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SPOTLIGHT ON LOCAL WORKFORCE INNOVATIONS

Reengineering a Traditional Workforce Program during COVID-19

Welcome to the next generation of the City of Charlotte's Mayor's Youth Employment Program (MYEP). For over 34 years, MYEP has provided Charlotte youth with opportunities to explore the world of work, build social capital, and enhance economic mobility. The program focuses on leveraging relationships with businesses and the community to provide meaningful, career-oriented work experiences for participants.

Since 1986, MYEP has built partnerships with host employers in the private, public, and non-profit sectors of Charlotte's economy who can provide one-of-a-kind career experiences for MYEP participants. Businesses provide career experiences that help youth develop career goals, stay in school, achieve academically, and enhance social skills that enable them to succeed in life. Students connect to the world of work, while businesses and communities get to know the needs and successes of the students and local schools.

MYEP participants are motivated, high-school-age youth seeking career exploration or employment opportunities. Participants include youth associated with various community partners, charter schools, home schools, e-learning, and others. Typically, MYEP participants commit to six weeks of in-person work, from June through August. However, due to COVID-19, in-person internships were no longer a viable option in 2020. MYEP needed to find new opportunities for over 300 youth who were at risk of losing their internships this summer. In Charlotte and around the country, youth depend on programs like MYEP to earn a wage and obtain valuable entry-level work experience.

In April, MYEP began to be reimagined as a virtual career readiness program in partnership with Radius Learning Group, which expands work-based education pathways with various Fortune 500 firms and academic institutions. Together, the Radius team and MYEP began to develop new virtual pathways across Charlotte's major sectors. Additional partners included Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) and LinkedIn Learning.

CMS provided 20 teachers to serve as virtual guides for participating youth, and LinkedIn Learning provided access to a content library of more than 5,000 courses.

► Building Pathways to Simulate the Jobs of the Future

The Radius team worked with guidance from employers to develop virtual pathways aligned with local industries. Charlotte employers shared learning and development content and information on their skills profiles, which Radius then incorporated into a five-week pathway experience for MYEP participants. Each pathway was aligned with an overall project related to a real-world challenge in the community. Pathways consisted of:

- Skills development provided in partnership with Radius Learning and LinkedIn Learning.
- Work-based learning to expose participants to the tasks they will face in future roles.
- Coaching sessions with team leaders from Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools.
- Industry interactive sessions with representatives from local employers.
- Life skills sessions focused on developing confidence and professional habits.



PROGRAM REVIEW

Launching a Virtual Workforce Ecosystem of 300

On Monday, July 6, 2020, more than 300 youth across Charlotte logged on to begin their journey into the future of work. Throughout the five-week pathway experience, each participant went through a comprehensive virtual program designed to prepare them with skills, provide them with social capital, and help them discover their talents. Despite COVID-19 MYEP managed to maintain 88 traditional (in-person) internships with local businesses, determined to give youth a safe and secure opportunity. Participants' assignments both virtually and in-person consisted of the following:

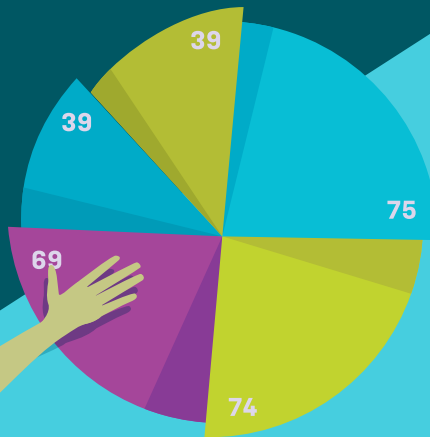
- 75 youth developed new financial technologies with Bank of America.
- 39 youth worked to reimagine the city's infrastructure with Siemens.
- 69 youth worked to expand healthcare access with Atrium.
- 39 youth developed sustainable innovations with Sealed Air.
- 74 youth designed platforms to support small businesses with Accenture.

MYEP Virtual Pathways is now on the forefront of workforce development in the region, providing youth with an increased chance at finding an entry point to a meaningful career and a fulfilling life.

Expanding Pathways to Opportunity

MYEP is one of the few summer youth employment programs across the nation that has managed to adapt to the changing conditions of the pandemic. The biggest challenge for MYEP during the pandemic has been to ensure equitable access to technology for participants. CMS and the City of Charlotte's Housing and Neighborhood Services have been critical partners in providing laptops and hotspots to participants. Moving forward, the partners recognize that the need for virtual workforce education is accelerating and increasing in intensity. The MYEP team is already looking towards expanding the virtual experience in 2021 and beyond. The program is committed to adapting to the needs of youth and continuing to serve as a leader in the local workforce ecosystem.

As we move forward through these uncertain times, pathways from education to employment should be redesigned to meet the needs of our workforce. MYEP Virtual Pathways is an early example of what it can look like to rapidly modernize workforce solutions at the local level.



► About the Series

Brought to you by the NCWorks Commission, the Spotlight on Local Workforce Innovations series showcases local innovations in collaborative, employer-led workforce development partnerships across our state. The series will highlight promising practices that can be replicated across North Carolina.

The NCWorks Commission is the state's Workforce Development Board. Led by a private sector chair, the 33-member, Governor-appointed commission includes representatives from the business community, heads of state workforce agencies, educators, and community leaders.

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