



Expanding NYC Youth Opportunities

Developed by Teen Interns of the NYC Work-
Based Learning Coalition in partnership with
Teens Take Charge
Fall 2022

TEENS
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CHARGE

NYC WORK-BASED
LEARNING
COALITION

Executive Summary

WHO WE ARE:

We are a group of 19 young people, ages 17 to 23, from New York City who are passionate about Work Based Learning. From February to June of 2022 we participated in a Work Based Learning (WBL) internship and have identified priorities to improve and expand opportunities for NYC youth. We believe that all young people deserve access to high-quality work-based learning opportunities.



We believe that all young people should graduate high school with a better understanding of the many work opportunities available to them. All students should have equitable access to these opportunities from their schools and the city. We know this can be accomplished by:

- **Creating youth-friendly platforms and equitable communication processes**
- **Ensuring culturally responsive, sustaining, and inclusive WBL opportunities for ALL**
- **Including youth in all stages of WBL planning and implementation**

In the following document, we outline ways to make WBL more equitable, culturally responsive, sustaining, inclusive, and youth-driven.

FOCUS #1

Equitable Access to WBL opportunities - Create youth-friendly platforms and equitable communication processes

Collect demographic data to measure equity of access to WBL opportunities

Problem:

We know that not everyone has access to WBL opportunities, but there is no clear data on who is missing out on opportunities. This prevents the DYCD (Department of Youth and Community Development) and the DOE (Department of Education) from doing targeted outreach to underrepresented students and advocacy groups from accessing information that would allow them to ensure every young person has the chance to participate in WBL opportunities.

Solution:

The DYCD should work with the DOE to track and publish data on which schools and demographic groups are participating in WBL opportunities. This data should be used to make sure that all young people, especially the most marginalized, receive access to WBL opportunities.

Maintain and share a citywide WBL list

“When HERE to HERE sent out a newsletter every week to my school more students were able to participate in more work-based learning opportunities due to the newsletter being easy to read and accessible. There was no login or password access, it just appeared on our emails every Thursday.”

Samra Moosa,
Bronx Center for Science and Mathematics, Class of 2022

Problem:

Students rely on school communities and outside relationships to find and apply for summer opportunities. This inevitably results in massive disparities; young people coming from well-resourced schools (generally disproportionately wealthy and white) have more access to opportunities than young people from under-resourced schools.

Solution:

Create and share a citywide WBL list allowing young people, families, and community members to access and apply to WBL opportunities. Doing so will attract young people with the most interest and allow them to have wider access to more opportunities. Furthermore, it is important to set a standard of prioritization for more marginalized schools and communities.

Create an accessible website that matches students with WBL opportunities

Problem:

Despite collecting data through the SYEP application, the Hats and Ladders program, and schools, there is no formal way for students to be paired with appropriate WBL opportunities. The diversity of professional fields and opportunities available to the city's young people are vast; it is important that there is a way to match students to access programs that truly meet their needs. This makes the program meaningful and intimate.

Solution:

Create an accessible website that matches students with their identified interests. The website could have a short, personality quiz-like questionnaire to determine students' interests. Prospective youth should be able to know the multiple jobs available to them; there should be a section in the program application that lets the individual know of their options and have a chance to pick their top five. Young people should be involved in the design and implementation of the website to make sure it is accessible and youth-friendly.

FOCUS #2

Universal WBL - Culturally responsive, sustaining, and inclusive WBL opportunities for ALL

WBL should be universal for all NYC youth. Universal WBL means every student who signs up is guaranteed a slot, regardless of documentation status.

Create a multilingual, accessible SYEP application

“As a soon to be senior high school student, I wanted to work during summer so I applied to SYEP. Due to Covid delays, I only have my social security card and not my resident green card. I wanted to give SYEP a try so I could help my mom pay the bills. I sent the application and got accepted, but around 2 weeks later, I received a text saying that I had to send some other documents. Every document I sent was accepted except the one where I have to send the work authorization.

I sent a message to ask what the options were, so that I could prove it. They answered: ‘for work authorization you need a United States passport or alien registration card.’ I asked what if I don’t have any of those options, when they said ‘I’m sorry we can’t enroll you unless you have one of those.’ I was feeling sad, SYEP was the only summer plan that I had. I even neglected other options because I really thought I was going to be in SYEP. But due to the fact that I don’t have a green card I won’t be able to have opportunities like others. Now I have to find other jobs and make new summer plans.”

Nadilka (Veronica) Hernandez,
International High School for Health Science,
Expected to graduate 2023

Problem:

SYEP applications are tedious, unnecessarily long, and not available in languages spoken by so many NYC families. This reduces the number of applications and participation from those without stable internet access, learning English as a second language, or simply the majority of young people who live busy and unpredictable lives. These barriers keep young people, like Veronica, and those who could most benefit from paid work experience, from applying for and participating in SYEP and other paid WBL opportunities.

Solution:

The DYCD (Department of Youth and Community Development) must work with providers and young people to streamline the application process so that it can be completed in one sitting (at a public library or coffee shop, for example). The application must at least be translated into NYC's most spoken languages: Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Creole, Korean and Bengali, but should be expanded to every language needed by a young person and their family. Ideally, this translation could be done by a young person involved in and paid for the development of WBL programming.

Offer culturally responsive and relevant WBL programming

Problem:

Many families are not aware of WBL opportunities and their benefits, and many may be fearful of their child participating in an activity outside of school. Furthermore, there are limited support systems and accommodations for individuals with disabilities, immigrant families, families who speak English as a second language, and youth experiencing homelessness.

Solution:

DYCD and DOE representatives should offer regular workshops for families explaining what WBL is and how it can help students expand their skills through participating in work-based learning opportunities. DYCD and the DOE should work with all schools, not just a select few, to help students fill out SYEP applications and officials should be in constant communication with school staff and families to encourage more youth to sign up. The DYCD should also expand the number of worksites, including remote options, so young people can stay in their communities. Efforts should especially be made to recruit locally owned worksites that are representative of students' neighborhoods. DYCD and the DOE must also train worksites so that they know how to support students from diverse backgrounds with different needs. Finally, transportation costs, as well as breakfast and lunch, should be covered for those participating in SYEP.

Ensure equitable pay for everyone

“As a high school student who resides in NYC, I am protected from receiving unfair wages and any work opportunities from interfering with school and my school work. I am able to make 15 dollars per hour and still be able to have the time I need for school. However, students who are undocumented can’t apply to the same WBL opportunities, like SYEP, in NYC that I can. Instead, they have to work other jobs that pay them in cash, which could result in the following: employees dishonestly withholding their payroll taxes, being paid less than the federal minimum wage for their labor and hours, and be at risk for losing their job if they don’t comply with the set terms and conditions that might be exploitative by nature to make less money and work more hours than students who have citizenship. Why should they be treated differently? WBL opportunities should extend an arm for undocumented students to apply and receive payment because they deserve a healthy work environment as they pursue their education.”

Samra Moosa,
Bronx Center for Science and Mathematics 2022

Problem:

Thousands of young people are excluded from paid WBL opportunities, including SYEP, due to lack of documentation. Citizenship should not be a requirement for WBL as it excludes students who have just as much a right to participate in paid opportunities as any other NYC student.

Solution:

Undocumented youth must be allowed to participate in paid WBL opportunities and need to be paid fairly. If it is not possible to pay undocumented youth the same amount as those with documentation, DYCD must find other ways to compensate participants, such as scholarships, gift cards, technology, etc.

Fully fund and expand the Summer Youth Employment Program

Problem:

On April 6, 2020, the city announced that it would eliminate the Summer Youth Employment Program, a \$164 Million program that provides jobs to 75,000 young people. Since then, we have fought and restored the majority of the jobs. This year, the Mayor announced that SYEP would be guaranteed for 100,000 young people. However, the demand for summer jobs is far greater than the current availability: an average of 180,000 young people apply each year. Given the financial strain on hundreds of thousands of New York City young people and families, we should be expanding paid summer opportunities in a sustainable way, year after year.

Solution:

The DYCD (Department of Youth and Community Development), alongside young people, must work to create a long-term plan to increase WBL opportunities without sacrificing quality. In addition to summer internships, WBL opportunities should be offered year-long through different employers looking for interns. The Mayor and City Council must actively include SYEP in the budget for the upcoming fiscal year so that DYCD and providers have the resources needed to expand the program and its benefits to the greatest number of NYC's young people. The lottery method should be renounced, as we demand an SYEP slot for every young person who applies. WBL needs to expand to guarantee a paid summer internship for all NYC students.



FOCUS #3

Create paid, year-long WBL internships for youth to develop, implement, and evaluate their WBL experiences

Create a multilingual, accessible SYEP application

“The youth know what is best for the youth. We are the ones attending school every day, going home doing hours of homework and at the same time trying to make a difference in the world with our voice. We closely understand what types of constructs work best for us, rather than officials understanding it for us. What we also comprehend is that we need guidance, but not to the point of dominance.”

**- Mariam Mtchedlishvili,
LaGuardia High School, Class of 2023**

Problem:

Across the city, politicians, providers, and advocates regularly list off the benefits of young people being involved in WBL experiences, yet very few city agencies work to create these experiences. This seems hypocritical, but also presents a simple and impactful fix: paid, year-long internships. Not only do paid year-long internships and WBL experiences give youth an opportunity to experience what the professional world is like (insight on having a job, dealing with finances and more), it puts them at the forefront of decisions that impact their own futures, giving them a voice in what they learn and how they learn it best.

Solution:

DYCD and the DOE should create year long, paid internships to mentor, teach, and foster a passion for public service for young people. Not only would this provide invaluable skills for participants, but it would improve the programs themselves as the interns would better understand how to craft a meaningful internship from the point of view of the participants. Moving forward, the DYCD, in particular, should encourage and support other government agencies to also build their own paid internships where students are active participants in their own futures.

Ask for feedback about young people's WBL experiences and suggestions to improve program quality

"The DOE has been sending out text reminders to high school seniors, trying to keep them on track with post-high school plans. In theory this was a great idea—teenagers check their texts far more often than email. However, random texts filled with emojis and random links looked like spam, and most high school students ignored the text. This is one example of the youth knowing what's best for the youth."

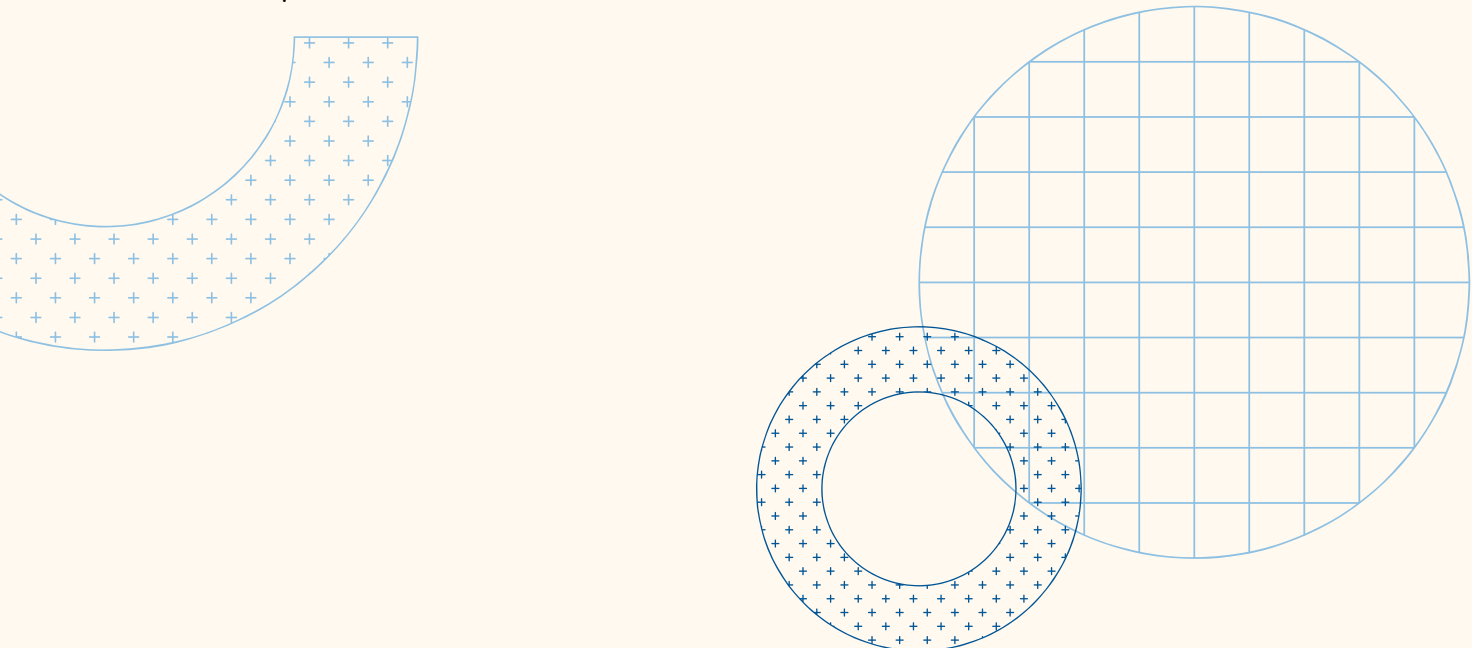
Kai-Lin Kwek-Rupp,
Bard High School Early College Manhattan, Class of 2022

Problem:

While year-long, DYCD-sponsored internships are one way to get feedback from youth participants, it is critical that every young person has the ability to provide feedback and suggestions on their WBL experiences.

Solution:

Create a simple, short, and accessible form to fill out after every WBL experience. Youth DYCD interns can help use this feedback to improve programming, communication, and policies to make sure that the DOE and the DYCD are providing impactful and meaningful WBL experiences.



CONCLUSION

The DOE serves over 1.2 million students from different backgrounds, but there are many discrepancies in WBL opportunities between schools and districts. These inequalities only increase over time, resulting in wide opportunity gaps and a lack of career options for the most marginalized students by the time they graduate from high school. The lack of work-based learning opportunities only leads to lost potential and further harm to potential economic, social, and political growth in NYC.

By making WBL more equitable, culturally responsive, sustaining, inclusive, and youth-driven, it is possible to empower all young people. This is especially necessary for those graduating from high school as they need a better understanding of the work opportunities available to them. This is only possible by ensuring equitable access to WBL opportunities, creating youth-friendly platforms and equitable communication processes, and facilitating universal WBL. Additionally, youth should be included in all stages of WBL planning, implementation, and feedback about young people's WBL experiences to ensure improvement.

Ultimately, WBL should be by the youth, for the youth. Your help will empower all young people graduating high school with a better understanding of how to find the right path to their success.



The New York City Work-Based Learning Coalition comprises non-profits, educational institutions, young people, practitioners, advocates, families, employers, and thought leaders committed to increasing equity, quality, and access to work-based learning opportunities for New York City's youth.

We aim to better prepare all young New Yorkers for career success and economic security in a rapidly changing economy/labor market. The work of the WBL Coalition is to discover, support, and implement advocacy efforts in coordination with young people, schools, nonprofit organizations, and NYC and NYS agencies.

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