

MAY 2024

Recruiting Employer Partners for Summer Youth Employment Programs

Learning from the JP Morgan Chase & Co. Summer Youth Employment Program Evaluation

By Cassie Wuest and Ivonne Garcia

Summer youth employment programs (SYEPs) are a workforce development strategy used around the country to provide early work experiences to young people each year.¹ These programs partner with local employers to provide subsidized wages for young people between the ages of 14 and 24. The programs often include job-readiness training (which prepares young people to seek employment through, for example, help writing résumés or getting ready for interviews) and financial literacy training, as well as other forms of support. SYEPs provide first job experiences for many young people who participate.

Rigorous research examining whether summer jobs positively affect young people's longer-term employment and postsecondary outcomes is limited, but there is evidence that SYEPs improve more immediate outcomes. MDRC's lottery-based study of New York City's SYEP showed that the program had large effects on young people's employment and earnings during the summer for which they applied.² Other studies have shown that SYEPs have the potential to improve outcomes related to school engagement and youth development.³ More generally, research shows that early work experience can bolster long-term economic and academic outcomes and those related to social and emotional well-being.⁴ Additionally, having a job between ages 16 and 18 is associated with having a higher-quality job in adulthood.⁵

In 2022, JPMorgan Chase & Co. committed \$20 million over the course of five years to support SYEPs across the United States.⁶ In the first year thereafter, it awarded grants to 27 organizations that operate SYEPs across the country. The grantees include social service agencies, economic development agencies, and other types of organizations that focus on workforce development and youth development. JPMorgan Chase partnered with MDRC to conduct an evaluation to promote continual improvement among grantee organizations. MDRC conducted interviews with grantees, focused on grantees' program models and implementation, and collected data to gauge the programs' reach in terms of the number and demographics of young people they served, as well as the number and types of job placements they made.

The Critical Role of Employer Partnerships

For SYEPs, robust employer partnerships are essential for providing quality programs and helping young people connect to the workforce. Engaging employers across a wide range of industries and across the public, nonprofit, and for-profit sectors can help programs expose young people to various career pathways, allowing them to explore their interests. Employers are also critical partners in providing workplace opportunities where young people can learn the hard skills (that is, tangible skill sets that require technical knowledge, such as computer coding) and soft skills (that is, general habits and competencies that make for an effective employee, such as time management) they will need to succeed in the workforce and in life. Some SYEPs make a particular effort to engage employers in high-demand fields so they can prepare young people for competitive jobs in their local economy.

Strong SYEP-employer partnerships are especially important for Black, Latinx, and Native American young people and young people from low-income backgrounds, who experience significant barriers in gaining access to early work opportunities and who face the prospect of lower earnings over their lifetimes.⁷ Although most young people who participate in SYEPs attend school, many SYEPs also serve young people who are not engaged in school — commonly referred to as disconnected youth or opportunity youth. Research shows that employment is critical to reengaging this “disconnected” population. According to one study, two-thirds of disconnected young people ultimately reconnected with education or the labor market, with the majority reconnecting first through work.⁸ Although they are short-term programs, SYEPs and their employer partners can help disengaged young people reengage with the workforce.

To maximize the benefits of employer partnership, it is important for SYEP staff members to build deep relationships with employers that span years, rather than just focusing on work placements for young people while they are in the program. That way, SYEP staff members can help employers see partnerships as an opportunity to train their future labor force and not just a way of giving back to their community. In conversations conducted as part of MDRC’s evaluation of JPMorgan Chase’s grant program, grantee organizations said that they wished to improve their engagement with employers, particularly with for-profit employer partners in high-skill, high-demand industry sectors — and they also noted some important barriers to doing so. This brief highlights innovative strategies that some of these grant-supported programs use to recruit for-profit employers.

The Current Landscape of Employer Recruitment

JPMorgan Chase grantees work with a diverse group of employers to place young people in jobs. MDRC found that almost half of grantees’ employer partners (45 percent) were nonprofit or community-based organizations and an additional 17 percent were government agencies. For-profit organizations made up 35 percent of employer partners, though only 19 percent of young people worked at for-profit organizations, which suggests that each for-profit employer hosted fewer young people on average than each nonprofit organization or government agency. Notably, however, these findings largely reflect trends in large cities, where grantees worked most closely with nonprofit organizations. In smaller cities, the majority of employer partners were for-profit.

Young people worked in many different types of jobs, across industry sectors. Many (39 percent) worked as tutors or camp counselors, whereas 17 percent worked in office jobs and 12 percent worked in retail positions. The type of for-profit employers that young people worked for varied widely, from grocery stores and amusement parks to real estate and financial services. Grantees named many for-profit industry sectors where they struggle to recruit employer partners. These sectors include media, technology, financial services, and the health sciences, though they vary by grantee. Many grantees noted that their desire to partner with more for-profit organizations comes in response to young people's interest in these industries in particular. Taken together, these findings suggest that SYEP organizations face challenges in engaging employer partners in high-skill, high-demand industries that are aligned with young people's interests.

Findings from the interviews elucidated various reasons why grantees have difficulty recruiting such employers.

Attracting for-profit employers: Grantees most often cited a lack of interest as the main hurdle in recruiting for-profit employer partners, who do not necessarily see hiring young people as part of their mission. SYEP organizations have a hard time finding employer partners who are willing to commit to providing job opportunities for SYEP young people, especially those who are still in high school. Grantees also reported that many large, for-profit employers have existing internship programs that typically recruit from four-year colleges, and that they do not have the interest, job slots, or supervisory staff to take on additional SYEP interns.

Employer staffing and supervision challenges: Many employers do not have structures in place — for example, robust supervision programs — that would allow them to bring on SYEP young people. Staffing shortages at employers can lead to inadequate supervision for interns, which makes it harder for employers to participate in SYEPs. Similarly, high turnover at many employer partners has led to lower staff investment, as staff members who were familiar with SYEP programs and championed hosting SYEP interns have in many cases left their positions.

Inadequate resources to support outreach to employers: Grantees also face internal and logistical issues that prevent them from engaging with additional employer partners. Few grantees have the resources to support a dedicated employer-relations team, which can be crucial for cultivating trusting relationships with new employers. For-profit employers, especially, may not be as familiar with SYEPs as are nonprofit organizations or government agencies with a long history of providing job opportunities for participants in those programs.

Logistical complications in placing young people: Logistical complications related to placing young people in jobs also affect which potential employers SYEP organizations try to bring on. For example, many grantees reported that they try to place young people in jobs that are close to where they live, especially in cities that lack reliable public transportation. As such, grantees were not always able to engage with employers located in a downtown business district, because young people would have no way of getting to the job site. Other logistical problems include age restrictions on the type of work that young people can do (for example, in construction or health care), as well as extensive paperwork requirements that can be prohibitive for young people who may lack the necessary documentation.

Innovative Practices for Recruiting Employers

Despite the challenges that many SYEP organizations face in recruiting for-profit employers, some grantees have implemented innovative practices for engaging employers.

Providing potential partners with resources: Some grantees have created playbooks or resources with example projects that young people could work on over the course of a summer. Grantees share these resources with potential employer partners to demonstrate that taking on young people may not be as difficult as anticipated. [Youth Force NOLA](#), for example, created a series of playbooks for industries where young people may have internship opportunities, such as graphic design, business operations, and carpentry. Each playbook has a weekly breakdown with step-by-step information on how to structure the internship experience, including suggested tasks or activities, skills to target, and sample scripts that an employer can use to talk with young people about their performance and to address issues that may arise. The goal of these playbooks is to give supervisors as much information as possible to host an intern successfully.

Challenging assumptions about young people: Other grantees reported success in recruiting employers by challenging employers' assumptions about hiring marginalized, non-college-aged young people for summer work experiences. Employer education can take the form of sharing examples of how young people have contributed to businesses in the past, and of emphasizing that young people are independent and do not need constant supervision. [United Way of the Bay Area](#), for example, involves employer partners in conversations about the young people that it serves. Embedded in these conversations are frank discussions about recognizing bias when working with young people.

Drawing on existing partners' networks: Grantees have also found success in putting potential employer partners in touch with veteran employer partners who can provide a peer's perspective on working with young people. For example, [Broward County Public Schools](#) relies on "employer champions" who serve as peer-to-peer recruiters to help bring on additional businesses to its internship program. Employer champions often take a multipronged approach to recruitment, with strategies that range from informal conversations with other businesses in their network to formal recruitment efforts through the local chamber of commerce or economic development agencies.

Engaging employers outside of hosting interns: Other grantees have successfully engaged for-profit employers in a short-term or more limited capacity, beyond taking on paid interns. For example, [One Summer Chicago](#) works in partnership with Apple on the Everyone Can Code + Create program to celebrate young people's ingenuity and determination in learning cutting-edge technologies in the fields of coding, augmented reality, gaming, and video storytelling. Other organizations, such as [Eight Million Stories](#) and [Baltimore Civic Fund](#), partner with JPMorgan Chase to provide young people with mentors who meet with them regularly to help them think about post-secondary and career pathways. This short-term engagement strategy can be especially effective if employers are short on time or otherwise unwilling to commit to offering paid internships.

Some grantees engage with employers outside of hosting interns as a way to build young people's skills in preparation for future internships, as well as for college and career. [ExpandED Schools](#)

engages employers on “workplace challenges” that target high school students. The goal of a workplace challenge is to provide young people with an opportunity to develop skills in collaboration and communication, to prepare them for jobs, college, or both. Partner employers visit the program to introduce the workplace challenge, and young people are asked to work in groups as consultants on projects. Employers check in with the young people every other week through the duration of the six-week program and attend their final presentations. Workplace challenges, and other opportunities for young people to gain exposure to an industry while building some foundational skills, may serve as a stepping stone for greater employer engagement in the future, as employers gain familiarity with SYEPs and the young people they serve.

In Summary

JPMorgan Chase grantees highlighted obstacles to building strong and sustainable partnerships with for-profit employers, as well as solutions for addressing these obstacles. Employer education is a promising approach for SYEPs to engage employer partners. By providing resources and information to employers that help them host young people successfully, grantees can make it easier for employers to engage. This approach may also help grantees increase partnerships with for-profit employers in high-wage, high-demand industries, which grantees have identified as a challenge and an area where they wish to do more.

SYEP organizations have also found success in involving employers in more limited but still valuable partnerships, such as by providing mentors, and by participating in “workplace challenge” activities. Employers can partner with SYEPs at different levels of involvement and through a range of opportunities.

SYEPs help young people become more employable and employers are essential to the process. Early work opportunities can be foundational experiences that help young people enter the world of work, explore career interests, and build soft skills that are valued in the workplace. By strengthening employer engagement using some of the approaches presented in this brief along with other strategies, SYEPs can better serve young people and connect them to career pathways.

Notes and References

- 1 New York City Department of Youth and Community Development, “2023 Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) Application: DYCD Youth Employment Programs” (website: <https://application.nycsyep.com/>, 2023)
- 2 Erin J. Valentine, Chloe A. Golub, Farhana Hossain, and Rebecca Unterman, *An Introduction to the World of Work: A Study of the Implementation and Impacts of New York City’s Summer Youth Employment Program* (New York: MDRC, 2017).
- 3 Alicia Sasser Modestino and Richard Paulsen, “School’s Out: How Summer Youth Employment Programs Impact Academic Outcomes,” *Education Finance and Policy* 18, 1 (2023): 97–126; Alicia Sasser, “How Do Summer Youth Employment Programs Improve Criminal Justice Outcomes, and for Whom?” *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 38, 3 (2019): 600–628.
- 4 Davin Fein and Jill Hamadyk, *Bridging the Opportunity Divide for Low-Income Youth: Implementation and Early Impacts of the Year Up Program* (Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018); Jacob Leos-Urbel, “What Is a Summer Job Worth? The Impact of Summer Youth Employment on Academic Outcomes,” *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 33, 4 (2014): 891–911; Alyssa Modestino, *How Can Summer Jobs Reduce Crime Among Youth?* (Washington, DC: Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program, 2017).
- 5 Martha Ross, Kristin A. Moore, Kelly Murphy, Nicole Bateman, Alex DeMand, and Vanessa Sacks, *Pathways to High-Quality Jobs for Young Adults* (Bethesda, MD: Child Trends, 2018).
- 6 J.P. Morgan Chase & Co., “JPMorgan Chase Commits \$20 Million to Support Summer Youth Employment Programs Across the United States,” press release (May 19) (<https://www.jpmorganchase.com/news-stories/jpmc-commits-20mil-to-support-summer-youth-employment>, 2022).
- 7 Martha Ross, Richard Kazis, Nicole Bateman, and Laura Stateler, *Work-Based Learning Can Advance Equity and Opportunity for America’s Young People* (Washington, DC: Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program, 2020). The U.S. Office of Management and Budget defines “Hispanic/Latino” as any person of “Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin.” See U.S. Census Bureau, “Why We Ask Questions About... Hispanic or Latino Origin” (website: <https://www.census.gov/acs/www/about/why-we-ask-each-question/ethnicity/>, n.d., accessed on August 28, 2023). In recent years, some research publications and other sources have started using “Latinx” as a gender-neutral reference to this population. See Andrew H. Nichols, *A Look at Latino Student Success: Identifying Top- and Bottom-Performing Institutions* (Washington, DC: The Education Trust, 2017).
- 8 Elizabeth C. Hair, Kristin A. Moore, Thomson J. Ling, Cameron McPhee-Baker, and Brett V. Brown, *Youth Who Are “Disconnected” and Those Who Then Reconnect: Assessing the Influence of Family, Programs, Peers and Communities* (Bethesda, MD: Child Trends, 2009); Louisa Treskon, *What Works for Disconnected Young People* (New York: MDRC, 2016).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to thank several JPMorgan Chase & Co. staff members for their thoughtful contributions to the preparation of this brief, including Laura Mutis and Matthew Muench. We thank MDRC colleagues Dan Bloom and John Martinez, who reviewed and provided valuable comments; Bryce Marshall, who assisted with fact-checking; and Joshua Malbin, who edited this brief. We also recognize several JPMorgan Chase & Co. Summer Youth Employment Program team members whose work contributed to this brief: Sarah Salimi, Mei Huang, and Alexandra Bernardi. Finally, we express deep gratitude to the summer youth employment program administrators and practitioners who participated in the project and allowed us to learn from their knowledge and experiences.

Dissemination of MDRC publications is supported by the following organizations and individuals that help finance MDRC's public policy outreach and expanding efforts to communicate the results and implications of our work to policymakers, practitioners, and others: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Arnold Ventures, Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation, The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, Ford Foundation, The George Gund Foundation, Daniel and Corinne Goldman, The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, Inc., The JPB Foundation, The Joyce Foundation, The Kresge Foundation, and Sandler Foundation.

In addition, earnings from the MDRC Endowment help sustain our dissemination efforts. Contributors to the MDRC Endowment include Alcoa Foundation, The Ambrose Monell Foundation, Anheuser-Busch Foundation, Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Ford Foundation, The George Gund Foundation, The Grable Foundation, The Elizabeth and Frank Newman Charitable Foundation, The New York Times Company Foundation, Jan Nicholson, Paul H. O'Neill Charitable Foundation, John S. Reed, Sandler Foundation, and The Stupski Family Fund, as well as other individual contributors.

The findings and conclusions in this report do not necessarily represent the official positions or policies of the funders.

For information about MDRC and copies of our publications, see our website: www.mdrc.org.

Copyright © 2024 by MDRC®. All rights reserved.

NEW YORK
200 Vesey Street, 23rd Fl., New York, NY 10281
Tel: 212 532 3200

OAKLAND
475 14th Street, Suite 750, Oakland, CA 94612
Tel: 510 663 6372

WASHINGTON, DC
750 17th Street, NW, Suite 501
Washington, DC 20006

LOS ANGELES
11965 Venice Boulevard, Suite 402
Los Angeles, CA 90066

