



Digital Summer Youth Employment Toolkit 2.0

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About the Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions

The Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions promotes collaborative, community-based efforts that build the power and influence of those with the least access to opportunity, and support communities to come together to expand mobility, eliminate systemic barriers, and create their own solutions to their most pressing challenges. Launched in 2012 at the Aspen Institute, the Forum for Community Solutions envisions a future where communities create their own vibrant and lasting solutions to the social and economic problems that they face. The Forum for Community Solutions believes that if communities have more power to lead change, we will create a more just and equitable society. For more information, visit us at www.aspencommunitysolutions.org.

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Introduction

Across the country, summer youth employment programs (SYEP) serve an important function in preparing youth and young adults in low-income communities for careers. These programs, which traditionally have offered workplace readiness preparation, career exploration, and subsidized job placements with government agencies, non-profit organizations, and private sector employers, improve economic, academic, and behavioral outcomes for young people.¹ The Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions (AIFCS) is committed to deepening and expanding SYEP based on the tangible benefits these experiences offer as a critical piece of the year-round ecosystem of career development opportunities for young adults that communities should cultivate. The current COVID-19 crisis is exposing and exacerbating social inequality in the United States, with young people at the epicenter of economic injustice that too often falls along racial lines. Unemployment during the pandemic soared to 53% among Hispanic, 45% among Black, 48% among Asian, and 38% among white young adults.²

Summer youth employment programs were more important than ever in 2020. At a time when many opportunity youth (OY) experienced loss of connection to school, youth programs, or work for several months, SYEP provided a connection to important relationships with caring adults, often served as a bridge to postsecondary and other career pathway opportunities and created a chance to develop noncognitive skills highly valued in the workplace. These relationships and connections are critical to ensuring that young people can access mental health and other supportive services, all of which are needed during the current crisis. More broadly, SYEP is an essential piece of what will be a long and difficult economic recovery for young people in the United States. Effective young adult talent development systems, that extend beyond summer programming, catalyze the overall economy by providing a pipeline of workers qualified for in-demand jobs and prepared with the skills and mindsets necessary to navigate future labor market changes due to technology. Finally, at a very basic level, summer youth employment programs provide a vehicle for

transferring funds to low-income young people at a time of extraordinary financial, food and housing insecurity and at a time when more than 90% of unemployed young people have been unable to access any income.³

With social distancing and stay at home requirements, implementing SYEP in 2020 required innovative strategies and approaches among organizations, including a new emphasis on digital platforms and tools. While some communities chose to cancel their programs to prioritize public health and safety and in response to budget pressures, stakeholders in many communities came together to rally around their young people with remarkable adaptability, urgency, and focus.

In June 2020, the Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions released a 1.0 version of this toolkit, based on a rapid scan of the field, in order to inform active planning for summer programs about to launch. This resource is an updated version, informed by implementation lessons from this “summer like no other” from communities across the [Opportunity Youth Forum \(OYF\) network](#) and national partners.

Much of this toolkit is orientated toward addressing common challenges imposed by social distancing and the need to pivot to virtual experiences. It is important to note, however, that there have been some benefits to this new environment and adaptations that we expect to persist even after the COVID-19 pandemic. Remote work eliminates barriers related to distance and transportation. In addition to opening up opportunities for participants to serve regularly at worksites regardless of geography, it also eliminates the cost and time associated with young people traveling to meet in person at a centralized program location for professional development check-ins. Embracing video conferences makes it possible to arrange for a broader group of guest speakers from all over the world, including people usually not able to connect young people with in person. Virtual projects can facilitate multiple shorter internships or other types of exposure to various careers within one summer. Perhaps most critically, telework is increasingly part of the world of work, especially in many occupations with

family-sustaining wages and projected growth despite automation. Therefore, exposure and training in this mode of professionalism serves young people well.

This toolkit is primarily designed for practitioners and systems leaders who implement and oversee local summer youth employment programs planning for 2021. Many of the strategies are relevant for year-round career readiness, training and work-based learning programs in high school or community-based organization settings.

Policymakers, employers and philanthropy will also find this full toolkit useful, but we highlight specific calls to action for these audiences on page 15, followed by options for funding SYEP on page 16.

This toolkit is organized around the following **components**, listing **strategies** to tackle each challenge or design element, and specific **examples** from OYF communities. Equity and accessibility should be considered across each of the categories below and all aspects of program design and delivery.



Component 1

Working with Stakeholders to Reimagine Summer Youth Employment Programming

Investment in community infrastructure for cross-sector collaboration pays off in the ability to come together quickly to adapt to a crisis. Young people served not just as program participants, but as co-designers of solutions.



Component 2

Recruiting and Onboarding

How do young people become aware of, apply for, and join the program? Paper-heavy processes dominated many enrollment systems prior to COVID-19. During a time of simultaneous uncertainty and information overload, how did programs communicate clearly and reach everyone?



Component 3

Addressing the Technology Divide

Devices and connectivity presented immediate challenges. Building capacity among youth and program staff to effectively use tech to access the program and take part in work experiences was also critical.



Component 4

Online Programming: Creating Community and Connection

Relationships are at the heart of all youth development experiences and expanded social capital is one of the most important outcomes of work-based learning programs.⁴ How can programs structure activities and interactions to create a sense of belonging and facilitate the growth of authentic bonds when face-to-face conversation is limited?



Component 5

Online Programming: Responding to Young People's Needs

Accessibility and differentiation are essential to ensuring all young people can participate successfully. Managing screen fatigue is important for maintaining high engagement.



Component 6

Employer Partnerships and Virtual Internships

Amid so much uncertainty in their own business environment, some employers were hesitant to host work experiences, or had to cut back on what they intended to offer. Nonetheless, SYEP leaders and employer partners were able to co-design successful work-based learning experiences, often in the form of remote, project-based internships.



Component 7

Alternatives to Internships and Job Placements

With COVID-19 shutting down traditional worksites in service settings, program leaders had to be creative in designing work-based learning experiences. Project-based learning, consulting engagements, career exploration, and training offered opportunities for skill-building in lieu of more traditional placements for some participants.



Component 8

Onsite Internships and Job Placements During a Pandemic

With health and safety paramount, some programs continued to offer in-person experiences.



Component 9

Responding to Crises in Community

Illness and loss due to the coronavirus, police violence and racial reckoning, food and housing insecurity as unemployment soared – 2020 was a summer of trauma. Effective programs incorporated discussion of these overlapping crises into curriculum and training, and in some instances centered the program around setting youth up as solution agents – creating media, connecting resources, or conducting research.

“We don’t want to not do things because of COVID, we want to change the model to respond to COVID.”

— Ruth Barajas-Cardona, BACR



Component 10

Making the Case for Funding and Public Support

As policymakers grappled with implications of COVID-19 across all aspects of the community and budget shortfalls, collaborative advocacy that demonstrates the possibility of running safe, quality SYEP despite social distancing requirements was essential.



Component 11

Postsecondary Bridging

Summer is a critical time for recent graduates to successfully transition to college, training, or permanent employment. For those who entered SYEP with a high school diploma (recent or otherwise) but without a clear plan for further education or career development, how can seasonal programs serve as a smooth on-ramps to the next good-fit opportunity?



Component 12

Measurement and Evaluation

Beyond hours worked, internships completed and participant and employer satisfaction, programs should measure critical outcomes like social and emotional learning. Continuous quality improvement and responsiveness to changing conditions requires an intentional research and learning agenda.

A Note on Technology Tools

While plenty of software is referenced throughout, a full market scan of the technology tools relevant to summer youth employment programs in the era of COVID-19 is outside the scope of this toolkit. With K-12 and postsecondary education technology markets churning in response to expanded demand for platforms to manage learning online, including work-based learning, more rapid changes are likely.

[Unlocking Career Potential: An Analysis of the Career Navigation and Guidance Product Landscape](#) published by Entangled Solutions in April 2020 is an excellent recent resource. [Career Technology 2020](#), released in September by JFFLabs is another recent market scan focused on career navigation platforms for workforce development, although the tools are more focused on employers as users and not specifically for youth.



Component 1 – Working With Stakeholders to Reimagine Summer Youth Employment Programming

STRATEGY	EXAMPLE/S
<p>Convene system leaders, providers, and young people to identify what is needed and design appropriate programming to meet those needs.</p>	<p>When the main partner for the summer Youth Training Academy, College of the Redwoods, closed due to the pandemic, program planners in Del Norte, California convened meetings with stakeholders to figure out what to offer for the summer program. During those sessions, young people made it clear they didn't want to be on computers all the time because they had already spent the spring with online school, lacked access to reliable internet service, and wanted to be outside. Based on this input, and the context of a sparsely populated rural community with very few COVID-19 cases at that time, program instructors developed a variety of summer options, many of which included little or no online programming.</p> <p>When New York City announced that SYEP was cancelled due to budget shortfalls, youth advocates at Teens Take Charge launched the #SaveSYEP campaign in collaboration with HERE to HERE, ExpandedED Schools and dozens of program providers. A coalition identified five key program components to focus the design of virtual experiences: 1) connection to professionals, 2) career exploration, 3) authentic work experiences, 4) social and emotional supports, and 5) skills-building.</p>
<p>Support new curricular, staffing, and technical needs of youth-serving organizations.</p>	<p>The Chicago Department Family and Support Services created “Save Our Summer” to move most of the City’s in-person summer youth employment programming virtual. Through weekly workshops and counseling sessions, Save Our Summer helped organizations make the rapid switch to digital program delivery. MHA Labs, a key part of this support, is maintaining Power On Chicago as an ongoing resource hub for year-round innovation focused on remote learning, positive youth development and social justice. Similarly, Connect Detroit offered a “technology intelligence” seminar for its youth-serving partners to help them learn ways to help young people experience meaningful relationships in an online environment.</p> <p>On April 1, New York City practitioners including ExpandedED, PASE, BEAM Center and others launched an informal community of practice focused on summer learning. After the SYEP budget cut was announced the following week, this group launched Youth Empowerment Summer, or YES 2020, a rapid response coalition of over 50 CBOs. While advocating for the restoration of funding, YES partners facilitated a co-design series to plan quality experiences that young people could participate in remotely. Many organizations lacked capacity to implement such programs on their own, especially when facing layoffs or hiring freezes of seasonal staff. Leveraging the collaborative to jointly raise nearly \$2 million in private funds, ExpandedED issued an RFP inviting applicants to apply to share and deliver high quality work-based learning activities to complement whatever publicly funded program might be restored. The YES team, including leaders from Hive NYC Learning Network, played an intensive matchmaking role dedicated to maximizing the number of youth opportunities through unselfish collaboration. This provided practitioners a sense of stability and optimism at an extraordinarily chaotic time. With over \$1 million awarded through 36 contractors, almost 100 partnerships emerged from the YES coalition, supporting over 11,000 learning experiences for young people via providers, curriculum partnerships, virtual worksite placements, and career panels.</p> <p><i>“The brokerage side was huge. In a rapidly shifting policy landscape, making sure that organizations offering support actually matched specific provider needs was critical.”</i></p> <p>— Rafi Santo, Telos Learning</p>

<p>Challenge the community to come together and offer young people high-quality summer experiences.</p>	<p>Program and system leaders in many communities were happily surprised by how community members rallied to provide meaningful summer experiences for young people. For example, in Seattle, when nearly all employer-hosted internships fell through, the community mobilized and different City departments and community-based organizations, including the City of Seattle, King County, and Port of Seattle, funded and hosted work experiences to support a virtual Earn and Learn job-readiness program.</p> <p>Maintaining high expectations for program quality was an important part of the #SaveSYEP and YES coalitions in New York described above. HERE to HERE's Key Distinguishers for Virtual Paid Work Experiences resource and ExpandedED's Elements of Work Based Learning Program Design offer more detail on quality frameworks that complement the City's compliance requirements and guidelines for baseline program elements.</p>
<p>Recognize one size does not fit all and develop a variety of options for SYEP.</p>	<p>Choice in program offerings is always helpful in serving young people of different ages and stages with different interests. With the disruption and uncertainty caused by the pandemic and economic downturn, many communities found it especially helpful to offer a range of options. For instance, in Boston, partners collaborated to create a summer jobs ecosystem with four tracks:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Earn and Learn - in which students were paid to take credit-bearing courses at local colleges; 2. Blue Shirts Program - in which participants worked in-person in outdoor Parks & Recreation maintenance jobs; 3. Virtual Internship Track - in which participants were paired with community-based organizations or private sector employers for an online project-based experience, with structure and monitoring; and 4. COVID-19 Public Health Campaign - in which participants developed a public campaign to educate young people about wearing masks and social distancing. <p>In addition, community-based organizations developed summer programming for young people already affiliated with their programs. More details on the wide array of programs in Boston can be found here.</p>
<p>Offer incentives tied to completing program components if compensation for hours worked at an internship or job is not feasible or desirable.</p>	<p>Connect Detroit found it simplified things to move to an incentive system with benchmarks that were easier to track and pay than hourly wages. They plan to continue using this system, where appropriate, for compensating participants in summer youth employment programs.</p> <p>Philadelphia Youth Network developed a tool for all their summer program providers to document and articulate how various portions of their program were tied to incentives. This created a way for providers to think about experiences they were offering, map those to individual task activities, and relate them to compensation. This process is now universal and can be used consistently across providers.</p>

Additional Strategies to Consider:

- Engage young people early and often in discussions to make sure planning is addressing their actual interests and needs.
- Consider whether now might be the time to rebuild your community's youth employment system.
- Consider collaborating and sharing with other communities. What can you learn from or develop with counterparts in other communities? Are there new opportunities to work together when geography is not a barrier?



Component 2 – Recruiting and Onboarding

STRATEGY	EXAMPLE/S
Move registration and enrollment to an online/digital process.	Most programs surveyed reported moving their registration and enrollment processes to an online or digital format using platforms such as DocuSign , Adobe Acrobat , JotForm , Formstack , Formsite , the iPhone Notes app, CamScanner , and Sharefile for signatures and uploading documents. This proved much easier for youth participants who could upload all of their documents once, and partner programs that did not have to chase down copies of the same documents for storage in their own file cabinets. Virtually all communities report they intend to streamline this process and continue it online in the future.
Also allow the option of a paper application.	Several programs noted that it was important to retain the option of a paper application for those without access to the technology to apply. While programs ultimately need to ensure access to technology to participate, offering this accessible option at point of application results in more equitable enrollment while allowing time to seek other resources.
Engage youth in the recruitment process	Peers are trusted messengers and stay connected through social media to young people who might otherwise be missed in the absence of school or community-based in-person outreach.
Host summer youth internship/employment interviews or job fairs online.	In Flint and Genesee County, Mich., the Chamber of Commerce hosted a virtual Summer Youth Internship Job Fair. Chamber staff worked with agency representatives to prepare them to take part in group and individual interviews with potential interns in Zoom meetings. The fair was much easier for all involved, and the Chamber will likely continue with this streamlined process.

Additional Strategies to Consider:

- Have a centralized website listing the opportunities and ways to apply.
- Consider if it is possible to safely include at least one in-person meeting for participants with a member of the program staff to help them feel connected to the program.



Component 3 – Addressing the Technology Divide

STRATEGY	EXAMPLE/S
Do a tech assessment for all applicants early on to understand their access to internet and devices, situation at home, ability to use Zoom for interview process, etc.	Numerous programs report including an assessment of applicants' technology access and knowledge as part of the onboarding process. This allowed them to make sure participants were adequately equipped and ready to use the technology needed to access summer youth programming. For programs requiring an interview, this assessment should be done prior to the interview.
Move funds allotted for items no longer needed in an online environment to cover costs of technology needs.	With reduced transportation costs, One Summer Chicago was able to allocate those funds to new needs, such as technology purchases.
Ask local school districts to allow students to keep devices lent to them in the spring.	In many communities, the local school district allowed students to retain computer devices lent to them in the spring for summer youth employment programming. Unfortunately, many reported that by the time summer began these devices had often become too worn to remain of use. In addition, educational devices were often incompatible with remote internships and jobs due to educational firewalls.
Identify sources of refurbished computers to provide to program participants.	Chicago's Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS), the lead for One Summer Chicago , worked with Comp-U-Dopt to purchase refurbished computers for participants. For about \$150 per device, Comp-U-Dopt , a Texas-based non-profit, helped DFSS provide over 250 young people in summer programs with refurbished computers (which remained theirs to keep) and two years of tech support.

Avoid platforms certain young people will not be able to access.	In Philadelphia, system planners for the WorkReady summer program made a conscious decision to use only platforms fully accessible on a smartphone.
Provide WiFi service where young people live.	Chicago Public Schools parked school buses with WiFi hotspots next to homeless shelters to provide residents with internet access.
Offer program participants regular access to tech assistance.	While live help desk resources may be limited, youth in Philadelphia reported satisfaction with access to recorded videos of how to troubleshoot common tech challenges, uploaded by tech support staff as challenges arose.

Additional Strategies to Consider:

- Consider the devices and web connection needed for the programs and platforms you plan to use before you begin.
- Consider if smartphone access is enough for the programming you have planned.

 **Component 4 – Online Programming: Creating a Sense of Community and Connection**

STRATEGY	EXAMPLE/S
Offer at least one in-person session with a small group of participants and one staff person as part of the orientation process so participants can meet a few people face-to-face before the rest of a virtual program.	Bay Area Community Resources (BACR) offered an in-person orientation session for three participants and one staff person at the beginning of its all-online training program. BACR staff found it increased participants’ engagement with their peers and program staff.
Have participants go through the program in cohorts, with strict attendance policies, so they are together a lot and get to know one another.	Sticking to their core values and principles despite the disruption of the pandemic was very important to Connect Detroit, the coordinator of the summer youth employment program for the City. So while the redesigned program relied heavily on the self-paced programming of the online platform Virtual Job Shadow , Connect Detroit partnered with community-based organizations to develop a social and emotional learning curriculum delivered to cohorts of participants who were able to connect with one another through online synchronous workshops.
Increase frequency of individual check-ins throughout the entire program.	In New Orleans, YouthForce NOLA increased individual coach-participant check-ins to once per week and reported relationships between coaches and students were stronger than ever before.
For training components, hold as many synchronous sessions as possible.	ExpandED Options brought cohorts together in 2-4 hours of live group time weekly throughout the summer. In Hartford, Conn., Capital Workforce Partners used Career Labs , a modular version of Year Up’s career readiness curriculum offered by Grads of Life , to deliver training in small cohorts to prepare older participants going into in-person job placements. Grads of Life instructors facilitated synchronous virtual workshops focused on soft skills and social and emotional learning. Hartford is considering using a train-the-trainer model to prepare local providers to use this curriculum in the future in online or blended applications, an approach Seattle launched in August 2020.
Make cohorts smaller than usual to increase relationships among participants and between participants and staff.	YouthForce NOLA, BACR, and other programs decreased the ratio between young people and staff coaches or facilitators to allow more time for individualized follow up and group sizes that that were conducive to full participation in online synchronous meetings or lessons.

Convene events focusing on youth interests.

SYEP leaders in Newark, N.J. hosted five virtual town halls focused on topics including COVID-19 response and networking, with particular engagement in an entrepreneurship forum where participants were able to share social media handles and promote sales for their ventures.

Additional Strategies to Consider:

- Increase program structure.
- Increase communication.



Component 5 – Online Programming: Being Responsive to Young People’s Needs

STRATEGY	EXAMPLE/S
<p>Choose platforms with young people’s needs in mind.</p>	<p>In Boston, employer groups worked together to decide what platform would work best for young people they would work with over the summer. For instance, the city’s hospital hosts chose Google Classrooms, engaging their IT departments to confirm it would work and to provide tech support as they planned to host young people virtually.</p> <p>Bay Area Community Resources chose to use different platforms for different groups of young people with an eye to which platforms posed the greatest potential for frustration.</p>
<p>Address screen or online fatigue by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Limiting web time as much as possible;• Incorporating variety into an online program;• Offering young people the opportunity for self-paced work.• Limiting workshop length;• Varying composition of groups for breakouts, icebreakers, career exploration, projects; and• Varying content delivery methods (e.g., large group, small group discussion, engaging videos, polls)	<p>Many programs indicated that they tried to vary the type of online programming and limit the length of individual sessions.</p>
<p>Offer programming that young people can engage in on their own but that does not require any or as much time online.</p>	<p>One of the programs of One Summer Chicago involved cooking kits delivered to teen parents so they could learn to cook basic meals; another involved kits to help participants engage in hydroponic farming in their home or yard.</p> <p>In New York, ExpandedED Options also sent home small fast-plant mini-gardening kits. Rather than cooking together in a culinary training track, participants received funds to purchase food to conduct recipe experiments. In another track focused on technology in partnership with NYU, they sent home Arduino robotics kits for young people to work on independently.</p>
<p>Consider the needs of English Language Learners when planning online programming.</p>	<p>Bay Area Community Resources (BACR) offered simultaneous translation via phone for participants during online sessions. This was not ideal in that it required ELL participants to have two devices, but it worked. BACR also made a point of placing ELL participants in breakouts with peers who spoke their native language to facilitate their connection and interaction with fellow participants.</p>

Additional Strategies to Consider:

- Take time to develop clear online program policies, making sure these are responsive to young people’s needs. Provide training in online etiquette, professionalism, and rules (e.g., When will video have to be on? When will it be ok to have it off? What does it mean to be professional while on a video conference?).



Component 6 – Employer Partnerships: Convincing and Supporting Employers to Host Internships and Jobs Remotely

STRATEGY	EXAMPLE/S
<p>Supplement employer-supervised work with wraparound career exploration and readiness programming such as workshops or online modules.</p>	<p>In Boston, youth-serving CBOs provided five hours/week of programming to supplement the employer-hosted twenty hours/week. In addition, access to a library of projects to assign to interns eased employers' fears of not being able to go through with hosting during a crisis. More detail on lessons learned from the Boston PIC's experience can be found here.</p> <p>The summer youth employment programs in Newark, N.J. partnered with Newark College Institute (NCI) at Rutgers University to supplement employer-hosted virtual internships. NCI provided onboarding, work-readiness training, and ongoing mentoring for interns.</p>
<p>Use virtual internship and case system management platforms to assist in developing internship projects and track how participants are doing in work placements.</p>	<p>Employer hosts for young people in Boston's Virtual Internship track were supported by Virtual Internship by Practera, a platform assisting supervisors ("coaches") in providing interns with specific project and ongoing, immediate feedback on their work.</p> <p>The Chamber of Commerce in Flint and Genesee County, Mich. was already using Career Services Manager by Simplicity to supervise young people placed in multiple organizations during the Summer Youth Internship program, so it was ready to supervise participants remotely to ensure they were on-track with their internships.</p> <p>ImBlaze, used by Big Picture Learning schools, can integrate daily check-in questions to interns and supervisors to help program staff monitor progress alongside timesheets.</p> <p>The virtual internship platform Symba helps employers design and organize onboarding and orientation materials and structure project and competency-specific feedback.</p>
<p>Engage employer hosts that are comfortable working in an online environment.</p>	<p>When approached by a small tech company about partnering, LRNG agreed to host a cohort of 25 student interns. Interns worked on a specific project advising the online learning platform on improving the first-time-user experience. Using LRNG playlists to scaffold the project, helping interns progress toward a final presentation, and exposing interns to a variety of careers represented among staff, LRNG developed a strong internship program which it is continuing through the school year. Details on the structure of the LRNG internship program are here.</p>
<p>Engage small businesses who might shy away from hosting interns or work-based learning experiences by offering extra support in partnership with industry associations.</p>	<p>Tech:NYC represents New York's tech economy, including many startups and small firms without the HR support to consider hosting youth interns. Many of these businesses were thriving while other sectors that could not easily go remote struggled, and business leaders sought opportunities to support the community but weren't always sure how. Tech:NYC partnered with the YES coalition by hiring a staff person to design "Workplace Challenges" for the tech companies. These challenges engaged teens in activities such as design and marketing and included feedback from employee volunteers. Projects were manageable for both parties. This led to more tech sector SYEP engagement and positive experiences working with high school students than in past years.</p>
<p>Provide employer hosts with playbooks (e.g. week to week detail) on how to support interns.</p>	<p>YouthForce NOLA leveraged the experience of their educators in curriculum design to create playbooks and related resources for employers such as guidelines for how to provide feedback using developmentally appropriate approaches. They apply MHA Labs frameworks for 21st century skills development.</p>
<p>Offer project-based programming supervised by an employer.</p>	<p>In Boston, when actual jobs or internships were not available, youth participants developed a concept around a project to carry out with a team for their summer youth employment experience. Teams developed an end-product that aligned with their project to present at the end of the program. Some projects were supervised by employer hosts, some by community-based youth programs.</p> <p>Some employer hosts in Chicago used the LRNG platform to create projects, divided into pieces that interns could upload as they finished them.</p> <p>In New Orleans, YouthForce NOLA adjusted its internship program to offer young people the opportunity to work in small groups on a project-based consultancy led by employers.</p>

Additional Strategies to Consider:

- Consider asking employer partners to tap into their in-house training programs that they use with staff for possible use with distanced youth employment opportunities, to think of young people who come through [SYEP](#) as part of their career pipeline and start training them as such.
- To minimize work for employer hosts and provide additional interaction among participants, consider organizing interns into teams working on collaborative projects.
- Maintain a centralized point of contact to help employers navigate different providers serving a common region.



Component 7 – Offering Alternatives to Internships and Job Placements

STRATEGY	EXAMPLE/S
Offer project-based programming supervised by a youth program provider.	<p>In Boston, when actual jobs or internships were not available, many youth participants developed a concept around a project to carry out with a team for their summer youth employment experience. Teams developed an end-product that aligned with their project to present at the end of the program. Some projects were supervised by employer hosts, some by community-based youth programs.</p>
Offer young people opportunity to take course/s.	<p>Boston Public Schools piloted college courses focused on social justice topics at community colleges. They used CARES Act funds to support paying young people to take college course with supplementary career exploration programming.</p> <p><i>“A lot of kids took a college course this summer who wouldn’t have had that opportunity otherwise. This was oversubscribed. We had more kids than we could serve with that track!”</i></p> <p>— Rashad Cope, Director of Department of Youth Engagement and Employment, City of Boston</p> <p>Detroit Employment Solutions Corporation engaged EDSI to adapt their industry-led training track to a virtual setting. Roughly 200 young people participated in occupational training focused on IT, manufacturing, healthcare, construction or customer service.</p> <p>In New Orleans, interns in a paid tech training track at Operation Spark earned certifications in JavaScript and HTML, while those in construction training at NOTEP earned entry-level NCCER credentials.</p>
Offer programming focused on career exploration and career readiness.	<p>Boston partners used the Signal Success curriculum and Career Hub, in addition to programming developed by CBOs, to offer career exploration and readiness workshops to complement other summer youth employment programming.</p> <p>Capital Workforce Partners’ Summer Youth Employment and Learning Program in Hartford, Conn. used CareerEdge to provide younger participants with a self-paced career exploration curriculum.</p> <p>YouthForce NOLA used Headed2 for industry awareness and career exposure.</p> <p>While platforms like those above, Naviance (used in Philadelphia) or Hats and Ladders (used in New York City) offer the benefit of scalability, young people caution against overreliance on online learning due to screen fatigue.</p> <p>Many programs noted it was much easier to schedule speakers from all over the world when operating in a virtual environment. This often meant more opportunities for young people to meet with professionals throughout the summer program. In Boston, “Lunch and Learn” blocks with career panels were a regularly scheduled part of the summer program, when in past years they typically only occurred a few times. In San Francisco, the Japanese Community Youth Council, lead agency for the Mayor’s Youth Employment and Education Program, found it much easier to offer multiple, smaller career exploration events online than past large-scale, in-person career days. This meant participants were able to learn about many more careers beyond their placements.</p>
Offer programming focused on life skills (e.g., social and emotional learning, financial literacy, web presence).	<p>John Hancock’s MLK Scholars program in Boston uses the interactive Everfi financial literacy program.</p> <p>Summer programs in Chicago and Newark turned to the LRNG platform for open source “playlists” covering career and personal development created by other youth employment and education programs.</p>

Additional Strategies to Consider:

- Online programming may make it possible for you to consider partnering with organizations beyond your community. Are there courses or programs elsewhere that you might partner with to offer participants additional options and the opportunity to meet and work with their peers in other communities?



Component 8 – Offering On-site Internships and Employment Opportunities During a Pandemic

STRATEGY	EXAMPLE / S
<p>Include additional requirements for health and safety in each work-site agreement (based on CDC and state guidelines), and conduct monitoring of work sites.</p>	<p>The Chamber of Commerce's Summer Youth Internship program in Flint and Genesee County, Mich. typically places about 350 young people in internships with about 22 agencies. Despite COVID-19, in Summer 2020 the Chamber was able to place 240 students in 19 agencies. To ensure the safety of participants, the program's director visited each work site prior to the start of the program and continued with visits throughout the summer. Work sites agreed to have strict COVID-19 safety protocols in place, and fewer students were placed at each worksite.</p>
<p>Carefully place participants into in-person positions related to COVID-19 response.</p>	<p>The countywide Youth Bridges program in Los Angeles, a pipeline for opportunity youth into public sector jobs, safely placed 30 young people into paid work experiences across 16 sites providing emergency food assistance.</p>
<p>Continue outdoor work experiences.</p>	<p>Boston's Blue Shirt program offered an in-person SYEP track where youth ages 15-18 performed beautification and maintenance of parks and other public outdoor spaces.</p> <p>The Del Norte and Adjacent Tribal Lands Food Council trained Food Forest interns on how to plant, harvest, cook, preserve, and sell healthy food.</p>



Component 9 – Responding to Crises in the Community

STRATEGY	EXAMPLE / S
<p>Remain nimble and keep the broader picture in mind to respond to participant (and staff) needs during a stressful time.</p>	<p>In Detroit, Connect Detroit and its partners consciously resisted focusing narrowly on SYEP goals, looking more broadly to build supports for the trauma, grief, and loss people were experiencing during this time. This included recognition of the effects of the pandemic, the economic downturn, and renewed calls for racial justice in response to the murder of George Floyd.</p> <p>Summer Youth Employment and Learning Program participants in Hartford, Conn. had access to online telehealth visits so young people could connect with a mental health provider if they were going through mental health struggles during the pandemic or processing trauma. In addition, participants had the opportunity to take part in discussions and workshops on topics such as navigating COVID-19 and social protest.</p> <p>SYEP leaders in Newark, N.J. repurposed funds to provide gift cards and to-go meals to address food insecurity.</p>
<p>Incorporate youth leadership into the community's response to crises.</p>	<p>In San Diego, Youth Will created a COVID-19 Action Team comprised of young people ages 15-25 advocating for their needs and the needs of the broader community during the pandemic. This led to the development of a county-sponsored Youth Emergency Resources Ambassadors Program, a youth sector within the County's Live Well San Diego initiative, and a partnership with the County to provide free menstrual products at food distribution sites, and work with the County to ensure incarcerated youth are safe during the pandemic. Based on the impact the initiative had in dispersing needed resources, youth advocated to make the Youth Ambassadors program permanent to ensure young people's continued access to local government resources.</p> <p>In May, 22 young people from South King County, Wash. collaborated with adult staff from Road Map Project partner to develop and distribute a Opportunity Youth Impacts of COVID-19 Survey. Over the summer and into the fall, youth engaged in internships to promote the research recommendations and support their implementation.</p>

Provide young people the opportunity to respond to their communities' needs related to the pandemic, economic downturn, and movement for racial justice.

When San Francisco first went under a stay at home order, staff of Bay Area Community Resources (BACR) were clear that they wanted to respond to COVID-19, not stop doing their work. They engaged Latinx youth in pandemic response internships involving delivery of food and PPE, testing, and outreach. The young people who participated experienced a huge sense of empowerment and responsibility to the community.

As part of the Department of Family and Support Services' One Summer Chicago initiative, the "Everyone Can Create" photography program for visually impaired young people allowed participants to create COVID-19-related public service announcements on wearing masks, social distancing, and what it's like for those with visual impairment to try to social distance. In addition, the City created the **Chicago Youth Service Corps**, a group of about 2000 young Chicagoans who engaged in activities to help their community during the pandemic. The Chicago Youth Service Corps was so successful over the summer that City is continuing the program into the fall, supported by funding from the CARES Act.

In Orlando, Fla., SYEP participants served as a "Clean Team" to increase the frequency and depth of cleaning of 17 neighborhood centers to meet strict CDC sanitation guidelines.

Additional Strategies to Consider:

- Consider if there is work a community in crisis needs that youth and young adults might be best poised to offer during the pandemic.

 **Component 10 – Making the Case for Summer Youth Employment Programming**

STRATEGY	EXAMPLE/S
<p>Use co-design as an advocacy strategy during crisis.</p>	<p>When Los Angeles went under a stay at home order, City and County funders of youth employment programming initially assumed summer youth employment programming could not take place. Opportunity Youth Collaborative partners made the case that youth employment programming could and should happen over the summer. Then they worked collectively to think differently and provide meaningful program options.</p> <p><i>“A narrative out there in New York City in April was that there is no way we can do SYEP remotely, so let’s cut it. The YES coalition focused on strong virtual program design to prove that we could create a high quality remote youth experience. That was a critical point of the advocacy.”</i></p> <p>— Lucy Herz, Student Success Network.</p> <p>The ability of stakeholders to coordinate quick adaptation to a crisis does not emerge in a vacuum. Preconditions of effective rapid response grounded in community voice are collaborative infrastructure and long-term relationships among local systems leaders, providers and youth advocates.</p>
<p>Partner with youth in media campaigns.</p>	<p>The coalition of youth activists at Teens Take Charge and adult advocates representing the SYEP provider community in New York City used social media and traditional formats like TV spots and press engagement to advocate for funding restoration.</p>
<p>Emphasize SYEP’s direct economic benefit.</p>	<p>Advocates in Los Angeles, New York, and elsewhere argued that it was imperative to make sure that young people had the opportunity not only to gain work experience, but to earn money. “Prioritize financial security and basic needs so youth and families can navigate the economic impacts of the pandemic,” was the second recommendation from the youth-led survey on COVID-19 response in King County, Wash. SYEP income was especially important since young people have been disproportionately impacted by pandemic-related job loss, and 10 million 17-24 year olds claimed as dependents were not eligible for CARES Act direct relief.⁵</p>



Component 11 – Postsecondary Bridging

STRATEGY	EXAMPLE/S
Focus interventions on needs specific to graduating 12th graders’ postsecondary plans.	ALL IN!, a postsecondary success coalition in Hartford, Conn. worked with systems leaders and providers through the Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative to coordinate services targeting 2020 graduates while planning how to adapt summer programs. They mapped students into six groups based on post-secondary plans and connection to existing college transition programs and focused on enhancing services for students planning to enroll in community college and ensuring FAFSA completion.
Build an SYEP track around credit-bearing college coursework.	Approximately 500 young people earned stipends for participating in remote courses at Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology, Bunker Hill Community College, Roxbury Community College, or Urban College of Boston through the Learn and Earn track of Boston’s SYEP, typically accruing 3-6 credits and developing familiarity with the college academic and procedural setting.
Connect SYEP to year-round learning experiences.	Programs where the summer work experience is one component of a series of progressive training elements that extend throughout the year are often able to embed more robust and individualized postsecondary planning. Such programs are often, but not always, connected to schools. Many boutique programs have a sectoral focus and supplemental private funding. Connecting SYEP to opportunities and curriculum throughout the year and across multiple summers can allow more deliberate sequencing of career exposure, exploration and readiness activities that inform interest-driven postsecondary plans and targeted transition support for recent graduates.

Additional Strategies to Consider:

- Segment high school graduates into specific cohorts where training and individual coaching can focus specifically on immediate postsecondary plans.
- Complement community-based programs open to out-of-school youth with school-based SYEP.
- Apply carefully tailored behavioral interventions like text-message campaigns to address summer melt. The [Nudge4 Solutions Lab](#) at the University of Virginia offers a guide to evidence-based behavioral strategies for college transition and success increasingly used by school districts and college access organizations, and the College Advising Corps’ [Virtual Advising Guide](#) offers practical strategies on effective remote communication.



Component 12 – Measurement and Evaluation

STRATEGY	EXAMPLE/S
Engage in research-practice partnerships.	The City of Boston has partnered with Northeastern University professor Alicia Modestino for years to study the effectiveness of their SYEP and improve program quality. This longstanding relationship, sustained with philanthropic support, meant that the research team could be play an active, hands-on role in prioritizing SYEP as part of the city’s overall COVID response. This included creating employer surveys to better understand the roiling labor market, using focused data points to generate timely policy memos and presentations to build policymaker buy-in, and working with systems leaders and practitioners on program redesign. Student Success Network and Telos Learning lead research and documentation for NYC’s Youth Empowerment Summer (YES) initiative, working to capture emerging program designs for remote and blended online settings as well as lessons for organizational learning and coordination from this initiative for the city’s SYEP and wider youth-serving ecosystem.
Measure skill development, including work-readiness and social and emotional learning.	The Northeastern researchers working with Boston use surveys to measure work readiness skills, social and emotional learning and academic aspiration. Similarly, Career Labs by Grads of Life, used in Hartford Conn., measures social-emotional attributes like confidence and growth mindset, communication, and professional skills like time management. YouthForceNOLA used eSkill to assess skills such as digital literacy.
Disaggregate data by race, gender, geography and other demographics.	Analyzing disaggregated data is essential to identifying equity gaps. Most programs track detailed demographic information and many are analyzing disparities in outcomes to develop strategies to tailor support to specific subpopulations and close these divides.

Additional Strategies to Consider:

- Measure the development of young people’s relationships: their networks and human capital. The [Christensen Institute](#) and [Search Institute](#) offer emerging frameworks for how to do so.

Calls to Action

Policymakers

- Provide stable funding and adequate resources for SYEP programs. Virtual experiences require additional supports and do not necessarily imply economies of scale.
- Align communication and coordination for summer youth employment programs with other related initiatives and funding. Summer jobs programs should be aligned with the local workforce system and part of comprehensive youth talent development strategies.

Employers

- Work with local workforce intermediaries and community-based organizations to co-design work experiences that add business value and offer meaningful learning. Short-term consulting projects with teams of youth can offer insight from a fresh perspective, especially into marketing and product design.
- For small businesses with limited HR staff to support interns, partner with local industry associations for support.

Philanthropy

- Support local intermediaries and collaborative approaches to focus on program design and quality improvement.
- Leverage private investment at the moment of public budget crises to rally advocates, practitioners and policymakers.
- Support documentation and research of emerging practices so the field can learn from innovations and replicate what works.

Funding SYEP

Local General Funds

Mayors are prominent champions of SYEP in many communities, and local funds support nearly 2/3 of programs we surveyed.⁶ While in some cases this is the sole revenue source, local funds are usually supplemented by private grants and/or employer contributions, or braided with the other public funding streams listed below. While local funding cuts contributed to the cancellation of 2020 SYEP in a few communities, most rallied around their programs even when reliant on local dollars. In Boston, the city added \$4.1 million to ensure a successful pivot and sustain opportunities for students when only half of the typically over 10,000 employer-paid internships were available as businesses focused on adjusting their operations.

Workforce Innovation Opportunities Act (WIOA)

With 20% of youth formula funds required to be spent on paid work experience, communities from Newark, N.J. to Santa Clara County, Calif. braid WIOA funds with local and state sources to support their SYEP. Few summer jobs programs are solely funded by WIOA, however, in part because 75% of youth formula funds must be spent on out-of-school young people, and high school students are often a majority of SYEP participants.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

Philadelphia Youth Network is an example of an organization that uses TANF public funding for its SYEP, along with funds allocated via the City of Philadelphia's Office of Children and Families (OCF), supplemented by employer contributions and private grants.

Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)

CDBG funds can be used to support SYEP if the program is aligned with a broader community development strategy. In West Palm Beach, Fla. the Building Bridges summer internship program administered by City Department of Housing and Community Development is part of an initiative to improve outcomes for Black boys and young men.

State General Funds

Communities including Boston, Houston, Syracuse, N.Y. and Detroit, leverage state general funds along with local and/or federal dollars for their SYEP.

CARES Act

In Chicago, where 2,000 young people participated in the new Chicago Youth Service Corps in summer 2020 thanks to private funds, the city is using the federal Coronavirus Relief Fund authorized by the CARES Act to continue this successful program into the fall for 450 youth, with an emphasis on young people who have experienced court-involvement, homelessness, or are English language learners.

Employer Contributions

Employer-paid internships and unsubsidized summer jobs were far less prevalent in 2020 as businesses reduced hours and closed locations.

Private Grant Funds

Depending on the local context, philanthropic investment can play one or more of the following roles in a community's SYEP: 1) Fill a gap when no publicly funded program exists; 2) Supplement public funds to enhance programming; 3) Support specific programs with unique sectoral or thematic foci that complement the public SYEP; 4) Support coordinating infrastructure among the youth-serving ecosystem; 5) Support research and evaluation.

Endnotes

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- 2 Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP). *#WhyWeCantWait - Youth Data Portrait 2020, Economic Justice*. <https://www.clasp.org/why-we-cant-wait-economic-justice>. Accessed October 2020.
- 3 See, for example, Jessica Conway-Pierce and Amanda Rosenblum. *The Early Impact of COVID-19 on Young Adult Workforce Development: Insights from the Field*. JobsFirstNYC, May, 2020. https://jobsfirstnyc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/JFNYC_Report_COVID-19Insights_200519.pdf and CLASP, October 2020.
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- 5 Megan Curran and Shopie Collyer. *Teenage and Young Adult Dependents Left Out of Cash Payments in the COVID-19 Crisis*. Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia University, May 2020. <https://www.povertycenter.columbia.edu/news-internal/coronavirus-young-adult-dependents-cares-act>.
- 6 AIFCS and the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) jointly conducted a national survey of SYEP local funders and program providers in October 2020 in partnership with the National Youth Employment Coalition, U.S. Conference of Mayors, and National League of Cities. Initial impressions from this survey inform this tool, while detailed results will be released in a forthcoming collaborative report.

