Northeastern University
Community to Community

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Building Opportunity: A Research-Informed Manual for Summer Youth Employment

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Alicia Modestino
Lynn Sanders

J-PAL
ABDUL LATIF JAMEEL POVERTY ACTION LAB

Kalila Jackson-Spieker

BROOKINGS

Martha Ross

Arnold Ventures

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Arnold Ventures is a philanthropy dedicated to tackling some of the most pressing challenges in society through evidence-based policy solutions. With a focus on criminal justice reform, education, health, and public finance, Arnold Ventures has been instrumental in funding cutting-edge research that informs the design and expansion of SYEPs nationwide. Their investments aim to produce measurable outcomes and long-term benefits for underserved communities, helping policymakers adopt programs that deliver proven results.

The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) at MIT is a global leader in evidence-based policy, dedicated to reducing poverty through rigorous research and policy outreach. With an extensive network of affiliated researchers and a deep commitment to translating academic research into real-world impact, J-PAL has produced groundbreaking evaluations on the effectiveness of Summer Youth Employment Programs (SYEPs). Their work has shaped public policy by providing actionable insights into what works to improve economic outcomes and social mobility for marginalized youth.

Brookings Institution is a renowned nonprofit public policy organization committed to producing high-quality, independent research that addresses critical social and economic issues. Through its Center on Children and Families and the Metropolitan Policy Program, Brookings has conducted influential research on youth employment, economic mobility, and workforce development. Their contributions help frame national conversations on how programs like SYEP can close opportunity gaps and foster pathways to economic security for young people.

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Authors

Alicia Sasser Modestino
Lynn Sanders
Kalila Jackson-Spieker
Martha Ross

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Summer Youth Employment Program Manual

May 2025

I. Introduction: Who and What is this Manual for?

Roughly thirty cities across the United States provide Summer Youth Employment Programs (SYEPs) to connect low-income youth living in marginalized communities to positions where they learn valuable skills that set them up for future success. With the support of Arnold Ventures, we have developed this SYEP manual to help guide future investments, whether it be on the part of private sector employers, nonprofits and foundations, city and state agencies, or the federal government.

This manual draws on both the research evidence generated by rigorous evaluations as well as the collective years of lived experience across multiple US cities spent piloting and implementing SYEP programs. By working together to bridge the gap between knowledge and practice, researchers and practitioners have achieved real-world impacts such as expanding the number and type of summer opportunities, increasing access for youth facing barriers to employment by streamlining application and hiring processes, and improving coordination across SYEP intermediaries by improving job matching and tracking of youth placements.

In the chapters that follow, we lay out the key pieces of research evidence, the basic program components of the SYEP model, examples of existing summer job programs, and best practices for replicating and adapting the model to other local contexts. The first half of this manual reviews the research evidence from the past decade and links these findings to the primary components of the SYEP model, which is intended to be the "gold standard" based on what works and for which groups of youth. Recognizing that not every city will be able to achieve the "gold standard" model in its first year of operation, we also describe lower-touch options that can be built on over time as more resources become available. We provide concrete examples from different types of programs that vary by age and size, populations served, summer experiences offered, operating roles, and funding mechanisms. The latter half of the manual provides more detail on each program element, highlighting best practices for replication and providing additional resources (e.g., checklists, MOU templates, data tracking and evaluation plans) that can be adapted to the user's local context.

To make this information as accessible to the widest audience possible, this manual assumes that most readers have not hosted an SYEP before. If you are a more seasoned SYEP reader, we advise reading through the research evidence and program components before skimming over the best practices in the third chapter to iterate and make improvements for the upcoming summer. That said, there are a number of best practices from various programs in each phase that even an experienced SYEP operator might find helpful as essential "life hacks" for recruiting new employers, marketing opportunities to youth, matching youth to employers, backfilling positions, getting youth through payroll paperwork, hosting orientation and training, and troubleshooting when the unexpected arises.

A special note: We consider this to be a dynamic document that will be regularly updated to make it more user-friendly and informative. Please read on and be sure to fill out the feedback form linked here and at the end of the document to share your specific questions, ideas, or "life hacks" with us so that we can continue to improve this living document to serve as a resource for the wider SYEP

community of practice across the US. You can also ***indicate if you would like to be informed*** whenever substantive updates are made to this manual and a new version is released.

II. SYEP Research Evidence: What Works and for Whom?

A fundamental starting point for many jurisdictions that are interested in SYEPs is the desire to ensure that youth in the community are able to fill unstructured time during the summer in a way that fosters healthy youth development. Beyond that, jurisdictions may have multiple additional policy goals for implementing Summer Youth Employment Programs, including:

- Reducing the likelihood that youth will engage in delinquent or unsafe behavior during the summer.
- Fostering the development of social and professional skills as well as a perspective on possible career pathways.
- Creating direct connections to the labor market that improve employment prospects.
- Providing income and economic opportunities to youth who would otherwise have difficulty accessing these resources.
- Improving academic outcomes during the school year (Congressional Research Service, 2017).

Rigorous research evidence from Boston, Chicago, New York, and Philadelphia has shown that summer jobs programs are a cost-effective way of improving youth criminal justice outcomes, with emerging research from Boston also showing positive impacts related to employment and educational attainment. Below, we summarize the existing research evidence across Boston, Chicago, New York, and Philadelphia (Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL), 2022).[1] Research evidence can help jurisdictions understand how and when SYEPs may be able to impact youth outcomes that are relevant to each of these goals and make informed decisions about program design. The evidence base summarized here is more nuanced than any one individual study and shows that the overall impact of SYEPs can vary depending on the outcome or SYEP participant population in question. In general, localities seeking to start or scale up SYEPs may want to be mindful about how they target and structure the program, particularly if they are using it to reach a specific policy goal.

A. Criminal Justice Outcomes

Some of the longest-lasting and biggest impacts on youth outcomes have been observed in the area of criminal justice and public safety. For example, participation in SYEPs was found to reduce arrest and/or arraignment rates during the program summer across all evaluated sites, and these effects lasted for at least a year. These reductions in arrest rates were particularly notable for violent crime arrests, and in New York City, researchers found that SYEPs even reduced mortality rates for young people who died of external causes, which included accidents, homicides, and suicides. Notably, the rapid expansion of Chicago's One Summer Chicago Plus program, growing to almost four times its original size across several years, continued to yield substantial reductions in arrests, indicating the strength of the basic SYEP model. Below, we expand on each of these key

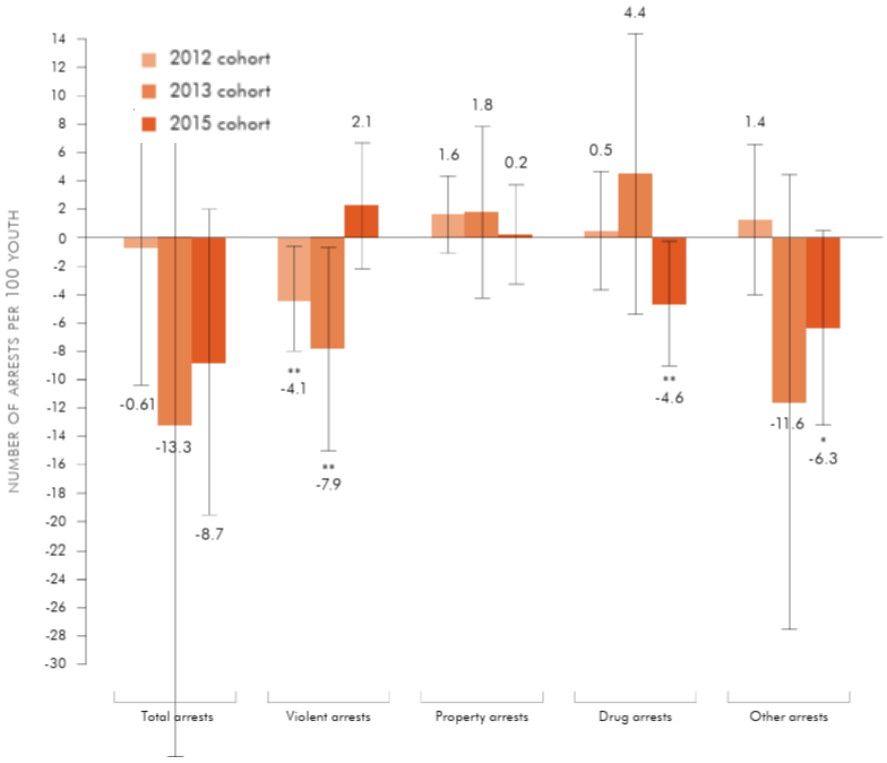
[1] This section draws heavily from Li, Yiping and Kalila Jackson-Spieker. The Promises of Summer Youth Employment Programs: Lessons from Randomized Evaluations. J-PAL North America, MIT. 2022. https://www.povertyactionlab.org/sites/default/files/publication/SYEP_Evidence_Review-9.22.22.pdf

findings in greater detail. *Evidence base: five papers (one on Boston, two on Chicago, one on Chicago and Philadelphia, and one on New York City)*

1. SYEPs reduced arrest and/or arraignment rates during the program summer in all evaluated sites. This reduction typically persisted for at least one year later and even longer at one site.

In 2012, participation in One Summer Chicago Plus (OSC+) reduced the number of violent crime arrests by 56 percent in the first year after the program summer (Davis and Heller 2020). The rapid expansion of One Summer Chicago Plus (OSC+) from 700 slots in 2012 to 2,000 slots in 2015 provided researchers with an opportunity to understand how the program's impact might change as it scaled up. As part of the expansion, OSC+ began working with four times as many providers as it had in 2012, meaning that a key delivery component—who managed the day-to-day experiences of participating youth—changed. Across the study years, there continued to be substantial reductions in arrest rates, suggesting that the basic program structure can be replicated with enough fidelity to maintain the impact on criminal justice outcomes. Moreover, participation also significantly reduced the number of drug arrests by 135 percent and other arrests by 75 percent in the later years after the program's expansion.[2] A full breakdown comparing arrests by crime type across the three studies can be found in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Chicago SYEP participation reduced the number of arrests per 100 youth one year after randomization for different types of arrests.



Source: Li and Jackson-Spieker (2022).

[2] "Other arrests" is defined as arrests from all other crimes except violence, property, and drug arrests.

Note: Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Statistically significant difference relative to the comparison group is noted at the 1% (***), 5% (**), or 10% (*) level.

Similar impacts have been found across all four of the cities where the basic SYEP model has been evaluated. In Philadelphia, SYEP participation reduced the number of total arrests by 107 percent (Heller 2022). In Boston, SYEP participation reduced the number of arraignments for violent crimes by 41 percent and for property crimes by 37 percent during the seventeen months after the program (Modestino 2019).[3] In New York City, SYEP participation decreased the chance a youth was arrested by 17 percent, convicted by 31.2 percent, and incarcerated by 9.9 percent during the program summer (Kessler et al. 2021). In all cases, the observed impacts were driven primarily by reductions in arrests among youth who had already been arrested at least once before the program summer.

2. Because the effects of SYEPs on criminal justice involvement and youth safety last beyond the end of the summer, it is unlikely they are solely a function of youth being kept busy while they are out of school.

Prior to recent studies, SYEPs were thought to reduce criminal justice involvement simply by "incapacitation" –meaning youth were kept too busy to have time to get into trouble. Yet, if this were the case, then it would be unlikely that researchers would observe a reduction in criminal justice involvement beyond the summer, suggesting that longer-term behavioral changes might be occurring. One hypothesis is that youth are developing socio-emotional skills that can be deployed inside and outside the workplace. These skills allow youth to process social information and make decisions, skills that are central to avoiding risky behavior and interpersonal conflict. For example, in Boston, researchers found a correlation between the observed decrease in arraignments and self-reported improvements in social skills such as managing emotions, asking for help, and resolving conflict with a peer (Modestino 2019). Another hypothesis for why summer jobs decrease criminal justice involvement is that they might expand youths' social networks and introduce them to new peers who may engage in lower-risk activities. Some researchers have posited that the tangible increase in household income may also dissuade youth in high-poverty neighborhoods from engaging in crime as a means of economic survival.

3. SYEPs save lives by reducing deaths from external causes.

By reducing the risk of violence among youth, SYEPs can also reduce the risk of death. For example, the mortality rate for New York City youth who participated between 2005 and 2008 had declined 0.073 percentage points by 2014, an 18 percent reduction from a baseline mortality rate of 0.41 percent among all applicants who were not offered a slot in the program. This reduction translates into 83 lives of mostly young men saved because of participation in the program. The reduction in mortality was due to a drop in deaths from external causes, including accidents, homicides, and suicides, as opposed to deaths from natural causes (Gelber, Isen, and Kessler 2016).

B. Academic Outcomes

The strongest evidence on the impact of SYEPs on academic outcomes is from evaluations of the Boston SYEP program, which found that participants were more likely to graduate high school on

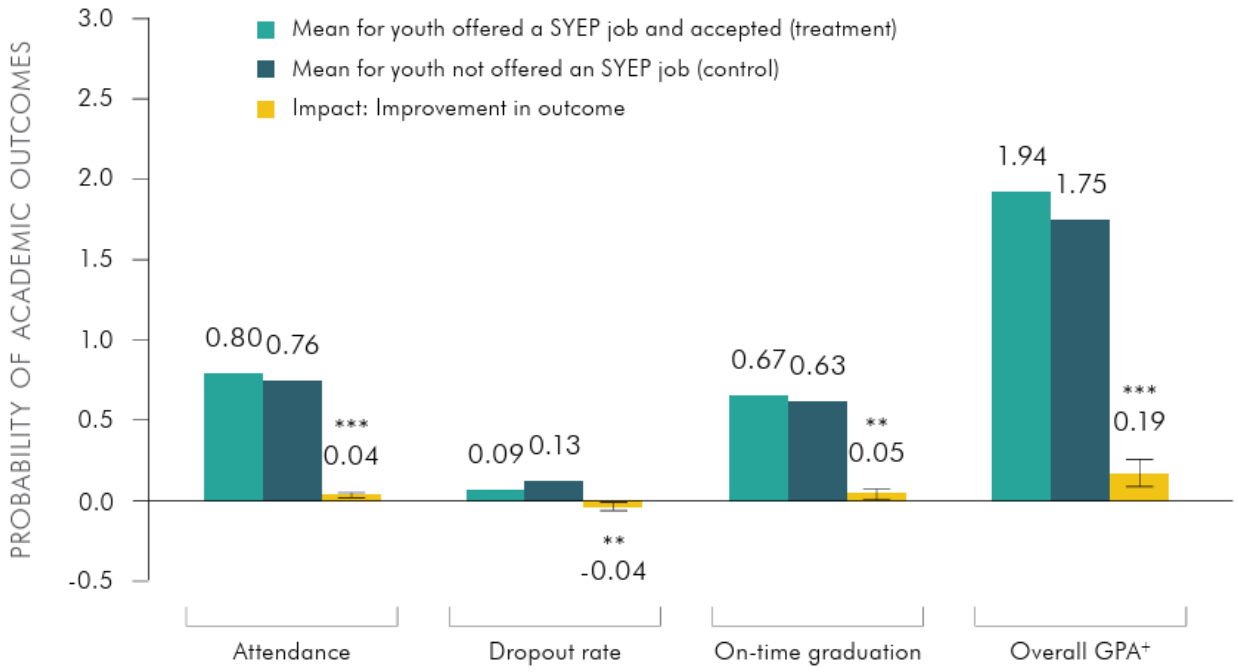
[3] Arraignment is the next step in the criminal justice pipeline after arrest where an individual is brought in front of a judge and is formally charged with a crime. Conviction occurs at the trial after arraignment where an individual is found guilty of the crime with which they are charged.

time, stemming from increases in attendance and GPA in the year following participation (Modestino and Paulsen 2022). Other studies in New York have also found that SYEP participation reduces rates of absenteeism in the following school year, and that this effect is larger for youth of legal dropout age or those who had previously experienced chronic absenteeism (Leos-Urbel 2014, Schwartz et al. 2021. In contrast, no such academic improvements were found in Chicago or Philadelphia, perhaps due to differences in youth population served and program design. *Evidence base: six papers (one on Boston, one on Chicago, three on New York City, and one on Chicago and Philadelphia).*

1. On average, those who benefited academically from SYEPs were youth of legal dropout age and those who had a higher rate of school absences prior to program participation.

In Boston, SYEP participants were five percentage points more likely to graduate from high school on time and four percentage points more likely to graduate at any point in the four years following program participation(Modestino and Paulsen 2022). These long-term outcomes were linked to more proximal impacts in the year following program participation, including a four percentage point decrease in the dropout rate, a four percentage point improvement in the attendance rate, and a small but statistically significant increase in grade point average (GPA) (see Figure 2). The attendance and GPA impacts persisted into the second year after participation and attendance impacts were larger for males, youth of legal dropout age, and those who had been chronically absent in prior years.

Figure 2. Boston SYEP participation led to improvements in several educational outcomes



Source: J-PAL Evidence Review (2022).

Note: Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Statistically significant difference relative to the comparison group is noted at the 1% (***), 5% (**), or 10% (*) level. + Overall GPA is in the unit of GPA.

In New York City, SYEP participants aged 16 years and up who also had an attendance rate of less than 95 percent the year before the program experienced small increases in attendance, in the

number of state English exams attempted, and passed as a requirement for high school graduation (Leos-Urbel 2014, Schwartz et al. 2021). In contrast, researchers found no evidence to suggest that SYEP participation in Chicago or Philadelphia affected school outcomes (Heller 2014; Heller 2022). The differences in findings between Chicago and Philadelphia, compared to Boston and New York, could be the result of differences in both the population served and program type. For example, Chicago specifically targets youth at risk of participating in or being a victim of violence. Philadelphia's program combines three model types: service learning for youth with little or no prior work experience; structured work experience for youth with little or no prior experience; and an internship for youth with some prior experience in the workplace.

2. Additional evidence from Boston's private sector placements indicates that less advantaged youth are more likely to take the SAT and enroll in college, shifting from 2-year to 4-year institutions.

Greater engagement of private sector firms could be one way to scale up summer jobs programs, while also providing early employment experiences that impact post-secondary outcomes. In Boston, the Private Industry Council (PIC) brokered internships with over 150 private sector firms to place roughly 1,300 students in high-quality, paid work experiences. In addition to covering youth wages, private sector internships expose students to a greater variety of occupations in industries such as health care, finance, real estate, insurance, and life sciences compared to jobs sponsored by publicly funded SYEPs (Boston PIC 2017). Beyond reducing dropout and increasing high school graduation, PIC SYEP participants were 4.1 percentage points more likely to take the SAT, although researchers were unable to detect a meaningful change in test outcomes. In addition, the PIC program was found to boost college enrollment by 6.1 percentage points overall, increasing enrollment in 4-year institutions by 8.1 percentage points while reducing enrollment in 2-year institutions by 2.9 percentage points. Less advantaged students attending schools with low college enrollment rates experienced a bigger boost in college enrollment, while English language learners were slightly less likely to graduate (Modestino, Paul, and McLaughlin 2022).

3. Academic improvements appear to be driven by improvements in work habits as well as aspirations that change how youth engage in school.

Based on qualitative data, researchers have theorized that participation in SYEP improves behaviors that are important to academic success. For example, focus group participants from the Boston SYEP program repeatedly stressed that "being on time" was one of the most valuable lessons they learned at their summer job. It could also be that the program's career readiness curriculum, coupled with real-world experience and mentoring, boosts career and academic aspirations, leading to a greater motivation or effort in school during the following year. Moreover, the prior research showing SYEPs can reduce the propensity to engage in delinquent behavior by developing soft skills might also play a role, particularly for groups that might disproportionately face disciplinary action in school. Linking self-reported survey data to administrative school outcomes, the Boston study found that many of the improvements in academic outcomes appear to be driven by improvements in work habits (e.g., showing up on time), as well as academic and career aspirations, which also translate to engagement and success at school (Modestino and Paulsen, 2022; Modestino, Paul, and McLaughlin 2022).

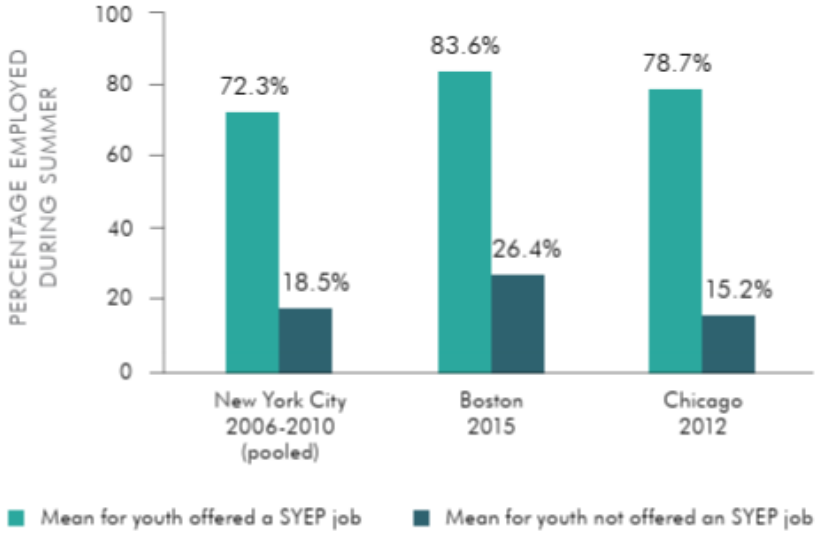
C. Employment Outcomes

While it might seem obvious that workforce development programs should improve employment outcomes, the question is whether they do so without crowding out existing opportunities. Across all three cities that have been studied, SYEPs have been shown to increase employment and wages for participating youth during the summer as compared to those who did not participate and may have independently looked for a job. There is less conclusive evidence demonstrating that SYEPs improve employment rates for youth after the program ends, although some groups of Black and Hispanic youth did experience employment gains in the year following the program. One factor that may increase the likelihood of longer-term employment benefits is the provision of a letter of recommendation from employers, given to youth after the end of their summer job, which has been shown to impact employment rates for up to two years after the summer. *Evidence base: five papers (one on Boston, one on Chicago, and three on New York City)*

1. SYEPs have consistently been shown to provide employment and additional income to youth who would otherwise have difficulty finding a job during the program summer.

On average, across study sites measuring comparable employment metrics in Boston, Chicago, and New York City, about 72 to 84 percent of those offered a slot through an SYEP lottery obtained paid employment during the program summer, compared to only about 15 to 26 percent of those who were not offered a slot (see Figure 3 for city breakdown). In New York City, SYEP participants earned US$876 more during the program summer compared to youth who applied but were not randomly selected into the program, a 76 percent increase (Gelber, Isen, and Kessler 2016).

Figure 3. SYEP increased employment for youth who would otherwise have difficulty locating summer employment.



Source: Li and Jackson-Spieker (2022).

2. There is little evidence to suggest that SYEPs improve formal sector employment outcomes beyond the summer for the average participant, but they may have positive impacts on subsets of participants.

In New York City, program participants in the 2005 to 2008 cohorts earned about US$100 less per year for each of the three years after the program than members of the comparison group (Gelber, Isen, and Kessler 2016). This may be because some members of the comparison group were able to secure permanent employment outside of the SYEP, which led to more consistent earnings due to the ability to continue their jobs year-round after the summer ended (Valentine et al. 2017). In a nine-year follow-up to the 2006 NYC SYEP cohort, there was no impact on total employment rates or earnings.

In Chicago and Boston, although SYEP participation did not significantly increase income overall, for some participants, the program significantly increased the probability of obtaining formal employment for some groups. For the Chicago SYEP cohort, employment increased by over 40 percent for younger, Hispanic and female participants who were less likely to be involved with the criminal justice system (Davis and Heller 2020). For the Boston SYEP cohort, employment increased by 15 percent, and wages were 12 percent higher for Black males aged 19 to 24 years relative to their peers in the comparison group in the year following the program summer (Mayor's Office of Workplace Development and Modestino 2017).

3. Adding new components to SYEP may lead to improvements in labor outcomes, though more research is needed to maximize the benefits and minimize undesirable effects on education outcomes.

In New York City, one study found that providing youth with a letter of recommendation following the summer program improved future employment outcomes by 5 percent and persisted over the two-year follow-up period (Heller and Kessler 2021). There was no evidence of increased job-seeking behaviors relative to the comparison group, suggesting that the recommendation letters, rather than simply having job experience, affected employers' perceptions of youth. However, the researchers also observed a 2 percent decrease in on-time (four-year) graduation rates among youth in grades 10 to 12 during the program summer. The effect was concentrated among students with a GPA below the median before the program summer. This suggests that increasing employment beyond the summer may delay graduation among youth who struggle to graduate on time by diverting a portion of them toward temporary formal sector employment.

D. Return on Investment

When assessing the value of any program, effect sizes should also be considered relative to their costs (Kraft 2020). Research evidence across all four cities studied conducted back-of-the-envelope calculations that indicate SYEPs typically have a positive pay-off relative to the program's costs. For example, the Boston SYEP costs roughly US$2,000 per participant, which includes just over US$1,400 in wages. From a societal perspective, the wage cost is simply a transfer from the government to the youth and so is not generally counted as a net change in overall resources, leaving an administrative program cost of US$600 per youth (Modestino 2019).

In terms of criminal justice outcomes alone, SYEPs typically have a payoff of roughly 3 to 1. For example, applying estimates of the social costs of crime (tangible losses plus quality of life) to each averted incident from the Boston SYEP indicated that the estimated cost savings from the reduction in criminal activity were US$1,793 for violent crimes (Modestino 2019). This benefit to victims clearly outweighs the program costs of US$600 per participant—not to mention the cost to

the criminal justice system of arresting, trying, and potentially incarcerating the offender as well as the opportunity costs of lower economic productivity for both individuals and their communities arising from lower levels of education and employment associated with time spent in youth detention.

Moreover, if we add in the program's positive impacts on academic outcomes, the return on public investment is even higher. For example, for the sub-sample of 1,200 Boston youth who were followed over time, the Boston program increased the likelihood of any high school graduation by four percentage points, yielding an additional 48 graduates. On net, this cohort would confer a benefit of US$6 million over their lifetimes, resulting in an additional benefit-to-cost ratio of more than 2 to 1 (Modestino and Paulsen 2022).

III. The SYEP Model: Basic Components

The research evidence described above was drawn from four core research sites (Boston, Chicago, New York, and Philadelphia) and can be used to directly inform the basic components of a primary SYEP model based on what works for different groups of youth. This chapter is intended to provide a high-level overview of the basic SYEP model that can be used by funders to guide future investment decisions and by jurisdictions to make informed decisions about SYEP design in relation to community goals and the population to be served. Table 1 below provides a reference summary of observed impacts by youth population and outcome category that is useful to bear in mind when considering different program components.

Table 1. Examples of Linking SYEP Goals to Youth Target Population and Outcomes through the Theory of Change

Program Goal	Youth Population identified as showing greater program impacts	Short-Term SYEP Impacts during the summer tied to Long-Term Impacts	Long-Term SYEP Impacts during the 1-2 years after participation
Decrease criminal justice involvement	Youth at-risk of criminal justice contact (e.g., previous arrest, arraignment, or conviction).	Improvements in soft skills (e.g., managing emotions, resolving conflicts with peers, asking for help); Fewer total arrests, convictions, and incarcerations.	Fewer violent crime arrests or arraignments; Fewer felony arrests and convictions; Decrease in youth mortality from external causes, including accidents, homicides, and suicides; Potential decrease in other types of criminal justice involvement (e.g., drug and property crimes).

Program Goal	Youth Population identified as showing greater program impacts	Short-Term SYEP Impacts during the summer tied to Long-Term Impacts	Long-Term SYEP Impacts during the 1-2 years after participation
Increase high school graduation rates	Youth at-risk of dropping out of high school (e.g., chronically low attendance rate, legal drop-out age, males)	Improvements in soft skills (e.g., managing emotions, asking for help); work habits (e.g., showing up on time, keeping a schedule); academic aspirations (e.g., shifting from 2-year to 4-year college aspirations, saving for tuition)	Higher school attendance, GPA, passing statewide exams; Reduction in drop-out rate; Increase in on-time and ever high school graduation rate.
Increase post-secondary enrollment	youth with low income attending schools with low college enrollment rates (e.g., public schools with no entrance exams).	Improvements in academic aspirations (e.g., shifting from 2-year to 4-year college aspirations; saving for tuition).	Increase in SAT test taking; Greater college enrollment rates; Shifting applications from 2-year to 4-year institutions.
Increase employment and wages	All youth during the summer; Non-white "opportunity" youth aged 19-24 who are not enrolled in school and not working during the 1-2 years after the program ends.	Improvements in work habits (e.g., showing up on time, keeping a schedule); job readiness (e.g., preparing a resume/cover letter, practicing interviewing techniques); Higher employment rates and earnings.	Higher employment rates and earnings only for non-white opportunity youth aged 19-24, or those who received a letter of recommendation from their employer after the program ended.

While we recognize that SYEPs are not a one-size-fits-all model, those that serve as the basis for the current body of research evidence have certain features in common that can be adapted to the local context in each location. The key components of the basic SYEP model might be aspirational for some jurisdictions, depending on the local operating context. Nonetheless, cities can try to incorporate as many program components as possible when expanding an existing program or starting a new one, as is often the case when cities do not have enough resources or program leaders do not have full control over decision-making.

When engaging in the initial program design, we have identified four key program components. These are:

1. The **type of summer experience** that could be offered to youth
2. The **operational roles** of the public entity overseeing the program
3. The **core activities** that are needed to ensure a successful and high-quality SYEP experience

4. The **funding sources** needed to support youth wages/activities and program administration

We provide concrete examples from different types of programs that vary by age and size, population served, summer experiences offered, operating roles, and funding mechanisms. In the next chapter, we provide more detail on program design elements relevant to each of the components above, highlighting best practices for replication and providing additional resources (e.g., checklists, MOU templates, data tracking and evaluation plans) that can be adapted to the user's local context.

A. The Basic SYEP Model: The Traditional Summer Job

Across all four SYEPs that comprise our evidence review, the primary component in common was the type of summer experience that was offered: the Traditional Summer Job. This type of experience offers a paycheck, employment experiences, the chance to develop new skills and relationships, and constructive activities to promote positive behavior among young people who otherwise might have little to do over the summer months. Their goal is often to enroll young people who may struggle in the labor market on their own, but they can serve young people from a variety of backgrounds. They typically last five-seven weeks and enroll people in the age range of 14 to their early 20's, although high school-aged participants are the most common.

Job Type: SYEPs offer placement in entry-level positions with employers in the public, nonprofit, and private sectors, with varying percentages in each category; yet those with primarily public or nonprofit jobs achieve similar results as those with private sector positions.

Workplace Setting: Before 2020, jobs were typically in-person across all four of the programs. However, during the Covid-19 pandemic, several cities expanded their programming to include virtual and hybrid placements (Swigert 2021). Currently, most jobs are offered in person with the exception of some office-based jobs that are often hybrid, depending on the schedule of the supervisor.

Duration: Programs usually run five to seven weeks from July to August, depending on the length of summer break of the local school district(s) (Congressional Research Service, 2017). Some positions for older youth (e.g., 19-24 years) such as youth leaders, might be as long as eight to ten weeks in duration, often starting one week earlier and/or later than other positions for high school-aged youth.

Hours: Across the four programs we studied, youth typically work for 20–25 hours per week. This part-time schedule is intentional to be able to accommodate other youth activities such as summer school and extracurriculars. Older youth, aged 19-24, are often allowed to work up to 30 hours per week.

Compensation: Participating youth are typically paid the state minimum wage, with older youth (aged 19-24 years) earning 10-15 percent more than younger youth. Compensation is usually in the form of a paycheck, not a stipend. This is intentional to provide youth with the real-world experience of being accountable for their hours, ensuring a high participation rate. It also ensures that taxes are appropriately withheld so that families do not have an unexpected tax bill due at the

end of the year. Typically, the wages are subsidized, either fully or in part, by the public entity sponsoring the program, although sometimes the wages are funded by the employer partner, particularly if there are private-sector placements.

Participants: Across the four programs that we studied, the requirements for participating in an SYEP are typically centered on age and residency within its service jurisdiction. Youth and young adults aged 14–24 years can be eligible, but most participants are aged between 16 and 19 years. Typical participants are coming from families with low income and/or identify as Black and Hispanic, demographic groups that all face greater challenges to finding employment on average than their higher-income or white peers. Some SYEPs maintain universal eligibility, such as Boston, while others focus on specific populations, such as Chicago, which targets youth at-risk of violence. However, all four programs show robust impacts on violent crime, even without explicit targeting.

Career Readiness Curriculum: In addition to providing job placements, all four of the research sites that provide the foundation for the research evidence include some type of learning components designed to amplify personal growth opportunities encountered on the job. These supports may be offered to all or to a subset of participants and commonly include one or more of the following:

- Work-readiness training is offered at the beginning of the summer to help youth prepare for their job placement or as an ongoing curriculum throughout the duration of the program.
- Financial literacy workshops to help youth manage their earned wages responsibly and open a formal bank account if they do not currently have one.
- Socio-emotional learning curricula are designed to help youth develop strategies for understanding and managing their emotions and behavior.
- Mentorship from an adult to foster access to positive role models and further socio-emotional development. The adult mentor can be a volunteer or program employee, or the youth's supervisor, and receives training to fulfill the role.

Wrap-Around Supports: Across all four programs, a common element is to partner with local community-based organizations to whom the public entity can make referrals for supportive services on an as-needed basis. This includes services to address issues such as lack of transportation, food insecurity, and homelessness.

Dosage: Programs typically allow participants to repeat participation for subsequent summers rather than restrict them to one summer to serve as many youth as possible. Research evidence from the Boston SYEP also shows that a second summer of participation makes a difference in sustaining the program's positive impacts on school outcomes, possibly reinforcing behaviors.

B. Other SYEP Models

In recent years, new evolutions of SYEPs have included using the same basic approach, but rather than offering a job in the literal sense, they offer participants the opportunity to engage in academic or life skills development experiences for a paycheck. SYEP experiences like these can be categorized as formal "Learn and Earn" opportunities or informal "Life Skills Development" opportunities.

1. Learn and Earn Opportunities

Description: Youth are paid to participate in classes or coursework that prepare them for post-secondary education and/or training, often in-person but also sometimes completely online.

Typical partners: Community colleges, four-year higher education institutions, college preparation programs, and training programs. Typically, community colleges offer courses for credit geared towards youth similar to dual-enrollment programs, while four-year institutions focus on non-credit courses for college preparation (e.g., Advanced Placement prep). Training programs are often those provided by the workforce investment board (e.g., Boston PIC Tech Apprentice) or nonprofit organizations (e.g., Girls Who Code) that may yield some kind of industry-recognized credential.

Advantages: Youth gain specific knowledge or skill that can lead to post-secondary education or a career path; youth may gain either college credit or a credential that can be listed on their application/resume; many youth experience being on a college campus for the first-time; youth may gain a college coach or reference who can help them prepare for and/or apply to college.

Special Considerations: Can be costly to fund both the course/training fees as well as the youth wages; some youth may not be adequately prepared in terms of academics and need tutoring; professors and trainers may not have experience working with high-school aged youth; colleges or training sites might not be geographically located near the youth population to be served, creating transportation barriers for in-person courses; online courses can be isolating for some youth; youth do not gain on-the-job experience.

2. Life Skills Development

Description: Youth are paid to participate in a developmental program that equips them with general life skills intended to set them up for success down the road, typically offered in-person but also sometimes entirely online.

Typical partners: City, nonprofit, or Community-Based Organizations(CBOs) that have long-standing programs for young people. City agencies often offer training on leadership (e.g., Boston Police Department) or financial capability (e.g., Boston Office of Financial Empowerment). Nonprofit and CBOs often have programs that focus on soft skills (e.g., Chicago Becoming a Man) or job readiness (e.g., Signal Success through Comm Corp). Some may also have more tailored programs to develop entrepreneurship (e.g., Bikes not Bombs) or academic (e.g., STEM programs) skills.

Advantages: Prepares younger or more vulnerable youth for future summer job or learn and earn experiences; can often be shorter in duration or have more flexible scheduling to accommodate summer school or extracurricular activities; partners often have decades of experience working with youth and more vulnerable youth in particular and are located nearby target youth populations.

Special Considerations: Youth do not gain on-the-job experience; online courses can be isolating for some youth.

It's important to note that the bulk of the underlying evidence base described in the previous section is focused on Traditional Summer Jobs. Ongoing research is being conducted to assess the impact of Learn and Earn opportunities and Life Skills Development models relative to Traditional

Summer Jobs. They should be seen as thoughtful efforts to extract key insights from Traditional Summer Jobs and apply them in contexts where that model may not be feasible, for example, if there are not enough employer partners who are willing to participate. In this section, we describe each of these experiences along with the advantages and drawbacks of each approach.

C. Operational Roles

SYEPs are generally overseen by local public entities such as workforce development boards, city departments, or state agencies. The public entity may implement the program directly or contract out various operational roles with other local nonprofit, community-based, or private organizations. They may also directly fund or subsidize youth wages, which may also include directly hiring youth onto payroll and paying youth as the "employer of record", or rely on local employer-partners to do so. Many programs use a hybrid approach – managing some aspects and funding of the program themselves and contracting with intermediaries for other program components. Roughly speaking, programs and their component parts fall into one of three categories, from the most to the least involvement in terms of operating roles.

1. **The public entity (and/or its contractors) manages the application, selection, and hiring process in addition to subsidizing youth wages or stipends at host sites.** The public agency is responsible for recruiting and assessing young people, developing employment and educational/development opportunities, placing young people in positions, monitoring progress over the summer, and troubleshooting problems. Job placements are typically in government agencies or mission-driven nonprofits. This approach typically incorporates "subsidized" wages or stipends and is the most traditional model for which we have the most research evidence. It has multiple variations, which will be discussed in more detail below. It is also the most expensive program model, due to the combined cost of youth wages and stipends, in addition to the administrative and staff costs of running the program. For example, New York City's Department of Youth and Community Development hosts the nation's largest SYEP, employing upwards of 100,000 youth every summer by conducting outreach to youth through schools and neighborhoods, overseeing the application, hiring, managing payroll process, and subsidizing youth wages for all employer-partners.

2. **The public entity (and/or its contractors) manages the application/hiring process for the host sites, but does not subsidize the youth's wages.** In this case, the host sites, often private sector employers, directly fund and maintain the payroll for the youth's wages or stipends. These "unsubsidized" job slots are less common across programs and, when offered, are usually less numerous than those subsidized by a public entity. This approach requires more labor market analysis and targeted outreach to identify employers willing and able to fund the youth wages, in addition to hosting youth on their payroll and supervising them at their worksites. For example, Boston's workforce development board, the Private Industry Council (PIC), brokers employer-paid youth jobs or internships at more than 200 private sector companies and institutions in Boston's top industries, including health care, financial services, life sciences, technology, architecture, and law.

   However, this typically requires recruiting and preparing a more work-ready subset of participants, since most private-sector employers are unwilling to fund wages/stipends if youth aren't able to show up on time, work within a team, and add value. For example, the PIC works in partnership with Boston Public Schools to place career coaches at each high

school who work with youth throughout the school year to prepare them for a summer job, including career exploration workshops, one-on-one resume writing and interviewing, and soft skill development. As a result, many cities that offer subsidized private-sector job slots also offer unsubsidized ones to ladder experiences from one summer to the next, and are able to fulfill the needs of all youth regardless of their starting point.

3. **The public entity (and/or its contractors) does not manage any aspect of youth outreach, application, selection, or hiring, but simply grants out funding to employer partners to subsidize youth wages/stipends.** Some operating entities are able to braid together funding from local governments (state, county, and city), private philanthropy, and corporate sponsorship to help programs operate at scale. However, they might not have the capacity to oversee, facilitate, or monitor operations other than to stipulate certain program requirements through an MLOU with the employer partners.
4. **The public entity (and/or its contractors) facilitates job placements but does not directly manage them or subsidize youth wages/stipends.** In this case, the public entity's primary role is to provide resources to help youth and employers find each other. This typically involves raising awareness among youth (e.g., career fairs), an online resource to list job openings (e.g., jobs portal), and minimal training for employers supervising youth (e.g., one-day workshop, online tools). It is the least expensive among the models, so programs often take this route when they are in the pilot stage and/or may have little dedicated public funding due to recent budget cuts or expiration of federal funding (e.g., American Rescue Plan Act). For example, the Texas Internship Challenge is a partnership among the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), the Texas Education Agency (TEA), and the Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), which challenges employers to offer paid internships and make it easy for students to search and apply for them.

A key factor underlying the success of the operating role is the support of local political leadership. SYEP operators uniformly say that without the vocal and committed support of their political leaders, typically mayors, their programs' impact would be severely diminished. For example, every spring in the weeks leading up to the start of the application season, mayors are often working behind the scenes to personally call partners and ensure their commitments for the upcoming summer. Every budget season, mayors typically make SYEP a top-three priority to secure funding alongside so many other needed City services. And with every boom and bust of the business cycle, the Mayor needs to remind public and private employers why SYEP is an important investment in the future and which youth will be left behind without it.

D. Funding Sources

Funding has clear and major implications both for the scale and scope of any program, but especially for summer jobs programs. This is because, unlike other workforce development programs, there is little federal funding available to hire youth, and young people require more developmental programming and supervision than adults. In addition, although it may seem counterintuitive, SYEPs are actually a year-round endeavor requiring full-time staff to plan activities, recruit employer partners, market opportunities to youth, maintain systems for process improvement, and implement the program. This often means braiding together funding mostly from local governments (state, county, city, and local education agencies), private philanthropy, and corporate sponsorship.

In terms of local government funding, it really depends on how budgets flow from the state to other jurisdictions, as well as the revenue-raising capacity at each level of government. For example, some states like Massachusetts have designated funding or programs for youth employment as a line item in their budgets (e.g., "Connecting Activities"), which can include summer jobs, as well as there is specific funding for high-risk youth. In other places, the county seat holds the purse strings, especially in more rural areas where smaller towns and jurisdictions often pool their resources. Larger cities like Boston, Chicago, and New York often have funding designated for youth programming, which can include summer jobs programs. Finally, local education agencies (e.g., school districts) can play a crucial role in youth employment by connecting students with career exploration, job readiness, and workforce development opportunities, often through partnerships with local workforce boards and youth-serving organizations.

In contrast, federal funding for summer jobs programs has been inconsistent since the passage of the Workforce Innovation Act in 1998, when the federal government stopped funding stand-alone summer jobs programs (Social Policy Research Associates 2004; Harris 2007). In 2009, the federal stimulus package directed US$1.2 billion to states for employment and training for youth, and it strongly encouraged states to use the money to support summer jobs programs (Bellotti et al. 2010). Currently, most federal workforce development funding is dispersed through states via the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) program, which is primarily focused on serving adults. For the small portion of WIOA funding designated for youth, the grants are often restricted to serving young adults (e.g., 19-24 years) or opportunity youth (e.g., not in school or at work or having certain risk factors) and offering industry or occupation-specific programming. However, WIOA funding can be used in conjunction with other funding sources to sustain larger or more universal programs. This option often requires diligent tracking of participant-level outcomes to maintain compliance with WIOA regulations.

Other sources of support often come from private philanthropy and corporate sponsorship. Support typically comes from regionally-based corporations and foundations, but sometimes national foundations also support SYEPs, such as JP Morgan Chase's multi-year effort. Support can come in the form of grants or the proceeds of special fundraising events. These dollars support a wide variety of program needs, such as transportation assistance, maintaining a job portal, running pre-employment training, or offering a limited number of subsidized jobs. Sometimes, if a private corporation does not have the ability to host youth workers over the summer, it may contribute financially instead. Cultivating and maintaining these relationships is a key operational responsibility. But the support can vary from year to year, even with the best stewardship, depending on business cycles and organizational priorities.

E. Examples of Existing Programs

Here we present high-level basic components that speak to concepts that have already been described in the first two chapters for a sample of existing programs. These examples were chosen to demonstrate how different jurisdictions mix and match program components along a spectrum of different scales and scopes. The hope is that readers will be inspired and come away with a

sense of how each component can be adapted to the local context to best meet the needs of their community, subject to the constraints of the resources that are currently available.

1. **Universal Ecosystem Model:** Boston's Summer Youth Employment Program

Stated Goals: (1) To increase youth labor market attachment by providing youth with the tools and experience needed to navigate today's job market on their own; (2) To reduce inequality of opportunity across different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups by increasing access to early employment experiences.

Types of Summer Experiences Offered: A mix of traditional jobs with over 900 city, nonprofit, and private sector employers; learn and earn programs at both 2- and 4-year colleges; and youth development opportunities with public and private entities. Youth are engaged for six to eight weeks and 20-25 hours per week. Participants also receive an additional twenty hours per week of work-readiness training designed to develop financial literacy, practical job skills, and soft skills such as conflict resolution and communication. Youth ages 14-18 years are paid the state minimum wage (US$15/hour), and youth leaders aged 19-24 years are paid more (US$18/hour), regardless of the type of summer experience they are engaged in.

Number of Youth and Population Served: The Boston SYEP serves roughly 10,000-12,000 youth every summer. It is a universal program open to all Boston residents aged 14-24 years. In 2024, Boston Mayor Michelle Wu issued a Youth Jobs Guarantee so that every eligible Boston Public School student who wants a summer job can have one.

Funding Amount and Sources: Roughly US$20 million in City funding braided together with federal (WIOA), state (Connecting Activities), philanthropy, and private sector employer wages. In 2024, City of Boston's Office of Youth Employment and Opportunity (YEO) administered over US$22.6 million in city funding to hundreds of both City and nonprofit employer partners, which covered both youth wages plus a small overhead rate (7.5 percent) to support program administration expenses through its SuccessLink summer jobs program.

Operational Roles: The Boston SYEP program operates as a coordinated ecosystem led by the City of Boston's Office of Youth Employment and Opportunity (YEO) that engages, develops, and employs Boston's youth.

Each summer, youth are placed into jobs through one of five intermediary organizations, each of which serves a different target population based on their needs (see Table 2 below).

Table 2. Program Characteristics of Intermediaries across the Boston SYEP Ecosystem

SYEP Intermediary	Number of Participants (pre-COVID)	Funding Sources for Support	Youth Population Served	Types of Jobs Offered
Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD)	800-1200	City of Boston, state, private philanthropy, other grants	Low-income youth typically age 14-15 years	Subsidized jobs primarily in daycares and day camps as well as community-based organizations
Boston Private Industry Council (PIC)	2000-3000	City of Boston, state, private sector employers	Youth age 16-19 years who are Boston Public School students	Subsidized jobs in daycares and day camps, non-profits, and healthcare. Private sector jobs in biopharma, hospitals, finance, banking insurance.
Office of Youth Employment and Opportunity (OYEO)	3000-5000	City of Boston	Youth age 15-18 years, older youth aged 19-24 years serve as peer leaders	Subsidized jobs in daycares and day camps, non-profits, healthcare, and city government
John Hancock MLK Scholars Program (MLK)	500-600	John Hancock	Youth age 15-18 years	Subsidized jobs in daycares and day camps, non-profits, healthcare, and business
Youth Options Unlimited (YOU)	100-150	City of Boston, other grants	Court-involved youth age 14-24 years	Subsidized jobs in community based organizations

Source: Authors' categorization based on interviews with each intermediary.

Through their coalition partnership model, YEO also offers enhanced support to smaller community-based organizations that need additional operational capacity to facilitate paid youth jobs. This includes leading the outreach and application process through its futureBOS jobs hub that provides young people with a central platform that encompasses all youth job opportunities and internships made possible through ongoing collaborations and partnerships across the city. In addition, YEO holds a Mayor's Youth Jobs Fair as well as a series of smaller neighborhood and school-based pop-up jobs fairs to bring employment opportunities, job readiness resources, and application assistance to underrepresented areas. YEO also provides a step-by-step guide to landing a job, information on how to succeed in a new job or internship, and additional resources in eleven different languages, serving demographics of youth who need additional support. Finally, YEO also provides young people with assistance to get through the payroll process, such as issuing city ID cards, issuing youth work permits, and verifying work authorization documents (e.g., I-9, W-2).

2. Large-Sized Municipal Model: One Summer Chicago

Stated Goals: The Johnson Mayoral administration of Chicago has described support for One Summer Chicago (OSC) as a core part of the city's community safety strategy, as well as a means of a way to invest in young people and give them the opportunity to earn money and develop their skills.

Types of Summer Experiences Offered: Most positions are between 20 and 25 hours per week for six weeks, and job placements are with local businesses, nonprofits, and city agencies ("The One Summer Chicago (OSC)| FAQ", n.d.). As part of an online learning platform, OSC participants earn badges that indicate when they have completed modules related to career readiness, goal planning, financial responsibility, and others ("One Summer Chicago", n.d.).

One Summer Chicago houses three programs:

- Summer Youth Employment Program: OSC's core summer jobs program is for youth ages 16-24. Participants engage in jobs, internships, or specialized training programs, and approximately 16,000 youth were served in 2024.
- Chicagobility: Rather than a regular summer job, youth ages 14-15 (who are too young to legally work) receive a stipend for participating in a six-week program of career exploration, workforce prep, financial literacy training, and mentoring. Approximately 3,700 youth were served in 2024 under this program.
- Chicago Youth Service Corp: Eligible participants are aged 16-24 and focus on leadership development through paid service-learning positions focused on civic engagement. This was originally created in response to the Covid-19 pandemic in the summer of 2020, which necessitated an emergency change in scope to OSC programming. It was so successful that the city decided to continue it (Miles, Martin, and Swigert 2020).

Number of Youth and Population Served: All Chicago residents aged 14-24 are eligible to participate. 59 percent of participants are Black/African American, 29 percent Hispanic, and 12 percent are of another race or ethnicity (Prudowsky, Lopez, and Contractor 2022).

Funding Amount and Sources: In 2025, the City of Chicago budget allocated approximately US$52 million for One Summer Chicago (City of Chicago 2025).

Operational Roles: The Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS) manages the program, with support from the Mayor's Office of Education, Youth, and Human Services (Mayor's Press Office 2025). Core partners to receive funding to offer employment and project based learning opportunities include Chicago Housing Authority, Chicago Public Schools, Chicago Park District, Chicago Transit Authority, City Colleges of Chicago, Cook County Forest Preserve, and the Lincoln Park Zoo ("One Summer Chicago", n.d.).

3. Mid-Sized Municipal Model: SummerWorks in Louisville, Kentucky

Stated Goals: To help young people explore careers, prepare for and connect to real job experiences, learn workplace skills, and develop supportive networks and professional references (SummerWorks, n.d.).

Types of Summer Experiences Offered: SummerWorks is open to youth ages 16 to 21 in Louisville/Jefferson County. For its subsidized job placements, it prioritizes young people living in ZIP codes with above-average levels of unemployment. It also offers a web-based portal and other activities to help a larger number of young people find unsubsidized positions in the private labor market. In 2024, SummerWorks placed 270 young people in subsidized positions while about 3,400 young people registered with the portal KentuckianaEARNS for career exploration and job search activities.

Number of Youth and Population Served: Subsidized placements are with nonprofit organizations and city agencies. In 2024, placements lasted for six weeks, for 30 hours per week with hourly wages of US$15 per hour(SummerWorks n/d). The portal KentuckianaEARNS is available to all local residents ages 16 to 21 and allows young people to develop user profiles, take online courses and earn badges, learn about different jobs and careers, and apply for jobs. Registrants applied for more than 5,000 jobs through the site in the summer of 2024. SummerWorks can also help with work-related expenses like bus fare for young people in both subsidized and unsubsidized jobs.

Funding Amount and Sources: The budget is about US$1.5 million, with about one million dollars coming from the Louisville Metro Government and the remainder from philanthropy. Major cost drivers include recruiting young people, subsidizing wages, managing payroll, developing and maintaining the web platform, hiring job coaches, conducting general community and employer outreach, and the administrative costs of managing all of the above.

Operational Roles: SummerWorks is a partnership between the local workforce development board KentuckianaWorks, and the nonprofit Blueprint 502. KentuckianaWorks manages the program overall and handles specific components such as fundraising, contracting with a vendor to design and maintain the web portal, and recruiting employers to post their positions. BluePrint 502 recruits and places young people in subsidized positions and hires job coaches throughout the summer to conduct site visits and troubleshoot problems.

4. **Small/Rural Model: Portland Youth Corps**

Stated Goals: The program was launched in 2021, with the goals: (1) to create a pipeline of talented parks professionals by exposing youth to conservation careers; (2) to use access to early employment experience to reduce inequality of opportunities in conservation careers across different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups; and (3) to provide valuable community service that improves Portland parks (Billings 2021).

Number of Youth and Population Served: Portland Youth Corps provides opportunities for thirteen teens in each cohort, with two cohorts each summer, as well as two Crew Leader positions in each cohort for older teens who have already completed the program to take on a leadership role. The program is open to teens aged 14-18 years who will be attending high school in Portland the following Fall, or who are current residents of Portland, with a focus on recruiting a diverse group of teens in each cohort. Program staff work closely with Portland high schools to recruit young people who will benefit most from the program. Participants have ranged from youth from multigeneration Portland families, to those who arrived in the country as refugees just months before applying. As word of mouth has spread about the program, they now receive significantly more applications than positions they can accommodate, receiving more than twice as many applications as they have openings for summer 2025.

Types of Summer Experiences Offered: The program provides a traditional full-time job for a short duration, with developmental opportunities and support, and additional immersive experiences. Each cohort participates for four weeks, beginning with an immersive four-day, three-night orientation, and an overnight at Jewel Island in Casco Bay during the program, where they support trail maintenance. In addition to learning job skills related to careers in park services and conservation, youth also receive basic job readiness preparation and education in science and ecology. Youth are paid a total of US$500 for the duration of the program, a strategy intentionally chosen to include and compensate undocumented youth. All program expenses are covered for youth, including transportation (van pick up daily and for trips), gear, boots, rain jackets, backpacks, and other essentials.

Funding Amount and Sources: The program's primary funder is the Portland Parks Conservancy, a nonprofit that raises philanthropic funds to enhance Portland's parks and recreation programs. Philanthropic sponsors include: Onion Foundation, News Center Maine, Maine Trails Coalition, and JRA Fund of Maine Community Foundation. With the support of these sponsors and individual donors, the Conservancy funds the program at about US$80,000 annually, which does not include

the staff time of a full-time Portland Parks Department employee who manages the program. A full-time AmeriCorps member also supports the Parks Department staff person.

Operational Roles: The City of Portland Parks Department manages program operations, and the Portland Parks Conservancy funds the program and plays an advisory role. Educational programming in science and ecology is provided through partnerships with Amin Audobaun and the Chestnut Tree Project at the University of New England. Portland high schools are key recruitment partners for this program.

5. Small County Model: Mercer County Student Internship Program

Stated Goals: In 2025, Mercer County will introduce a new cohort model, designed to provide high school and college students with hands-on experience, professional development, and career exploration in public service. Internships are aimed to provide hands-on experience, skill development, and professional networking opportunities, all while contributing to the Mercer County community.

Types of Summer Experiences Offered: This structured approach introduces students to local government operations while helping them develop new skills, build their resumes, and explore potential career paths. Interns will have the opportunity to work within various Mercer County departments, participate in structured training sessions, and gain valuable real-world experience to support their educational and career goals. Opportunities are available in public service, administration, health, law, environmental work, and other fields.

In addition to gaining work experience, interns will have access to a structured training series featuring workshops and skill-building sessions. These sessions will focus on:

- Career readiness and workplace professionalism.
- Resume writing and interview preparation.
- Financial literacy and budgeting.
- Public speaking and communication skills.
- Networking and personal branding.
- Community engagement and civic responsibility.

The program offers **two internship sessions**:

Cohort Session 1: College Students

- **Compensation:** US$17 per hour
- **Work Schedule:** Maximum 25 hours per week
- **Dates:** May 21 - July 18 (eight weeks)

Cohort Session 2: High School Students

- **Compensation:** US$17 per hour
- **Work Schedule:** Maximum 25 Hours per week
- **Dates:** July 7 – August 29 (eight weeks)

The program also provides transportation assistance, supportive mentors, and paid virtual job readiness workshops. The program runs from early July though the end of August. Work assignments can be virtual, on-site, or a combination. In addition to learning new skills and being

introduced to new career options, interns will be taught time management, effective communication, business etiquette, and more.

Number of Youth and Population Served: Target enrollment is a minimum of 110 participants. Interns must be at least 15 years of age and either live in Mercer County or attend a school or university located in Mercer County.

Funding Amount and Sources: Interns' wages and work readiness training are funded by a grant from the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development

Operational Roles: The program is coordinated by the Mercer County One-Stop Career Center.

IV. Best Practices: for Replicating and Adapting the SYEP Model

This chapter describes the core activities and services that public entities need to provide for youth and employers to ensure a successful and high-quality SYEP experience. Where possible, we also provide suggestions for best practices and examples from existing SYEPs. Core activities are broken down across three phases of work, in chronological order, although we acknowledge that there is likely to be some overlap across each phase. One thing to reiterate is that, despite their name, summer jobs programs involve year-round planning, logistics, and implementation:

- Strategic Planning - Fall preceding the program summer (September-November)
- Preparation & Logistics - Winter and spring preceding the program summer (December-May)
- Implementation - Summer during which the program is operating (June-August)

In each phase, numbered subsections outline key areas of activity and provide a list of related decision points. These decision points will be collected into a checklist that will be presented at the end of each phase that is hyperlinked with helpful resources. A project-planning Gantt chart template aligned with the phases and key areas of work can also be found here.

A. Strategic Planning Phase (September - November)

1. Identify Program Goals & Participant Population

Key Decision Points

- *Identify community needs*
- *Determine desired outcomes from program*
- *Identify target youth population & assess any special characteristics*

Successful initiatives start with clear intentions and stated goals to act as a north star for leaders, stakeholders, partners, and even participants. Although goals may change over time, having a common framework from the start will help guide decisions about the type of intervention, program logistics, processes for improvement, and key partners for implementation. All of these details should align to ensure that the program produces

the desired outcomes for youth, their families, and their communities. Below, we discuss the potential goals that cities will want to consider based on the issues that their cities face and the specific characteristics of the youth population that their programs will serve.

Community Needs & Desired Outcomes

As described in Chapter Two, research evidence demonstrates that summer jobs programs affect a wide range of long-term youth outcomes, including criminal justice involvement, academic achievement, and employment over the 1-4 years after participating in the program. But there are also a variety of short-term intermediate outcomes, such as improving soft skills and work habits, increasing academic and career aspirations, and boosting job readiness, that occur during the summer and drive those longer-term outcomes. Understanding how SYEPs affect both short- and long-term outcomes for youth and how this aligns with the most urgent needs of the local community is the first step in designing a successful program. This is especially true when resources are limited and cities need to prioritize some program components over others.

Although a key value-add of SYEP is to add structure and positive activities for basic youth development when youth might otherwise be unoccupied, cities may also want to think about more targeted goals. For example, a key decision point for city leaders to consider is "What are the most pressing issues facing the young people in my community today and how can SYEP help address those issues?" It might be reducing violent crime, increasing access to post-secondary opportunities, preparing youth to directly enter the workforce, something else (e.g., mental health), or all of the above.

Given the amount of resources available, it will be important to prioritize which outcomes the program will focus on achieving, at least in the near term. As the program grows and evolves, the primary focus might change and/or expand over time. For example, when Boston first started its program, the initial focus was on keeping youth off the streets and occupied during the summer to reduce youth violence. Since then, the City has shifted towards focusing less on violence reduction and more on increasing meaningful job opportunities for youth that lead to post-secondary education and/or a career pathway, and has focused on developing program components aligned with those goals.

Best Practices:

- Host an annual retreat that brings together key stakeholders such as local school districts, youth-service organizations, juvenile justice organizations, workforce development boards, and anchor employer partners to develop a consensus set of community goals.
    - For example, Boston's Office of Youth Employment and Opportunity hosts a kick-off SYEP ecosystem meeting every fall to evaluate the prior year's success and challenges while starting the planning process for the upcoming summer.

Target Youth Population

Once the program goals have been established then it's important to think about which groups of youth the program will serve. The most basic design question is whether the program should be universal or target specific populations. Again, this decision will be shaped by the goals of the program and the resources available, as well as the population to be served. For example, the Chicago SYEP has a clear focus on reducing youth violence and targets youth who are most at-risk of engaging in and/or being a victim of violence. In contrast, the Boston program has increased spending over time to become universal, instituting Mayor Wu's Youth Jobs Guarantee in 2024 so that any Boston Public School student who wants a summer job can have one.

Once the target population is determined, it's then important to assess the characteristics of the youth that programs are trying to engage. For example, if the target youth population is largely made up of immigrant youth, then cities will need to tailor their approach to recruitment, application and onboarding support, and matching youth skills and interests to the appropriate summer experiences. This will require key partnerships with local nonprofits serving immigrant youth, providing application materials in multiple languages, and ensuring that undocumented youth can participate in experiences that are supported with stipends rather than wages, which require an I-9 form and SSN verification. Similar considerations will need to be addressed throughout the program's design for any vulnerable youth populations that might be targeted by the program, such as court-involved, low-income, differently abled, less experienced (e.g., younger), or opportunity (e.g., older) youth who are disconnected from school and work.

Finally, cities will want to consider whether they will focus on reaching as many youth as possible or invest resources in hard-to-reach populations. For example, because it is harder to recruit young people who are not consistently connected to an educational institution, most programs focus primarily on high school students. High school students are easier to recruit and communicate with than other groups, assuming the SYEP has an effective partnership with a school or school system. By working with schools, SYEP can plug into a sturdy, pre-existing recruitment and communication mechanism. Of course, the high school population still includes a range of subpopulations with different levels of readiness and risk factors, so there are still important targeting decisions to make.

In contrast, reaching non-high school students (whether of high school age or older) usually requires greater outreach efforts, such as partnering with community-based organizations. It's often the case that cities reserve a smaller proportion of program slots (e.g., 10 percent) for young people in their late teens and early twenties, as well as those who left high school before completing their degrees. For example, the Boston Private Industry Council (PIC) runs a re-engagement program where staff go door to door to connect with students who have dropped out of the public school system, or are "at risk" to drop out (chronically absent), seeking to connect them to relevant resources to get their education or career preparation on track. Boston PIC finds that offering these young people a summer job is often a productive first step to get them engaged to return to complete high school and/or their GED.

Best Practices:

- Evaluate whether efforts to engage the target population were successful in serving more vulnerable youth by collecting data on key demographic, socio-economic, and school characteristics of youth applicants, those selected, and those ultimately hired for a position.
    - For example, the Boston program works with Northeastern University to collect data on school type to ensure that the program is honoring the Mayor's Youth Jobs Guarantee to provide every eligible Boston Public School student with a summer job.

2. Assess Capacity and Infrastructure

Key Decision Points

- *Determine available staffing and training needs*
- *Assess existing IT systems for application and hiring*
- *Identify potential employers and nonprofit partners*

The ability to implement SYEP elements efficiently and effectively requires substantial resources and expertise. There are three areas of capacity and infrastructure that cities need to assess before they even begin the planning process: basic staffing needs, reliable application and hiring systems, and the existing ecosystem of employer and nonprofit partners.

Staffing Needs

A capable, knowledgeable, and experienced full-time staff with properly designed roles and responsibilities is vital to operating a successful SYEP. Again, some minimum number of staff is needed to work year round to consistently plan and execute a successful program, not just during the summer months.

In larger programs with more diverse partners and worksites, having clear systems and processes for coordination and communication across the partner network is essential. Depending on the type and scale of your SYEP, it can be helpful to research the staffing of other SYEPs with commonalities, including conversations with leadership and staff to understand where their program might have shortcomings.

Similarly, high-quality staff training is important and can be borrowed and adapted from other programs. Recognized youth-focused organizations, like the National Youth Employment Coalition (NYEC) or the Aspen Institute Opportunity Youth Forum, can be valuable resources to connect with similarly situated programs with potential for replication. Additionally, depending on whether there is any plan to develop a universal program or to serve a specific population, including staff training in concepts relevant to the youth being served, such as training in Positive Youth Development (PYD), Trauma-Informed Practices (TIPs), etc, can be considered.

Best Practices:

- Identify functions to be centralized and undertaken by the operating agency, versus key operational partners, and employers/work sites, and develop MOUs to ensure roles are clearly delineated and agreed upon.
- Map the capacity of existing staff to support SYEP and gaps where new positions must be created, as well as funding to support additional staff capacity.

Application and Hiring Systems

Although it might seem obvious, even pilot programs will require a simple, reliable, and fair application and hiring process, and often these systems are increasingly hosted online. Most public entities typically make use of existing application and hiring platforms, often without realizing the potential barriers they pose to both youth and employment partners. For example, although the City of Boston's application and hiring system (iCIMS) has been in use for over a decade, it was not designed to handle the rapid high-volume SYEP placement process which requires a youth jobs portal where hundreds of non-City partners can seamlessly post job openings, youth applicants

can easily navigate and search for jobs relevant to them, employer-partners can review and communicate with applicants in real-time, and selected youth can independently complete the hiring paperwork to get onto the payroll.

Deploying information technologies to improve program management and communication among partners and participants is essential. Information management systems can increase access to information about job postings, streamline application and job matching processes, provide real-time tracking to ensure youth do not fall through the cracks, and capture important data that can be used for evaluation and improvement. While it is possible to engage in all of this coordination manually, we would not recommend it, especially as programs grow beyond the pilot stage and begin to attract hundreds of applicants that need to be placed with dozens of employer-partners.

Best Practices:

- The host employers post through a common online portal that can be marketed by all partners.
- Develop an application portal that is tailored to youth and captures information needed for selection and/or matching.
- Create a protocol for employer selections and/or job matching by the public entity.
- Utilizing Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software to support employer and youth communications.
- Track youth participants in real-time through each phase of the hiring process: application, employer selection, offer accepted, and completion of each required document for payroll processing.
- Track employers in real-time through each phase of the hiring process: number of allocated job slots, youth selections, offers made, youth hired onto payroll, and remaining openings.
- Develop a process to reconcile youth selected by multiple partners and youth failing to make it through the paperwork process, to free up job slots that can be reassigned before the start of the program.

Employer, Training, and Nonprofit Partner Ecosystem

Cities may find themselves initially constrained by the "coalition of the willing" in terms of partners who are interested and able to commit to hiring youth during the first year of the program or its expansion. For example, places with few colleges or training programs may not be able to support a Learn and Earn type of experience. Others that are anchored by large production or manufacturing employers may have limited options for traditional jobs that are suitable for youth in terms of safety and hours regulations. Finally, some cities that lack a robust nonprofit sector may not be able to offer the kinds of developmental opportunities that are needed for younger or more vulnerable youth populations.

In addition, program leaders will need to assess the broader youth-serving ecosystem in their locality that they can work with to provide basic curriculum and wrap-around services. These include local school systems that can help get the word out about employment opportunities to their students, serve as a resource for help with job applications and payroll paperwork, and often need to sign off on work permits for youth under 18. In addition, other youth-serving organizations such as local YMCAs and Boys & Girls Clubs can help provide training and supervision. Finally, community-based organizations such as food pantries, housing shelters, and health centers can help provide wrap-around support services for youth as needed.

Best Practices:

- Wherever possible, the operating entity should look for opportunities to build out the capacity of the partner ecosystem and facilitate intra-organization coordination. Investments in basic infrastructure and training are a first-order way of doing this.
    - For example, the Career Connected Learning Philadelphia program (C2L-PHL) recently began a multi-year effort to build capacity among the network of organizations it contracts with to offer employment and skill-building experiences to young people. As a first step, it developed a universally available resource library at www.c2lphlresourcelibrary.org, which features tools, guides, and other materials to help employers and host sites offer high-quality experiences to youth. In addition to these self-paced experiences, C2L-PHL will also offer more directed training to improve program design and implementation. Notably, C2L-PHL also increased the fees it pays to contracted organizations to compensate them for their time spent on program development and the professional development of their staff.

3. Determine Program Features

Key Decision Points

- *Select type of summer experience*
- *Develop programming tiers suitable for young people of different ages and work-readiness*
- *Determine program duration*
- *Decide level and form of compensation*
- *Identify support services needed*

Once cities identify their target population and the characteristics of those youth, they will want to consider which SYEP intervention features to develop and seek resources to support. As a reminder, the three main approaches to SYEPs are Traditional, Earn and Learn, and Life Skills Development. Regardless of which of the three types of experience the city chooses, program duration and type of pay are important to consider from the outset because they will determine the size and scale of the program. Within the three main program types, there are a variety of intervention features to consider depending on the social issue(s) your program aims to address, with measurable impacts.

Offer Options for Young People of Different Ages and Work-readiness

Summer jobs programs serve young people at different developmental stages. Age is the most obvious differentiator, and program design needs to be flexible enough to provide appropriate experiences, regardless of the program's age range, which is likely between the ages of 14 and 21. But apart from age, some young people are likely more work-ready than others in terms of their habits of arriving on time, completing assignments, communicating clearly, and working in teams. Staff can offer more competitive and demanding positions for those who are more job-ready and provide support and activities in more educational and community-based environments for those who are not. For example, 14- and 15-year-olds may engage in project-based learning, service-learning, or career exploration, while 18-year-olds may work in more traditional workplace settings such as an office or a summer camp. For example, in Wichita, Kansas, when more 14- and 15-year-olds signed up than available worksites, the Workforce Alliance created week-long "career camps" focused on particular industry sectors. Participants went on worksite tours, learned workplace skills, engaged in project-based learning, and met with business leaders. Completers earned a stipend of US$200 for the week.

Best practices

- Programs need to build their enrollment, assessment, and job-matching processes to capture appropriate information and then assign young people to the most suitable tier of programming. As programs develop placement sites, they also need to assess the programming tier for which the site is most suitable.
- Programs ask partners to develop positions appropriate to the age and skills of participants, which may involve creating separate tiers of programming.
    - For example, Philadelphia's program, Career Connected Learning PHL (C2L-PHL), organizes its program along a continuum:
        - Career Awareness (middle and high school): learning about work
            - Exposure and exploration activities to connect youth interests to careers
            - Workforce skill-building activities
        - Career Preparation (high school): learning through work
            - Internships and work-based learning experiences hosted by employer partners
            - Technical and professional skill developments and real-world projects
        - Career Launch (high school and post-secondary): learning at work
            - Connections to career pathways via degree programs, apprenticeships, and other opportunities to earn and learn
            - Support for getting a job, retaining, and advancing

Duration

Beyond the number of youth, the duration of the experience is an important consideration that can affect both take-up among youth and employers as well as program costs. This includes the number of weeks the program will run (e.g., anywhere from three to seven weeks typically) and how it fits with the end of school at the start of summer and the beginning of school at the end of summer. It also includes the number of hours per week that youth are engaged (e.g., often anywhere from 10-25 hours per week) and how they align with summer school, extracurricular, and vacation schedules.

Survey data from the Boston SYEP indicates that youth participating for fewer than five weeks do not experience short-term behavioral changes in soft skills, work habits, and academic aspirations. That said, programs that have shorter durations might want to consider partnering with other youth developmental experiences during the summer (e.g., leadership or life skills training) to possibly enhance or amplify program impacts. Obviously, if a program operates for more weeks and/or at a higher number of hours per week, it increases program costs as well as potential conflicts for youth and employers that may discourage program participation. Ideally, programs will strive to strike a balance between program cost and potential return on investment for a higher-duration program, which will also be dependent on the program goals and target population. A shorter duration program may also be part of a larger strategy for youth engagement: For example, in Boston, while the goal is to have youth participate for at least five weeks, the program does allow youth to sign up as late as the third week of July if spots are still available with the hope that these late-comers will be encouraged to apply earlier the following year.

Programs might also want to consider whether to allow participants to participate repeatedly for subsequent summers or only allow one summer of participation to serve as many youth as possible. Research evidence from the Boston SYEP also shows that participating in a second summer can be useful in maintaining the effects of the program beyond the first year. For example, the program's positive impacts on school attendance and GPA observed during the first year are more likely to endure for youth who are randomly selected to participate for a second summer, suggesting that some skills need to be reinforced over time. The Massachusetts YouthWorks program restricts the number of youth able to participate for a second summer to only 20 percent of the prior year's number and specifically targets repeat participation among "opportunity" youth who are not in school, not at work, live in a household with low-income, and have one or more risk factors (e.g., court-involved, homeless)

Compensation

Although this might seem obvious, an important consideration here is whether to pay youth hourly wages or some type of weekly or monthly stipend. Paying youth an hourly wage has important benefits in terms of providing incentives for youth to maintain participation, teaching youth about the employment and payroll process, and keeping accurate records for program funding. However, it requires burdensome documentation (e.g., Form I-9, SSN), real-time systems for accurately tracking time, the capacity to pay youth in a timely manner, and possibly youth needing to pay into required city benefits (e.g., pension system). Hourly wages can also be more costly than stipends, depending on the minimum wage laws in your state. Paying youth weekly or monthly stipends of the same amount eliminates the need for time-keeping and payroll deductions and provides a steady source of income, but some youth may show up less consistently if their pay isn't reduced when they are absent. Paying a lower stipend may reduce costs, but may also lead to lower take-up among youth if the youth labor market is experiencing high demand and outside employers are paying higher wages.

In such cases, the city will need to determine who will be the employer of record. In some cases, this will be the city or an organization the city contracts with. This might also be the employer partner. There are different documentation requirements for paying wages versus stipends, and this will need to be clearly communicated to participating youth. In addition, youth stipends and wages may be subject to taxes, which can come as a surprise to youth and their families if that expectation is not explicitly communicated. The employer and city should also work together to determine how hours work and how attendance will be tracked.

Best Practices:

- Cities should pursue payment options (stipend, paycheck, etc) that can be delivered accurately and on time.
- Programs need to understand all the financial implications of being employed through SYEP and share the information with youth and families (e.g., taxes, sick pay, absenteeism, etc.).

Developmental Curriculum

In addition to providing young people with an early employment opportunity, SYEP is intended to be a developmental experience that leads to personal and professional growth. A part of the SYEP experience is understanding workplace/professional culture, and what is expected of them in an employment setting. For many young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and having access to limited resources, family and personal obligations, and a lack of exposure to professional

settings can create roadblocks to success, and SYEPs should strive to provide an appropriate curriculum in conjunction with employment to address these challenges.

As noted in the previous section, the target population and goals of an SYEP will help determine the appropriate features, including the developmental curriculum. Preparing young people to succeed and learn new skills by providing training and professional development on career exploration, work readiness, soft skills, financial capability, and post-secondary education and training opportunities. Cities can draw on existing programs at local organizations such as school districts, workforce development boards, youth-serving nonprofits like the YMCA or Boys & Girls Club, banks and credit unions, colleges and universities, and unions for resources and curricula. It may also be possible for cities to partner with local school systems to complement their career readiness and professional development curricula.

Similar to matching with job or program opportunities, additional training to prepare young people to succeed will depend on the population being served and the labor market in the program area. Building leadership skills, basic technical skills, and financial capability training are likely broadly applicable, and there are many opportunities for partnerships with local or national organizations for instruction or curriculum in these areas. If the program is in a more rural area where transportation is a barrier, driving instruction could be a highly valuable offering. Financial institutions can be both strong partners for financial education and access to banking products, and may be able to provide philanthropic funding.

In Chicago, MHA Labs identified a core set of social, emotional, and cognitive skills and organized them into six building block categories: personal mindset, planning for success, social awareness, problem solving, verbal communication, and collaboration. Rather than developing a curriculum, however, MHA Labs worked directly with educational and youth-serving organizations to integrate these skills into their programs through assessment and feedback forms and other tools.

Examples of Best Practices:

- Strategies to promote work readiness vary among cities, and there is no one dominant standardized curriculum, but there seems to be consensus that training should be experiential, based on authentic challenges and workplace conditions, and should allow students to practice applying particular skills.
    - Carrying this out demands skilled facilitation and leadership; a successful program not only transmits information but also helps participants internalize behaviors as part of their repertoire of social skills.
    - Youth with limited exposure to the cultural norms of workplace environments can benefit greatly from assistance in translating their school- and neighborhood-based skills and behaviors into the workplace—a process sometimes referred to as code-switching.

- Boston and other communities in Massachusetts use the Signal Success curriculum developed by the quasi-public Commonwealth Corporation. The curriculum provides lesson plans, assessments, and a variety of activities and interactive exercises to build

non-cognitive skills. It can be customized for specific contexts, and there are accompanying web resources and professional development opportunities.

Support Services
Most SYEPs intend to serve less advantaged populations of youth even if they run a universal program. Often, these youth have needs (e.g., food insecurity, homelessness, unmet healthcare) that must be addressed for them to be successful on the job. These types of support services are usually outside the scope of a six-week summer jobs program, but fortunately, there are other wrap-around services that summer programs can both feed into and draw from in partnership with other community organizations.

It may be helpful for the city to map out existing resources and partners within the community who are willing to partner with the SYEP. As the target population is identified, the city should understand resource deficits associated with the youth and build out resources that are available in the community. It may also be valuable to develop strategies to connect summer jobs to the local school or education system so that youth have access to those resources.

Since typical SYEP resources and staffing patterns don't generally allow programs to offer supportive services such as housing, mental health care, or childcare, if a program anticipates enrolling youth participants who need such services, it should develop strong referral relationships with other organizations, such as schools and community-based organizations, in advance.

SYEPs are generally well-positioned to meet transportation needs to and from the job, which can make a big difference in whether a young person can participate. A number of SYEPs offer support with transportation to and from work through bus passes, vouchers for taxis/ride-shares, or vans. The key is to plan and budget for transportation services; while other supportive services are cost-prohibitive or beyond the staffing capacity of an SYEP, transportation is generally within an SYEP's scope (albeit easier and cheaper in urban and suburban settings than in more rural areas).

Examples of Best Practices:
- Offer free transit passes for public school students or summer feeding sites; SYEPs should also plan to make use of these resources as appropriate.
- Map existing resources and prepare information packets for youth and employers.
- Youth service providers who are known locally and already have other relationships (contractual or informal) with coalition partners and/or the school district are ideal partners to provide locally-relevant support services.

A. Strategic Planning Phase (Sep - Nov) Checklist

1. **Identify Program Goals & Participant Population**
   - *Identify community needs*
   - *Determine desired outcomes from the program*
   - *Identify the target youth population & assess any special characteristics*

2. **Assess Capacity and Infrastructure**
   - *Determine available staffing and training needs*
   - *Assess existing IT systems for application and hiring*

- *Identify potential employers and nonprofit partners*

3. **Determine Program Features**
   - *Select the type of summer experience*
   - *Develop programming tiers suitable for young people of different ages and work-readiness*
   - *Determine program duration*
   - *Decide the level and form of compensation*
   - *Identify support services needed*

B. Preparation & Logistics Phase (December - May)

1. Partner Site Recruitment & Coordination

Key Decision Points
- *Identify partners to recruit and build relationships*
- *Develop MOU and/or RFP*
- *Manage relationships*
- *Train employer partners*

As noted in Phase 1, a new program usually starts with a "coalition of the willing" who have some stake in the program, making them ready to sign on in program development and its early years. However, through the program design process, you will identify gaps in areas where additional service providers or employer partners are needed for the program to be successful. Your goals, program type, target population, and desired intervention features will impact the types, diversity, and robustness of partnerships needed to start, scale, and/or sustain a program long term. Formalizing some type of partnership agreement is also important to ensure accountability of all parties, which may or may not have funding attached to it. Additionally, it is important to have dedicated staff and systems in place to ensure partners are well prepared to play their role in the coalition and are collaborating and communicating effectively.

Building Relationships with Partner Organizations

Recruiting committed employers and worksites and sustaining engagement and participation are important to optimize the quality, variety, and number of job opportunities available. Local schools and districts can be ideal partners because they have built-in connections to youth for recruitment, but may be very resource-constrained and have limited capacity to support youth employment work. In some cases, if a school or district is very focused on high academic achievement, it may be less motivated to support connecting youth with traditional summer jobs, but excited about a learn and earn-type program. The operating entity needs to keep in mind the competing goals and needs of partners and collaboratively develop a partnership agreement that satisfies the needs of the program and youth being served, while putting minimal demands and constraints on partners, so it becomes a win-win for all those involved. Recruitment and relationship management strategies should be tailored to the needs of the partner(s) you want to engage with.

Typical types of partners	Role and responsibilities	Motivation(s)
Employers/education and training providers	• Host youth employees at work site(s). • Provide staff/supervisors to oversee youth employees. • Ensure staff are adequately trained and supported to supervise and work with youth employees. • Serve as "employer of record" to hire and pay youth employees directly (unless this is done at the program level). • Reporting for compliance during program operations. • Reporting metrics for evaluation during/post-program participation: job placement, wages paid, hours worked, education/training hours provided, supervisory feedback, attendance, tardiness, grades (in an academic or training program).	• Recruit future employees (or students for education and training providers). • Demonstrate corporate social responsibility. • Improve employment, educational, and career outcomes for local youth.
Local school districts or individual schools	• Outreach to high school students. • Data sharing agreement for evaluation. • Issuing work permits (depending on state regulations). • Pre-employment paperwork support.	• Reduce summer learning loss. • Increase academic knowledge, critical thinking, problem problem-solving skills. • Improve college readiness.
Nonprofit service providers, educators	• Curriculum development. • Provide instruction. • Support services. • Supplemental extracurricular programming.	Improve youth outcomes in: career readiness, college readiness, leadership, social emotional skills, and financial education.

As we have noted throughout, determining the type of program (traditional summer job, learn and earn, life skill development), the size of the target population, and the number of youth employment opportunities needed are key to making decisions about the program. To build relationships and expand employer partners, cities should work to identify key local industries or occupations, large local employers; and assess the number of partners and worksites, size of worksites, and preparedness of employers to engage with youth employees in general, any key populations in particular (i.e. justice involved youth, youth with disabilities, foster youth, etc.).

Depending on the current employment market and local economy, for-profit companies, nonprofit organizations, and public agencies may have more or less motivation to provide early employment experiences for young employees. In environments with tight labor markets and highly competitive job markets, for-profit employers may be more eager to participate in creating a pipeline for a next generation of entry-level employees with the skills they need. In some scenarios, mission-driven nonprofits and public agencies may be best suited to provide services due to mission alignment, particularly if you are aiming to support youth with significant barriers to employment.

Best Practices:

- Have at least one staff person dedicated to employer recruitment, professional development, and relationship management.
- Approach firms with whom the public agency already has a relationship for providing services, etc.
- Approach anchor institutions (universities, hospitals, and other large, locally-based organizations) that have a stake in your community.
- Approach mission-aligned community-based organizations and nonprofits.

Assigning Available Slots to Employers

Programs that subsidize wages for multiple employers and training partners will likely want to issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) or similar process to fairly distribute youth jobs and wages across worksites. The RFP should include questions related to each of the program components listed above and how the employer partner plans to meet these requirements.

Best Practices:

- New employer partners may not be able to fill all their positions during the first year of participation, so public entities should be cautious when assigning subsidized positions to new employers, while also providing additional support for youth outreach.
- Tracking data on each employer partner in real-time to reallocate available slots from those who are unable to fill positions to those that are over subscribed can ensure that no funding is left unspent.
- Cities should have a clear sense of the priority capacities that partners must demonstrate, and outline this in the RFP. Public entities will want to take into consideration factors such as organizational capacity, experience working with youth, ability to supervise youth who faced higher barriers, and past track record of filling positions efficiently and equitably.
    - For example, in Boston, the Office of Youth Employment and Opportunity issues preliminary assignments at the start of the recruitment season to assess the recruitment landscape, followed by a second round of supplemental assignments to ensure every slot is filled with a young person. Typical considerations include assessing the employer partners:

- Capacity to recruit youth employees, including the relationship with the local school system or youth-serving organizations.
- Experience serving special populations (i.e., Limited English Proficiency, court-involved, foster care involved, youth with disabilities requiring accommodations, etc.).
- Capacity to manage administrative processes such as youth hiring and payroll.
- Ability to provide an appropriate workplace setting for youth that complies with state youth employment laws.
- Capacity for supervising youth, including remote work (e.g., ensuring youth have access to the technology needed to do their job).

Developing an MOU to Structure Youth Positions and Processes

Once programs have chosen their employer partners and assigned a certain number of jobs, typically with an amount of funding allocated for youth wages, it's helpful to develop an MOU or similar agreement to ensure basic standards and processes, legal, and reporting requirements, are understood and consistently followed across employers and work sites. At a minimum, programs will want to put in place a binding agreement with employer partners to ensure each position has a designated, engaged supervisor. The supervisor should be properly trained to supervise youth, including overseeing legal requirements such as background checks and mandated reporter responsibilities for minors in certain situations.

The MOU is also a useful way of setting expectations for job quality across work sites and the ramifications for not following operating entity policies. Most programs will require a meaningful and intentional professional career curriculum for youth employees with established guidelines (e.g., number of hours, topics to be covered, delivered at the start of the program during orientation). For example, the Boston MOU requires employer partners to submit a job description for each position that is posted on the City's SYEP website, along with a link to the partner's online job application. It also stipulates in their MOU that the City may draw back funding that is not used and/or supported by the required reporting and tracking of youth hours and payroll payments.

Training and Supporting Employer Partners to Hire, Supervise, and Support Youth

As noted previously in the section on partner recruitment, employer partners and work sites can be diverse types of workplaces (i.e., outdoors, office, small business, large corporation or institution, nonprofit, public agency, etc.). As such, it is important to ensure leadership of employment sites, youth supervisors, and other staff who will interact with young people have a baseline understanding of what is expected of them, what to expect of young employees who are just entering the workforce, as well as any other special considerations relevant to the program's target population and goals. Different types of employer partners may have different levels of preparation and understanding of how to support youth employees. Typically, the culture and staff at mission-driven nonprofit organizations and community agencies serving as employers are more oriented to providing a developmental experience that has positive outcomes for youth.

Best Practices:

- Have at least one staff person dedicated to employer recruitment, professional development, and relationship management.
- Ensure the role of youth supervisors and processes and procedures for hiring, supervision, addressing challenges, payroll, and disciplinary actions (if necessary) are well articulated.
- Provide templates and reference materials that supervisors can access throughout the program and customize to their work site. Example employer supports: NU Program Resources
- Prior to initiating the application and hiring process, staff who will be supervising or working with youth employees should be provided with training to ensure:
    a. Legal regulations, requirements, and rights relevant to minors working in your state.
    b. Understanding of the logistical complications of hiring and placing young people in jobs.
    c. Understanding of how to support young people who are very new to work, including common challenges and strategies to address them.
    d. Partners will challenge assumptions and biases about young people who are non-college-educated, low-income, BIPOC, and/or from otherwise disinvested or marginalized communities. Program operators should provide training in social and cultural competence relevant to your youth population, including blunt, honest anecdotes, real-life examples of bias when working with young people.

Coordinating Application and Hiring Processes

With multiple employer partners and work sites, the operating entity should establish parameters for the process for youth to apply and be hired in positions, both for efficient coordination across partners and to monitor whether youth facing more barriers have equal access to the program, and ensuring they are not being excluded through work sites' hiring process or decisions. The operating entity can help standardize processes across the program through partnership management tools, such as sample job descriptions, interview protocols, and assessment tools that help structure the application and hiring process and work experience. In most cases, it will be beneficial to centrally coordinate employers and/or work sites through a multi-wave hiring process with clear deadlines/milestones. Employee recruitment, application, selection, and hiring processes and systems can be complicated under normal circumstances. So, hiring a large number of young people, most of whom are unfamiliar with this process, in a condensed time frame is extremely challenging in the best of circumstances, and the following section details practices demonstrated to make these processes more efficient for program operators, while providing the necessary support to create equitable access to the program.

2. Youth Recruitment, Application, Selection, and Hiring

Key Decision Points

- *Set multiple hiring waves and deadlines*
- *Conduct marketing and outreach campaign*
- *Determine youth selection and job matching mechanism*
- *Develop a hiring and paperwork support plan*

Implementing a summer jobs program sounds simple enough, but the application, selection, and hiring process is often a fire drill that requires a multi-pronged approach to be successful. One primary goal of SYEP is to introduce youth to the labor market and teach them about the employment process. Programs need to meet youth where they are and prepare them for each part of the process, especially how to get started with the application process, especially for younger youth who have never worked before. This means the job search and application process needs a higher level of support to fill positions and ensure youth in target populations are accessing jobs. And even then, there always appears the need to pivot based on how the process unfolds each year as labor market conditions, employer partners, and youth needs shift from summer to summer.

Setting Deadlines

No matter how strong youth outreach efforts are, every program will face the need to market and hire over multiple waves if the program targets to fill every job opening available and provide access to all youth. Several patterns in youth application behavior necessitate a multi-wave hiring schedule:

- **Application completion rates** - Prior research based on the Boston program has shown that upwards of one-third of youth who create a profile never complete a single job application, suggesting that there are significant barriers for youth trying to navigate this process. Among those who complete at least one application, over half of the youth apply to only one job, and many apply to the same job, creating a high degree of mismatch that can leave 10-15 percent of jobs unfilled and youth unemployed.
- **Timing of applications** - Research shows that youth who apply later tend to be from less advantaged backgrounds with a higher percentage of youth who are younger, Black, Hispanic, non-native English speakers, or attend one of the City's open enrollment (non-exam) schools. This group of youth often does not seek a job until the last few weeks of school, after most programs have closed their application portals. These youth might be waiting to hear about extracurricular or summer school schedules, focused on getting through final exams, or just unaware of the program until they hear about it from a friend, parent, or teacher. For example, although Boston's application portal opens in March, most youth apply later in April during school vacation, with another bump right before the employer selection deadline on May 30th. Another bunch of youth often apply right before the June 15th deadline or even as walk-ins during the City's "We Hire" job fair event after the application process has closed; allowing youth who are less advantaged and apply later

in the process to fill positions where another young person did not accept a job offer so there is still an opening.

- **Hiring paperwork completion rates** - Even if youth are matched with a job, some subset of them will fail to complete the hiring paperwork (e.g., I-9, W-2, work permit) needed to get onto the payroll. Research from the Boston program has revealed that upwards of one in five youth fail to onboard once they are notified that they have been selected for a job. Often, employers do not become aware of this issue until right before the program starts, leaving hundreds of jobs unfilled each summer. Proactive communication and support to ensure youth employees understand and can complete hiring paperwork is crucial.

Best Practices:

- Cities should be prepared to keep active track of applications as they are filled and plan for surges in hiring at crucial milestones, such as near the end of the recruitment phase. In practice, evidence from Boston suggests that planning to hire over multiple waves can ensure cities serve as many youth as possible and that all employers get the summer help they need. Often this looks like three distinct waves with a first round of employer selections, followed by a second round of "automated" City selections, and finally a last round of often in-person placements made at the recruitment office to backfill any remaining openings while serving both youth who have not yet been selected as well as "very late" applicants right before the start of the program.
- Cities must be prepared to "backfill" slots as needed if youth decline a job offer or fail to make it through the paperwork hiring process.

Best Practices: Research suggests that using a combination of employer selection mechanisms is the best way to achieve equity (e.g., serving those who need it most) while also maximizing efficiency (e.g., filling every job). For example, allowing employers to select youth for half of their subsidized positions on a rolling basis can prevent bottlenecks and allow employers to select youth as repeat participants for a second summer, often with the ability to ladder them into more experienced positions. The City can then place the remaining half using random assignment (or a job matching algorithm) for the pool of applicants who applied to each employer to ensure that at least half of the jobs are open to new participants and that youth who apply later have a chance of being selected. Finally, reserving some public sector jobs for youth in City departments with certain characteristics, either based on merit or income restrictions, can help accommodate specific target populations.

Marketing Programs to Youth

To ensure programs are able to efficiently fill every job opening while also providing access and opportunity to all youth, it's necessary to create a "thick" job market with many job openings and job seekers. Youth who apply later tend to be from less advantaged backgrounds, younger, non-native English speakers, or attend schools with low college enrollment rates. Efforts to create a thick market should take this into account by creating established processes for youth outreach and providing application support that target the needs of populations who might face more barriers to learning about or accessing job opportunities. Most programs help standardize processes through partnership management tools, such as sample job descriptions, interview protocols, and assessment tools that help structure the application process across employer partners. Surveys show that parents are often an important source of support, especially for

first-time job seekers, who help the youth find the website, search for jobs, and complete the application, so they can be considered a secondary audience for outreach activities.

Best Practices:

- In the absence of dedicated funding to subsidize positions, use other strategies such as youth employment portals and job fairs to connect young people to jobs.
- Utilize existing networks and relationships between service providers, teachers, and guidance counselors to promote opportunities through school and community partnerships.
- Host an annual job fair and pop-up neighborhood application sites, encouraging youth to apply to upwards of 15 jobs, and providing in-school job application workshops during advisory blocks.
- Coordinate with local schools to work with youth starting in the fall with career exploration, helping them develop a resume, and providing mock interviews.
- Send out text message reminders to youth to complete an application they may have started.
- Reorder jobs on the website so that undersubscribed jobs appear first to boost the number of applications.
- Include required fields for parents/guardians' contact information on interest forms and application, so parents can be cc'd on email communications to encourage follow-up, or be called directly when a young person is not reachable.
- Simplify coordination of application and hiring processes across program work sites through partnership management tools that help standardize processes, such as sample job descriptions, interview protocols, and assessment tools that help structure and support youth from the time they submit an application till they begin working in the program.

Matching Youth to Jobs

There are two considerations for matching youth to jobs:

- The timing and mechanism used for matching: Typically, programs opt to engage in matching on a rolling, first-come, first-served basis from the moment the application process opens, or by random lottery after the application deadline closes. There are challenges and opportunities with each of these selection processes. For example, a rolling application deadline would seem to increase access since youth can apply at any time right up to the start of the program. However, in practice, youth with greater advantage and support apply first, so if coupled with a first-come, first-served selection mechanism, then in practice, it's likely that the program will not offer access to less advantaged youth in practice. Similarly, although using a lottery (random assignment) design might seem to be the most equitable selection mechanism, this often necessitates a hard and fast application deadline after which the lottery is run and youth are notified of their placements with enough time to make it through the hiring paperwork to start the program on time. Research shows that youth with higher access can meet earlier deadlines, limiting access to those who might benefit the most. Finally, solely relying on income restrictions might help target the program towards the population of interest based on the city's goals, yet make it difficult to fill every slot if youth have little parental support to make it through the application and hiring process.
- Who is responsible for the matching: Depending on the structure of the program, youth will typically be matched with a specific job opening by the "employer of record," who is hiring them and paying their wages - this might be the program operator or the

employment host site. In Boston, research has shown that relying solely on employer selections resulted in disparities by race, English language proficiency, and school type.

Best Practices:

- Encourage youth to apply to at least five job openings. Even better, have them rank those opportunities based on their interest so that they are more likely to get a good match.
- Allow employers to select youth for some percentage of their subsidized openings (e.g., 50 percent) to ensure good matches, allow some youth to return to the same employer the following summer, and encourage sustained, year-over-year participation among employers.
- Have the program operator place the remaining slots (from among the pool of youth that applied to a particular employer) to ensure all job opportunities are open to youth of all backgrounds. Be aware of special requirements such as certifications, language fluency, etc.

Hiring and Onboarding Paperwork

Adults of working age often assume it is understood that being hired for any job requires a certain amount of administrative bureaucracy, and may forget this is completely new to everyone at some point in their lives. Being able to verify and maintain records of employee documentation (e.g., I-9 verification documents, work permit, etc.) is critical for employers to keep in compliance with state and federal laws and special processes. Clear directions and communication are critical to ensure young people can complete this process. This is most challenging for young people applying for a job for the first time ever, especially for those whose parents do not have time or capacity to support this process, because they have work and other obligations, and in some cases, may be new to the United States themselves and navigating a new system with a language barrier.

The hiring paperwork and process for youth employees and SYEPs is more complicated than it is for adults due to a few factors:

- Youth job applicants have a limited understanding of hiring processes.
- Additional protection, documents, and monitoring are required for employees who are minors (i.e., work permits), and policies and processes for minors who are under 18 to obtain a work permit vary from state to state, depending on the local laws and regulations. It is important to ensure that the requirements for employers and the process for youth in your state are well understood, and incorporate all necessary steps in planning for the hiring process and providing instructions to young people.
- Additional eligibility requirements (i.e., age limits, city or county residency) to ensure youth fit the target population of your program may require youth to present additional documentation. Proving eligibility should be simplified for youth applicants as much as possible, with clear instructions on what documents or processes are required.
- Sometimes, necessary participation from parents/guardians (i.e., to sign a work permit or other required documentation) can be a barrier for young people, as parents/guardians may be stretched thin and unable to provide their child with substantial support in the process.

As noted previously, the operating entity and employer partners should have a clear understanding and an MOU or other legal agreement outlining who is responsible for directly

hiring youth on payroll and paying wages. Whichever entity is responsible for hiring young people should provide user-friendly information to support youth through the hiring process and in understanding which documents need to be provided when, as well as navigating any online hiring systems. As early as possible in the hiring process, employers should provide a step-by-step outline of each phase of hiring with clear dates/deadlines and documents needed at each step. It is also important to clearly state the documentation needs upfront, in case youth need to request new government documents (birth certificate, Social Security card), which can take some time.

Best Practices:

- Depending on the size of the program, it is critical that sufficient staff are designated to respond to all youth applicant outreach and questions during hiring and provide hands-on hiring support.
- Ideally, youth applicants should be provided with multiple venues for support, including both virtual and in-person help sessions and office hours, and telephone, text, and email communication options with staff capacity matching the anticipated volume of outreach from youth and parents.
- An FAQ web page should be updated in real time throughout the hiring process, as staff respond to questions, to address common, repeated concerns.

B. Preparation & Logistics Phase (December - May) Checklist

1. **Partner site recruitment & coordination**
    - *Identify partners to recruit and build relationships*
    - *Develop MOU and/or RFP*
    - *Manage relationships*
    - *Train employer partners*

2. **Youth recruitment, application, selection, and hiring**
    - *Set multiple hiring waves and deadlines*
    - *Conduct marketing and outreach campaigns*
    - *Determine the youth selection and job matching mechanism*
    - *Develop a hiring and paperwork support plan*

C. Program Implementation Phase (June - August)

1. Tracking Hours and Payroll

Key Decision Points

- *Establish clear processes for tracking hours for payroll for youth who do and do not use direct deposit*
- *Establish training and communication plan to ensure youth understand processes and recurring deadlines*

Similar to hiring processes, policies and systems for tracking and reporting work hours may seem self-explanatory to adults who have been in the labor market, but are new and unknown to young employees, especially those in their first ever job. As with the hiring process, as noted earlier, the operating entity and employer partners should have a clear understanding and an MOU or other legal agreement outlining who is responsible for maintaining payroll and paying wages. If the employer partner or work site is not the employer of record, there must also be a clear process established between the operating entity and work sites for youth to report hours and for these to be verified by a supervisor.

While enrolling youth in payroll through onboarding can be a barrier for many youth, it also provides an opportunity to teach them about basic finance concepts that will be important throughout their lives. Enrolling in direct deposit and establishing a connection to mainstream banks with no fees and a noncustodial account can help young people develop positive banking habits, avoid predatory financial services, and gain a sense of financial independence and agency. Additionally, this may be the first time a young person learns about tax withholdings and their responsibility to file tax returns when they earn over a certain threshold.

Best Practices:

- Provide very clear information on pay rate and pay schedule, remind repeatedly throughout the hiring process and program, using a clear chart or table and including it in multiple forms of communications such as adding in the end of a weekly email notice or newsletter for all youth employees, on a website youth access for the program, printed and displayed on the wall in a common area for youth employees, etc.
- Once youth begin the program, provide a tutorial on how and when to record work hours as a part of the orientation, and repeat this tutorial when the first work time entry is due. This can be done as a video, but staff should also be available who can answer the youth employees' questions in real time. Ideally, youth will be following along to enter their hours during the tutorial sessions.
- Incorporate basic education on tax withholding and filing, including providing information on IRS-sponsored free tax filing online and at VITA sites in communities across the country. A VITA coalition in your community may have educational resources on tax withholding and filing that can be provided to youth employees.
- For youth who are not enrolled in direct deposit and are being paid with paper checks, be sure to communicate very clearly when and how they will receive paychecks. If checks will be mailed to their home address, it is important to make sure that they are aware of this and have the correct mailing address on record, including an apartment number if needed.

2. Orientation and Career Readiness Training

Key Decision Points

- *Plan curriculum and last minute hiring supports for participant orientation*
- *Hold orientation and training day*

To set youth employees up for success, an orientation at the beginning of the SYEP is a practical solution to ensure they have all the critical information at the outset of the program and to match their expectations. The first day of orientation should also include time and staff support for youth who are struggling with the last steps of hiring and onboarding to complete all elements of the process to be hired.

In all SYEPs, youth employees will come to the program with varying levels of knowledge about job readiness concepts, and program operators must ensure they meet the needs of those youth with the most limited knowledge and experience. At its most basic, any SYEP orientation should include comprehensive information on:

- Briefing on where and when to report to work, who to report to, and appropriate attire, including a uniform or specific dress code.
- The work location and resources at the work site that will be commonly needed to perform the job responsibilities.
- A code of conduct that addresses potential behavioral issues and expectations of professionalism in the workplace.
- Legal rights and restrictions on youth employees in the workplace.
- An introduction to other technical platforms or systems that youth will be required to use for their job, particularly those that are not commonly used in a home or classroom setting, to which young people are likely to have limited exposure.
- A process to report workplace issues, conflicts, or concerns that youth may experience during the course of the program.
- Any safety information relevant to the particular job or work site.

Depending on the goals and model of your SYEP, workshops for career readiness, leadership development, and other life skills training may be provided as a part of the orientation and/or be integrated throughout the program. In large programs with varied worksites, the operating entity should set baseline expectations for the developmental programming required to be provided by all worksites, and establish reporting mechanisms to monitor that programming is being provided to youth, as well as to evaluate the impact of participation in these growth experiences on youth attitudes, behaviors, and outcomes.

Best Practices:

- As discussed in "Tracking Hours and Payroll" section, ensure the orientation introduces and/or emphasizes guidance on the correct process for logging their work hours (each day, week, or pay period, whatever interval the employer requires or prefers); the maximum number of hours they can work per day, week and work period, based on both local regulations and your program design; and how, when, and how much they will be paid, including pay periods and a schedule of when payroll will be issued throughout the program.
- Include activities focused on building confidence in a professional setting and leadership development.
- Provide opportunities for networking relevant to the employer or worksite and workshops and activities highlighting the importance of building your network, social capital, and maintaining positive professional relationships.

- Ensure staff supervising and working with youth are reflective of the population being served, and are equipped to act as role models, and provide mentorship and to the extent possible in a short-term program.
- Partner with locally trusted youth and career development providers to provide training and services to youth while they are in the program, and to connect them to additional resources outside of the scope of a summer jobs program, as needed or if it is beneficial.

3. Monitoring and Evaluation

Key Decision Points

- *Identify data systems for tracking the number of job openings and youth applicants*
- *Develop youth, parent, and/or employer surveys for real-time feedback*
- *Consider partnering with a researcher to evaluate program impacts*

Given that local conditions, youth needs, and labor market conditions are constantly changing, having a process in place alongside regular touchpoints for data collection and monitoring to ensure program fidelity and help guide future planning can be incredibly valuable. This includes tracking the number and characteristics of both youth applicants and hires to ensure that the program is serving the targeted youth population rather than those with higher access or easier to serve, while neglecting youth who have less access or who are more challenging to serve. In addition, gathering feedback through 360-degree surveys of youth, their parents, and employers can be used to measure youth application barriers, skill development, and program satisfaction, as well as employer challenges and constraints.

In addition, having a formal evaluation plan in place when piloting new innovations is essential to be able to measure impacts, understand what works and for whom, and determine which interventions are cost-effective.

At a minimum, the operating entity will want to track the number of job openings, applicants, and the fill rate in real-time to monitor job placements. This is important for ensuring that cities can serve as many youth as possible, employer partners get the youth labor that they need, and funding is spent efficiently each year. While it sounds straightforward, tracking the entire process at scale requires an application and hiring system that can be kept up-to-date in real-time and generate accurate reports regularly for thousands of youth applicants and hundreds of employers.

When seeking to evaluate programs, public entities might want to partner with a researcher to conduct some type of process or impact evaluation. A process evaluation studies whether the program is working as intended in terms of efficiency (e.g., filling every position), equity (e.g., serving the target population), and quality (e.g., all employment experiences provide satisfying and meaningful opportunities for youth). An impact evaluation studies whether the program is achieving its intended outcomes–whether in the short-term over the summer (e.g., improving soft skills, increasing job readiness, boosting aspirations) or in the longer-term in the 1-2 years after participating (e.g., reducing criminal justice involvement, increasing employment and wages, boosting college enrollment).

Best Practices:

- In Boston, the Office of Youth Employment and Opportunity monitors job placements in real-time to be able to quickly back-fill positions when youth don't start the job for declining the offer or for inability to submit the required paperwork to get onto the payroll.

- Across the four programs where most of the research evidence has been generated, cities intentionally formed a long-term research-practice partnership with a university to seek external support for both process and impact evaluations. These types of relationships ensure that the city and the university work together to co-create the research agenda, data collection, and interpretation of the findings, ensuring that the generated research evidence can be useful for decision-making.

C. Program Implementation Phase (Jun - Aug) Checklist

1. **Tracking hours and payroll**
   - *Establish clear processes for tracking hours for payroll for youth who do and do not use direct deposit*
   - *Establish a training and communication plan to ensure that youth understand processes and recurring deadlines*

2. **Orientation and Career Readiness Training**
   - *Plan curriculum and last-minute hiring supports for participant orientation*
   - *Hold an orientation and training day*
3. **Troubleshooting**
   - *Establish a plan for regular communication with employers/supervisors*
   - *Establish a communication & feedback pathway for youth*

4. **Monitoring and Evaluation**
   - *Identify data tracking systems*

4. Crisis Management

Key Decision Points
- *Establish a plan for regular communication with employers/supervisors*
- *Establish communication & feedback pathway for youth*

No matter how much planning and monitoring go into a program, there will always be unexpected crises that the public entity will need to adjudicate for both youth and employer partners. This can range from important workplace issues at employer sites (e.g., absenteeism, discrimination, harassment) to serious personal issues that youth might be facing (e.g., food insecurity, homelessness, abuse). No matter what the issue is, programs need to have established reporting mechanisms, procedures, and consequences for the unexpected.

Unlike adult workers, youth are still learning about the workplace and how to advocate for themselves in that setting. On the one hand, youth workers might not feel comfortable telling their supervisor that they were late to work because of an ongoing public transportation issue that could be easily solved by asking the City to subsidize a bus or subway pass. On the other hand, they might develop a strong mentoring relationship with their supervisor and share sensitive personal information that could have legal implications.

Working with young employees who are new to the workforce provides managers with a new lens through which to view their work, brings a fresh perspective, and creates robust learning

opportunities for both parties. Conversely, generational and cultural differences can also lead to miscommunication, misunderstandings, and workplace conflict. Although training supervisors in advance about cultural competency, youth development, and mandatory reporting requirements can help prepare employers for the unexpected, it's virtually impossible to anticipate every possible scenario. At a minimum, programs should provide ways for both youth and supervisors to report an incident or contact a program representative in any situation that they might face to identify problems early and ensure both sides of the employee-employer relationship are supported in finding a resolution.

Examples of Best Practices:

- When selecting employer partners, the operating entity might want to assess whether supervisors/worksite managers are representative of the youth population being served, particularly for at-risk youth or vulnerable populations.
- In Boston, the Office of Youth Employment and Opportunity sends a weekly newsletter that includes a reminder about an established reporting hotline for both youth and employer partners to ensure that problems are identified sooner rather than later.
- Randomly selecting one or more employers for a site visit announced one week in advance can give operating entities first-hand information about program operations or youth behaviors that might lead to issues down the road.
- Establishing working relationships with supportive services (e.g., food, housing, healthcare) and law enforcement in advance of the program's start date can make it easier to find solutions or de-escalate the situation during a crisis.

Please share any insight to help improve this manual via the Feedback Form linked here.

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