- 20 While a partnership strategy was developed, WCS did not proceed with its planned partners. Instead, WCS elected to use the YASEP Learning Community to undertake an effort to strengthen its onboarding and training protocols and to refine its approach to promoting Bronx young adults in careers in hospitality, food services, and retail.
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- 24 The Workforce Field Building Hub is a New York City-wide resource designed to unite and strengthen those interested in the diverse and wide-reaching workforce development field. It brings together key leaders from across the interdisciplinary and diverse New York City and national workforce community to identify common issues and solutions to build the field of workforce development. See <https://www.wpti.org>.
- 25 The Workforce Benchmarking Network is a collective of workforce organizations—along with public and private funders and other intermediaries—who are committed to improving their programming and outcomes through optimizing data collection and data benchmarking. See <https://skilledwork.org/workforce-benchmarking-network/>.
- 26 Built by practitioners for practitioners, Change Machine delivers online training materials, tipsheets, and lessons that help frontline staff grasp financial coaching topics such as building or repairing credit, protecting against identity theft, and applying for unemployment insurance. See <https://change-machine.org/app/uploads/2019/10/Boosting-Workforce-Development-FINAL-The-Financial-Clinic.pdf>.
- 27 Individuals are listed with the organizational affiliation they had when they contributed to the paper.

Appendices

APPENDIX 1: A CLOSER LOOK AT THE YASEP LEARNING COMMUNITY AND ON-SITE SUPPORT

The Learning Community

Comprising partnership leaders, core program staff, employers, and industry experts, YASEP's Learning Community ensured that partnership organizations could craft, implement, evaluate, and course correct the programs and strategies they implemented over time.

Core characteristics of the Learning Community included the following:

NEUTRAL SPACE FOR PLANNING AND LEARNING

The YASEP Learning Community was designed to provide a neutral, safe space for shared learning, particularly around the refinements necessary to overcome program development obstacles and to ensure that programming was properly resourced and managed.

As noted by Mara Cerezo, senior program officer at Green City Force, "I could not overstate the importance of planning in this work—in all of our work. The time to think and to focus on our partnership was not just invaluable, it was the most important factor in our bringing our work to fruition with strong results. The overall shared knowledge of the Learning Community, from which we continue to draw ideas and best practices, has been as important as having time at each session to navigate partnership issues and to build and refine the partnerships. This neutral space for planning and learning made a significant, positive impact on our progress."

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—Mara Cerezo, Senior Program Officer at Green City Force

“Time to work together and plan is a scarce commodity, but developing workforce strategies requires this kind of investment. Learning communities can be a powerful tool for shared learning.”

—Sheila Maguire, Senior Fellow in the Economic Opportunities Program at the Aspen Institute

Developing effective learning communities to support complex, multi-partner efforts can be challenging, but it is a necessary task, especially when an initiative seeks systemic change. “Time to work together and plan is a scarce commodity, but developing workforce strategies requires this kind of investment. Learning communities can be a powerful tool for shared learning,” said Sheila Maguire, senior fellow in the Economic Opportunities Program at the Aspen Institute, who served as the lead consultant to JobsFirstNYC on this project.

ACCESS TO CONTENT EXPERTS AND LEADING PRACTITIONERS

The YASEP Learning Community heard from industry experts and leading practitioners undertaking sectoral employment work in other areas of the country. This allowed participants to learn about promising approaches and understand how other efforts overcame challenges in their quests for success.

ACCESS TO CURRENT LABOR MARKET INFORMATION

The CUNY [Labor Market Information Service](#) played a key role both within the Learning Community and as part of partnerships’ overall effort to develop customized training services that addressed employers’ needs. The Labor Market Information service not only shared up-to-date labor market data but also provided access to employers and overall guidance to the partnerships so that their strategies were consistently informed by the perspectives and concerns of employers and other relevant industry sources. This suite of information (labor market data, employer perspectives, and broader industry trends and information) offered the labor market intelligence needed to effectively implement programming and to make refinements over time.

Customized, On-Site Technical Assistance

Another central feature was the provision of strategic advisement and support by industry experts and JobsFirstNYC staff, which helped partnerships troubleshoot issues specific to program design, staffing decisions, and data collection and management.

For example, the partnership led by the Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation, a sectoral employment effort designed to connect young adults to jobs and careers in the transportation and logistics sectors, saw a need to better address the talent demands of partnership employers, notably paratransit driving companies, which have very specific onboarding and staff training requirements.

With the help of customized technical assistance, the Cypress Hills team made the decision to hire a former paratransit company executive whose insider knowledge was invaluable for revising and updating the training curriculum, as well as communicating with partnership employers. “It was one of the turning points in the development of our sector work,” noted Lowell Herschberger, director of career and education programs at Cypress Hills. He added that the program “became much more sophisticated about our engagement with the paratransit industry because we now had continuous access to within-industry knowledge. It increased our credibility with our employer partners.” By being able to adopt the terminology and communication styles of the employers in the industry, the program substantially reduced its learning curve and improved the quality and duration of the job placements made.

Another example includes the partnership led by [Per Scholas](#), which faced specific challenges in recruiting the first cohort of its TechBridge program, a bridge program aimed at ensuring that younger people are prepared to successfully meet the requirements of Per Scholas’s admission process. With significant under-enrollment concerns in the first cohort, the staff worked with JobsFirstNYC to receive on-site technical assistance and student feedback. The supportive work paid off: By the second cohort, recruitment increased and recruitment targets were consistently being met. “TechBridge, designed to help jobseekers, especially young people, that we would not otherwise be able to serve given our program requirements for reading and math skills, has enabled our organization to offer a more diverse talent pool for our employer partners, increasing our overall organizational value proposition as a consequence,” recalled Kelly Richardson, former managing director at Per Scholas.

“It was one of the turning points in the development of our sector work. [The program] became much more sophisticated about our engagement with the paratransit industry because we now had continuous access to within-industry knowledge. It increased our credibility with our employer partners.”

—Lowell Herschberger, Director of Career and Education Programs at Cypress Hills

APPENDIX 2: PLANNING LEARNING COMMUNITY SESSIONS

COHORT 1 EXAMPLE

YASEP LEARNING COMMUNITY EVENTS				
OCTOBER 8 9:30 am-5:00pm	OCTOBER 29 9:30 am-5:00pm	NOVEMBER 12 9:30 am-5:00pm	DECEMBER 10 9:30 am-5:00pm	JANUARY 17 9:30 am–5:00 pm
<i>The Industry</i>	<i>The Intervention</i>	<i>Making the Match: Connecting for the Business Bottom Line</i>	<i>Outcomes through Partnership</i>	<i>Presentations, Feedback, and the Good Jobs Strategy</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Framing the Sectoral Field <i>Participants: leadership, managerial, key frontline</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sectoral Strategies <i>Participants: leadership, managerial, frontline (jobseeker service delivery, employer- facing)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Industry Criteria and Assessment <i>Participants: leadership, managerial, frontline (jobseeker service delivery)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Outcomes, Goals, and Measures• Collaborative Roles and Priorities <i>Participants: leadership, managerial, key frontline</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• YASEP Sector Model Presentations with Structured Peer Feedback• The Good Jobs Strategy: <i>How the Smartest Companies Invest in Employees to Lower Costs & Boost Profits</i> <i>Participants: leadership, managerial</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Industry Analysis <i>Participants: leadership, managerial, frontline (employer-facing)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Applying Young Adult Development Principles to Sector <i>Participants: managerial, frontline</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recruitment Networks <i>Participants: managerial, frontline (job eeker service delivery)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Measuring what Matters: Lessons from the Field <i>Participants: leadership, managerial, key frontline</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Design Pitch Prep and Run of Show for Funder Briefing <i>Participants: leadership, managerial</i>
Reflection on Implications Using Impact Framework				
Employer Partnership Development				
TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE				
Labor Market Information and Analysis, including data collection/compilation and validation (surveying) • Post-meeting Memo → Draft TA Plan Phone Conference → TA Plan Implementation				Implementation Proposal Consultation
	Identification and Connection to Sectoral Models and Leaders Post-meeting Memo → Draft TA Plan Phone Conference → TA Plan Implementation			

APPENDIX 3: IMPLEMENTATION OF LEARNING COMMUNITY SESSIONS

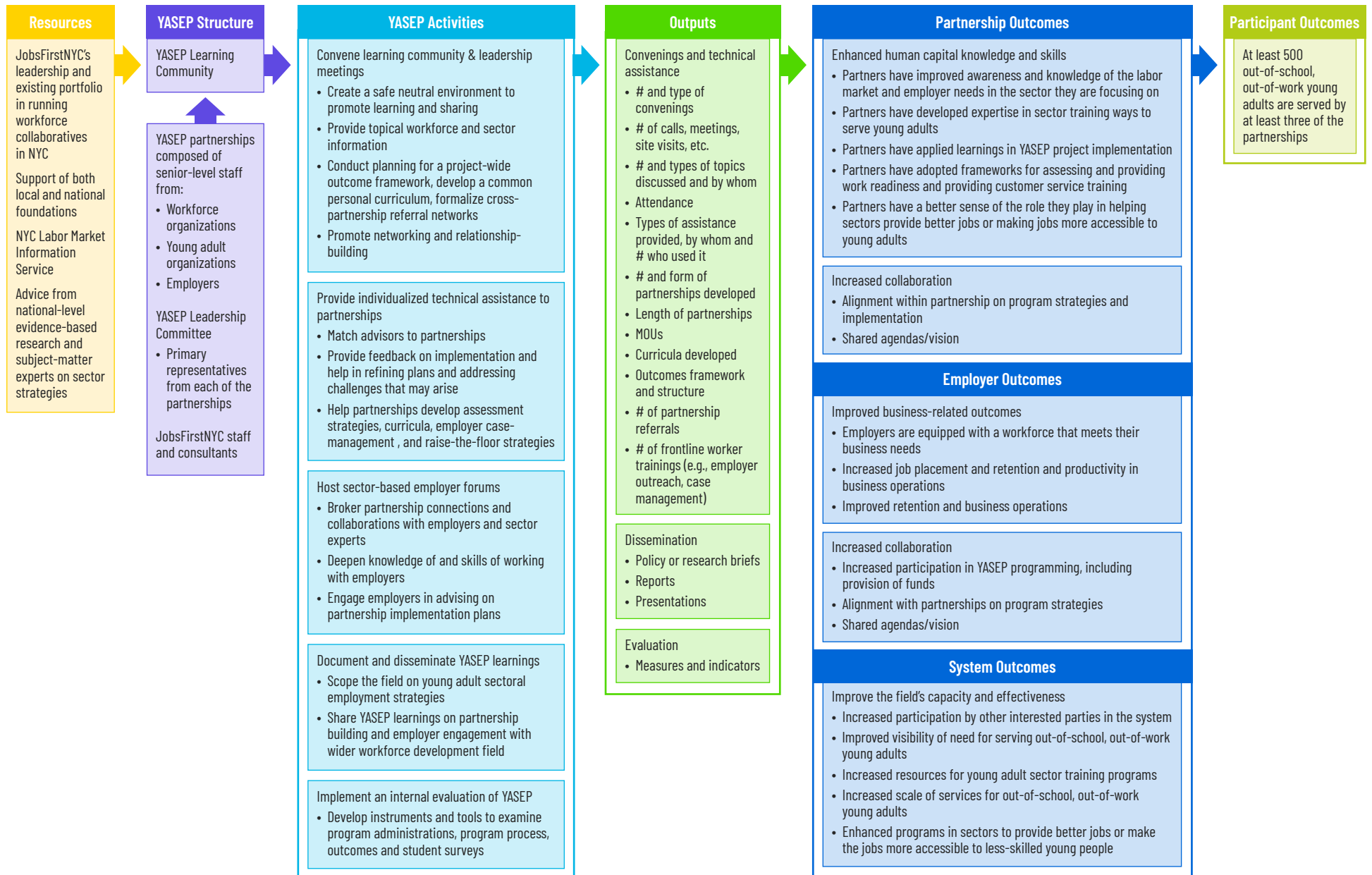
YASEP COHORT 1 LEARNING COMMUNITIES		
Date	Learning Community Title	Description
Feb 25, 2014	Business Strategy: Connecting for the Business Bottom Line	This session strengthened participants' ability to align workforce strategies with business goals by building partnerships that deliver measurable value to sectoral employers.
June 10, 2014	Assessment	This session built participants' capacity to develop effective assessment processes that match jobseekers to sector-specific training and employment opportunities—based on interest, aptitude, and readiness. Members shared tools, practices, and strategies for aligning candidate screening with employer needs and program success benchmarks.
July 16, 2014	Expanding the YASEP Community of Practice	This session expanded the YASEP community of practice to reflect the growing sectoral employment landscape for young adults in New York City and fostered planning around shared outcomes, referral networks, and collaborative curriculum development.
Dec 11, 2014	Building Our Recruitment Network	This session launched YASEP's cross-referral network, bringing together recruitment and program teams to build shared understanding of each model and connect young adults to opportunities that best matched their interests, competencies, and goals.
April 28, 2015	Advancing Sector Partnerships	This session challenged partnerships to apply sector strategies more intentionally to young adult employment, with field leaders offering insights on the employer bargain, career pathways, and labor market-informed program design.
June 4, 2015	Employer Partnerships in Practice	This session examined how to build strong, accountable employer partnerships, with practitioners and national leaders sharing strategies for aligning training with business needs, supporting retention, and navigating real-world employer dynamics.
July 23, 2015	Designing Effective Bridge Programs	This session focused on the role of bridge programs in preparing young adults for sectoral training, equipping partnerships with strategies for contextualized instruction, strong partner coordination, and integrated supports.

APPENDIX 4: YASEP LOGIC MODEL

As the first cohort came to a close, JobsFirstNYC collaborated with the Aspen Institute to design a logic model to visualize YASEP's approach.

Overarching JobsFirstNYC Goal – Reduce the number of New York City's 172,000 out-of-school and out-of-work young adults between the ages of 18 and 24 by the year of 2014

YASEP Goal – Facilitate the development of partnerships and provide capacity-building support to help organizations implement sector-based training programs that meet the needs of employers and give young adults improved labor market access





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