



Job Readiness Skills for **Youth**



A Clear and Actionable Definition

May 2018

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Executive Summary

Early youth employment experiences are critical to preparing young people to access living-wage careers in the Seattle area when they finish their education. Both employers and youth-serving providers want to know that young people are prepared when they enter these first jobs or internships, and while most people have a general understanding that “soft skills” are critical to preparation, there has been little consensus on which soft skills are most important, and how to talk about them.

Essential Skills for Job Preparation

After research and analysis from other cities, conversations with youth-serving providers in Seattle and King County, and interviews with current and former employers and hiring managers, we find the most important skills for job preparation are:

1

Time management + punctuality

moving from simply showing up at the right time and place to the ability to meet deadlines and demonstrate respect for co-workers' time

2

Professional orientation

including appearance, attire, attitude, demeanor, and the ability to think about how early-career jobs fit into a career trajectory

3

Having a team work ethic

including leadership abilities, being helpful to others, and recognizing and valuing others' contributions

4

Verbal communication

including the ability to ask questions and be proactive about work tasks and responsibilities ahead. Importantly, verbal communication is commonly misconceived as having the definition of "articulateness" or "being articulate," but "being articulate" is not correlated with high performance when measured in performance reviews.

5

Problem-solving

including the ability to break problems down into smaller pieces as well as critical thinking and decision-making skills

We also found that there is not a single baseline within each of these skills for when a young person is job-ready or not. Borrowing from best practices in research and other cities, we developed three tiers of jobs and job-readiness criteria that were then endorsed by both youth-serving providers and employers. These categories are:



Tier 1

Career development, frequently group-based with express learning outcomes



Tier 2

Independent but highly supervised



Tier 3

Professional, where work products are expected to contribute meaningfully to the work of the department

In talking with employers and young people in focus groups, we learned that while many people focus their career preparation on helping youth build resumes, develop interviewing skills, and manage finances, **these activities do little to help young people be successful in a job**. We recommend that youth-serving providers assess their programming to understand how much time is spent on career awareness or financial management vs. building job readiness skills. We are not necessarily suggesting a shift away from career awareness or financial management, which are also important, rather we want programs to accurately portray what they are aiming to teach and add or adjust programming if necessary.

There was also consensus that a necessary component of a strong youth readiness system includes a requirement that hiring managers and youth supervisors attend training as well, so they can be sure to hire for skills that are appropriate to the tier of job they are offering. Additionally, such training helps to ensure that employers hire and support in a way that is cognizant of and attempts to transcend their implicit biases, and that youth have the best experience possible in each job or internship.



Introduction

The City of Seattle, King County, and the Seattle Region Partnership—the partners—along with other organizations in the region have identified that early youth employment experiences are critical to preparing young people to access living-wage careers in the Seattle area when they finish their education. The partners are exploring ways to increase the number and quality of early work experiences, and they know that preparation is critical for both young people and employers to have a positive experience. This report will dive into the skills and behaviors that young people need to be prepared for early work experiences. It will include information about how other major cities support this preparation, how youth-serving providers in the Seattle region work with young people to help them gain these skills, and recommendations for how the partners can ensure the quality of both youth preparation and the jobs and internships themselves.

There is an undeniable consensus among researchers, service providers, and employers that soft skills are far more important for success in a first job or internship than any particular technical skill, regardless of the job. Several employers said, “if they can show up on time and be ready to learn, I can teach them what they need to know to get the job done.” And while arriving on time is a clear and measurable skill, many of the other soft skills do not have clear definitions and degrees of competence that are commonly accepted as the “expected” skill level for a first-time employee. This report will provide both detailed definitions for the soft skills that we believe are most important for success in a first job or internship, as well as competence descriptors. These definitions and descriptors are intended to be clear and useful to employers, program providers, and youth themselves, so our region can begin to align our language and our expectations.

For this report, we will be using the terms “job” and “internship” interchangeably to refer to any work-based experience lasting more than 20 hours in duration and intended as a first-time or early work experience for a young person. We will also discuss the components necessary to make these experiences meaningful for youth. We are also using the term “youth” to generally encompass people ages 14-26 who have not completed a postsecondary degree. This includes people ages 14-21 who are still in school, youth up

Similar to career awareness skills, we feel that financial awareness is an important life skill but not one that directly determines how successful a person is likely to be in a first job or internship.

to age 24 who had interrupted schooling and are getting back on track, and people up to age 26 who may have experienced challenges with homelessness, drug use, incarceration, or unsupported mental illness and who have found support to reconnect with work and education in their mid-20s.

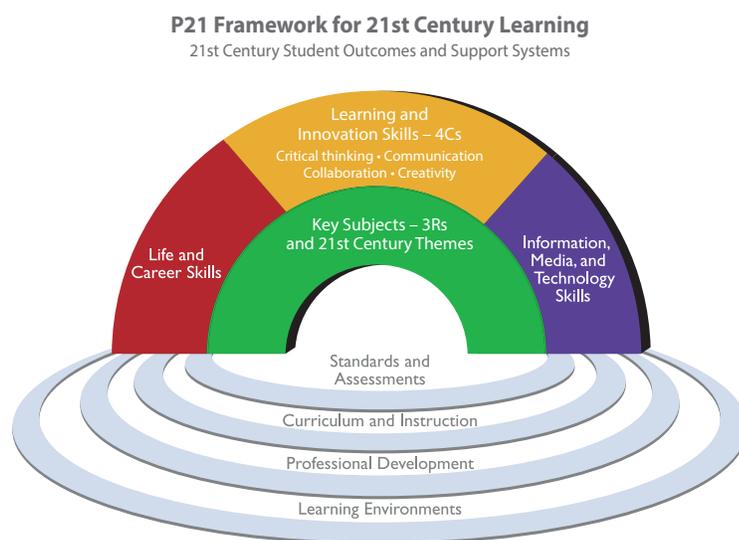
When talking with providers about the skills they seek to impart through their programs, many include skills and activities related to **career awareness**, such as resume writing, career interest development, and outreach to prospective employers. Although these activities help students build their writing, speaking, and analytical skills, we do not consider them to be job readiness skills. For example, having a resume serves as a demonstration of writing ability and critical thinking skills and is necessary to access many internship opportunities, but the act of creating a resume does not mean a person is job-ready. Further, the skills required to develop a resume are not universally high on the list of readiness skills that employers told us are necessary for success. Similarly, most of the robust citywide programs that we studied in our nationwide scan provide some **financial management training** to youth in their program, either directly or via an online learning platform. Similar to career awareness skills, we feel that financial awareness is an important life skill but not one that directly determines how successful a person is likely to be in a first job or internship. One employer told me, “just because you have a fancy resume or a bank account doesn’t mean you’re capable of doing this job.”



Soft Skills Matter

Since the 1970s, there has been a general use and understanding of the term “soft skills” to represent non-technical, non-job-specific traits, attributes and skills that are necessary for a person to be a productive employee. Despite being acknowledged as essential skills, they were frequently deemed less important than “hard” skills which were applied, technical, and/or job- or task-specific. In the 1990s and 2000s, academics and labor-force policymakers made a push for specificity in the soft skills as a means to bring more legitimacy to them and elevate their importance among hiring managers and supervisors.

The most visible of these efforts include the federal Department of Labor's Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS), released in 1991, and the founding of the Partnership for 21st Century Skills in 2002 (now the Partnership for 21st Century Learning, P21). These sets of skills remain critically important for preparing youth and adults for the workplace and provide a critical backbone for the skills we are recommending in this report (see page 9). However, at the category level, which is the level that most people discuss, they are too generic to be definitive for youth-serving initiatives, so we will use them as a guide but ultimately provide more specificity.



© 2007 Partnership for 21st Century Learning (P21)
www.P21.org/Framework

In the world of K-12 education, there is a great deal of focus right now on “noncognitive” skills, so-called because some people believe they are traits or skills that people have and exhibit but do not always think about as they are being demonstrated. Carol Dweck’s book “Mindset, the New Psychology of Success”¹ finds that when people believe they can learn new things, they work harder. On the flipside, when people believe that intelligence is a fixed trait (“you are either smart or you’re not”), they lack persistence and motivation for hard work because they don’t want to be seen as not living up to other people’s perceptions of them. As such, schools and organizations are now focused on helping young people understand that intelligence and ability are not fixed traits and can be increased through hard work and effort. Follow-up work by Angela Duckworth² and Paul Tough³ explore these soft skills in more detail and build out their connections to success in school and work. In addition to persistence and tenacity, other noncognitive skills include the ability to break big problems into smaller tasks, ability to form supportive relationships with adults, having a future orientation or “preference for long-term goals,” having a realistic self-appraisal and having a leadership experience in one’s community to draw on.⁴ In general, educators are once again talking about how soft skills are connected to traditional student achievement measures and need to have more focus to see greater gains in reading, math, and high school graduation.

Locally, the Seattle Jobs Initiative issued a report in 2013 that focused on the critical importance of soft skills in the entry-level workplace.⁵ Most of the youth programs that we talked to in the Seattle area focus their

¹ Dweck, Carol S. *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. New York: Random House, 2006.

² Duckworth, Angela. *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*. New York: Scribner, 2016

³ Tough, Paul. *How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012.

⁴ For more, we recommend any of the papers or books by Dr. William Sedlacek, sometimes referred to as “the father of noncognitive variables.” <http://williamsedlacek.info/publications.html>

⁵ Pritchard, J. (2013) “The Importance of Soft Skills in Entry-Level Employment and Postsecondary Success: Perspectives from Employers and Community Colleges.” Retrieved from: seattlejobsinitiative.com/wp-content/uploads/SJI_SoftSkillsReport_vFINAL_1.17.13.pdf

career readiness programming on many of these same soft skills. Some programs, like FareStart's barista training program and stadium employment programs supported by YouthForce and Juma Ventures include technical skills in sales, customer service, and coffee making, but those are supplemental to their focus

Schools and organizations are now focused on helping young people understand that intelligence and ability are not a fixed traits and can be increased through hard work and effort.

on the soft skills. We pulled heavily from these local programs due to their well-developed curriculum standards. We also learned a lot from other youth employment providers listed in Appendix B.

Lastly, we drew on a couple of tools we found in our national scan: Denver Public Schools is doing extensive work to align their educational goals with career outcomes, and thus created a document entitled, "Traits of a Young Professional." It is a simple but useful framework that many local partners are using, including Highline Public Schools and the region-wide Career Connected Learning Workgroup. In Chicago, an organization called MHA Labs⁶ began developing a work-readiness screening rubric in 2011. MHA Labs has since become a national skills development organization with deeply vetted performance assessments and related resources and curriculum supports. Their frameworks are written in simple and clear language with great specificity so each item is clearly measuring a single, discrete skill. As such, we have borrowed heavily from their open-source tools and curricular resources.

⁶<http://www.mhalabs.org>

SCANS

21st Century Skills

Fundamental Skills

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| <i>Basic Skills</i> | Reads, writes, performs arithmetic and mathematical operations, listens and speaks |
| <i>Thinking Skills</i> | Thinks creatively, makes decisions, solves problems, visualizes, knows how to learn, and reasons |
| <i>Personal Qualities</i> | Displays responsibility, self esteem, sociability, self-management, integrity, honesty |

Workplace Competencies

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| <i>Resources</i> | Identifies, organizes, plans, and allocates resources |
| <i>Interpersonal</i> | Works with others (participates as member of a team, teaches others new skills, serves clients/customers, exercises leadership, negotiates, works with diversity) |
| <i>Information</i> | Acquires and uses information (acquires and evaluates, organizes and maintains, interprets and communicates information; uses computers to process information) |
| <i>Systems</i> | Understands complex inter-relationships (understands systems, monitors and corrects performance, improves or designs systems) |
| <i>Technology</i> | Works with a variety of technologies (selects technology, applies technology to task, maintains and troubleshoots equipment) |

1. Content Knowledge and 21st Century Themes

- English, reading and language arts
- World languages
- Arts
- Mathematics
- Economics
- Science
- Geography
- History
- Government and civics
- Global awareness
- Financial, economic, business and entrepreneurial literacy
- Civic literacy
- Health literacy
- Environmental literacy

2. Learning and Innovation Skills

- Creativity and innovation
- Critical thinking and problem solving
- Communication
- Collaboration

3. Information, Media and Technology Skills

- Information literacy
- Media literacy
- Information and communication technology literacy

4. Life and Career Skills

- Flexibility and adaptability
- Initiative and self direction
- Social and cross-cultural skills
- Productivity and accountability
- Leadership and responsibility

How MHA Labs Identified Employer Preferences for Youth Job Readiness Attributes

MHA Labs is an “open-source” national skills development nonprofit in Chicago that develops 21st century skill-building frameworks, tools, practices and assessments to prepare youth for college, career and life success. MHA Labs has a particular research and development focus on youth, employers and program providers engaged in youth internship programs. This work, and the organization, grew out of a need identified by the Chicago’s Mayor to build a more sustainable and high quality career-ready pipeline of youth and adults ready to meet the needs of a 21st century economy. To meet this goal, Mayor Daley created the Chicago Workforce Investment Council in 2011 (now the Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership) where Leslie Beller served as youth strategist. In partnership with the Chicago Public School Career and Technical Education Department, Beller designed a work-readiness rubric which was originally used to train young people on work-readiness skills.

MHA Labs researchers, along with a network of over 60 workforce partners, have worked for 7 years to isolate an entry-level work and internship work readiness framework now called the **Hirability Core**. Their research tested over 95 skill items with over 12,000 supervisor performance reviews of youth interns and employees after six weeks on the job. The majority of these young people are from low-income families and/or students enrolled in urban public schools, so the core skills are not subject to the bias that frequently plagues traditional research instruments. The youth performance evaluation, including the 12-item Hirability Core, is now embedded in multiple survey instruments, curriculum and work-readiness tools, and used by over 30,000 youth every year.

In order to validate their items, MHA Labs conducts analysis on how well each item and various configurations of items can predict an employer rating a youth highly on the following three questions. MHA Labs uses the average of these three items to create a summative Hirability Status rating.

Hirability Status Rating

1. If I had a job opening, I would hire this employee
2. I would seek out this person to be on my next project
3. I would recommend this employee to a colleague, for a similar position

Professional Attitude

- Brings energy and enthusiasm to the work
- Graciously accepts criticism
- Takes responsibility for his or her actions and does not blame others
- Stays calm, clear-headed and unflappable under stress

Team Work Ethic

- Actively looks for additional tasks when own work is done
- Actively looks for ways to help other people

Problem Solving

- Unpacks problems into manageable parts
- Generates multiple potential solutions to problems
- Identifies new and more effective ways to solve problems

Time Management

- Manages time and does not procrastinate
- Gets work done on time
- Arrives on time and is rarely absent without cause



Matching Skills, Jobs, and Youth

As we worked with youth providers in the region, we learned that all first jobs are not created equal: different soft skills and abilities are necessary for success in different jobs based on the complexity of the tasks and the expectations associated with each job. To serve youth across a spectrum of experience levels, local program providers are creating and sourcing a wide variety of work experiences for youth, ranging from career exploration to classroom-like experiences to jobs that look more like traditional internships in the private sector. In many cases, they are deeply considering a young person's demonstrated abilities when they match youth to jobs. This is more challenging in a large-scale program or one where the employers and the young people are not directly connected to a case manager.

We found a similar differentiating of opportunities in our national scan. In a recent Brookings Institute paper, researchers Martha Ross and Richard Kazis note that a critical component for youth employment program success is “matching young people with age- and skill-appropriate opportunities, differentiating by age, work readiness, and youth interests so that no one goes to a workplace unprepared to succeed.”⁷ A great example of this is provided by WorkReady Philadelphia who partners with the Philadelphia Youth Network (PYN), employers and organizations across the city to provide programs.

Philadelphia Youth Network Job Tiers

- **Career exposure:** Career awareness program for rising 8th graders to explore careers, meet a variety of industry professionals, and build an initial career and education plan.
- **Service-learning:** Group-based experience where teams of youth address an issue in their community and produce a report or product to contribute to a solution. According to the PYN website, this model “allows youth to explore these issues through research, reflection, and action... [and] enables them to hone both their work-readiness and their academic skills.”⁸
- **Work experience:** Work-based learning opportunities where young people work on projects at or in partnership with a business. The focus is on building work-ready skills more than on delivering value for the business or organization.
- **Internships:** Opportunities for independent work to develop professional skills and provide a service to a business or an organization. In the Philadelphia program, these experiences are coupled with “professional development workshops which focus on career exploration and aptitude assessment as well as work-readiness. Participants have the choice of completing a work-based learning project or a portfolio.”

As a region, we’d like to create a better match between young people and their first work experience.

Most well-established citywide youth employment programs provide some level of job tiering like Philadelphia. Chicago’s program is especially well-defined and comprehensive. As a region, we’d like to create a better match between young people and their first work experience. If the job requirements are attainable for a young person when they first enter an unfamiliar situation, they will gain confidence and stretch their abilities to demonstrate their current skills and learn new ones. (In education and child development, this is referred to as their “zone of proximal development.”) Similarly, if the employer has the right expectation of what a young person is expected to do, they are more likely to be satisfied with their new intern, to help them along their skill-building path, and to participate in the program again in future years. Satisfied employers are also likely to participate in other youth employment activities, such as networking, mentoring, and career-connected learning.

⁷Ross, Martha, and Richard Kazis. Youth Summer Jobs Programs: Aligning Ends and Means. Report. Brookings Institution, July 2016. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Summer-Jobs-Ross-7-12-16.pdf>

⁸<https://www.pyninc.org/models>

One Summer Chicago

The City of Chicago summer youth employment program is arguably the largest well-coordinated programs in the country. In 2017, there were over 31,000 career-related opportunities for youth ages 13-24. The effort is led by the city's Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS) but has major partnerships for placement and student supports, as well as a public-private partnership organization called After School Matters (ASM) who manages more than a third of the summer slots. Both DFSS and ASM provide grants and contracts to over 250 community-based organizations for career awareness, preparation, and internship opportunities in the summer.

The Chicago program is powerful not only because of its scale but also because of the strong efforts that partners have made toward ensuring a high-quality experience for youth and employers. Some of the keys to their success include:

A single, coordinated application across all agencies: not only is this a great service for young people who only need to fill out one application to gain access to dozens of possible jobs, but youth providers also like it because they do not have to learn about and keep track of program information, applications, and deadlines for dozens or even hundreds of different programs. They also don't have to be constantly reminding young people to apply for all of the different programs. Additionally, program managers are able to gather critical information for program improvement. (The application survey asks youth about their educational attainment and career goals, other employment, family employment, and support they've received for education and career awareness.)

Thoughtful and diligent work to understand job-ready skills, utilizing developmental interviews and youth evaluations through MHA labs: not only have these data-gathering efforts led to systemic changes, but each interview and evaluation has provided a meaningful feedback opportunity for youth.

Strong business-focused support through a local foundation: Chicago's Mayor has always played a big role in promoting summer youth employment to the business community for the purposes of charitable support as well as youth placements, but in recent years, the McCormick Foundation has established a fund for charitable gifts that now augment the program. The Foundation also hosts the annual kickoff event for businesses where they can pledge their financial gifts as well as their job placements and serves as a celebration of business involvement in youth programming. The Foundation also develops a summary report each year which serves as a marketing tool and encourages future participation.

A ladder of opportunities for youth of all skill-levels: because of the wide variety of program partners, and the intentionality of larger programs like After School Matters, programs are categorized in the following ways:

Apprenticeships: project-based programs led by industry experts that can provide a pathway to progress in skills development and independence. Final projects and showcases increase in complexity across the apprenticeship levels so teens have the opportunity to expand their skills. Teens must be at least 14 years old and are awarded a stipend for program completion.

| | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Pre-apprenticeship | Introductory hands-on program that provides broad exposure to a specific content area and related careers |
| Apprenticeship | Hands-on program in which teens learn content-specific skills and work towards a culminating project or showcase |
| Advanced Apprenticeship | Advanced hands-on program in which teens refine their technical skills while producing a complex culminating project or showcase |

Assistantships: opportunities for teens to participate in introductory workplace experiences alongside supportive After School Matters staff. Teens must be at least 16 years old and are paid an hourly rate of \$8.25/hour. These opportunities range from program assistance to schoolwide support for programming to outreach and engagement activities.

Internships: industry-specific, entry-level professional experiences with external organizations and companies. Teens may be required to have participated in at least three previous After School Matters programs. Teens must be at least 16 years old (some positions require the teen to be at least 18 years old) and are paid an hourly rate of \$10.50/hour. These opportunities include museum docent, camp counselor, corporate administration intern and more.

Many employers have noted that, without a strong training program, there is often a mismatch between what a new supervisor is expecting of a young person and what that young person is capable of. One youth provider noted that this mismatch might stem from a lack of knowledge or understanding by the employer about what is going on in the lives of young people today who are navigating school, identity development, extracurriculars, and other challenges such as family instability, mental health challenges, and social pressures. Many adults assume that the youth who join them will be “like I was at that age” or “like my child,” who has had the benefit of a professionally-employed parent molding them and training them to be job-ready. There may also be a mismatch in expectations when the internship tasks and expectations are not well-defined or communicated to the youth case manager or navigator, who thus don’t have the tools to make an appropriate match.

To support this match, we have created four job tiers that we think encompass the bulk of the first-time jobs in partner-sponsored programs. We do not include in these tiers entry-level, permanent jobs open to people of all ages, such as retail, food service, or warehousing and distribution, because those jobs are not generally the target of youth development programming. Our primary job tiers are:

Tier 0

Introductory experience: a job or job-like arrangement that a case manager creates for a specific young person to help them build confidence and very basic skills. In general these experiences are for out-of-school youth or youth who’ve struggled with education and employment, and possibly homelessness or substance abuse. One program manager spoke about a job with a local business: “if we have a small amount of money for a stipend and a willing worksite, we can place them in a role where they can build some confidence and job-readiness skills. We have a partnership with a local design and printing shop where the Director will give them jobs like folding and packaging shirts, or if they’re a little more advanced, working with designs in Photoshop or actually screen printing on the product. He can vary the tasks to who shows up and their skill level and interest.”

Tier 1

Career development jobs: a group-based internship or learning experience where it is structured like a job with expectations for punctuality, attire, professional demeanor, and producing work or delivering a service, but where the supervisor is an adult with youth development experience who is expected to help teach or improve job skills among the participants. An example is the “teamwork” program through YouthForce where young people provide navigation help, fan support, and tours at Safeco and CenturyLink fields.

Tier 2

Independent jobs: a highly-structured work experience where a young person is expected to perform a service or deliver a product, but under the direct supervision of an adult who is permanently employed in their job. A common example is that a community organization will add a scheduler or receptionist during the busy summer months who is answering phones and sharing a workspace with

a permanent employee. Bloodworks NW offers a “donor monitor” internship where the intern is stationed in the recovery area for blood donors after they give blood. The donor monitor’s job is to talk with the donors and watch for signs of weakness, nausea, confusion, or other physical condition that indicates they may need additional care before leaving the center. In both of these cases, the young people are independent but never out of earshot from a supervisor.

Tier 3

Professional internships: an independent internship where the young person is expected to work independently, manage their own time and priorities, and deliver value to the company or organization. While there is an expectation that supervisors are understanding and supportive of youth, that is not always the case in internships at this level, and young people may be held to the same expectations as other entry-level workers at this company or organization.

Using these tiers as our guide, we created a continuum of skill development within the major job skill categories. The continuum is not intended to be a stepping-stone path for every young person. Some 16-year-olds are already extremely mature and can exhibit most of the skills on our continuum already, especially if they know what they’re striving for. Youth with those skills should be placed directly into independent internships. Other young people—even into their early 20s—may be struggling on some of the more basic skills due to a variety of factors. They may be best served by starting at step one of the continuum and progressing step-by-step to ensure they are building a strong foundation while being supported by a case manager, something they may not have access to when they get older.

Career Development Jobs

- **Group-based:** Groups of 3-20 young people.
- **Supervisor** has a youth development focus.
- **Youth** provide a service or deliver a product. Team roles are generally not specific to any particular team member (ie: roles rotate or are interchangeable).
- **Examples:** Seattle Parks Department, Mural Painting Programs, CenturyLink Jobs via YouthForce

Independent Jobs

- **Individual focus:** Each youth is hired independent of others for a particular role.
- **Supervisor** has basic knowledge of youth development principles.
- **Youth** are expected to provide a basic service with tight supervision (ie: hour-by-hour support for time use, work quality, and next steps).
- **Examples:** SDHR Compensation Intern, Mayor’s Office Correspondence Aide

Professional Internships

- **Individual focus:** Each youth is hired independent of others for a particular role.
- **Supervisor** has attended an orientation on how to effectively manage youth internships.
- **Youth** are expected to meaningfully contribute to the work of the department with minimal supervision after initial orientation.
- **Examples:** Amazon, PointB, Kaiser Permanente

YouthForce

YouthForce is a youth career development program hosted by the Boys and Girls Club of King County who primarily works with low-income, first generation, foster youth, or youth from high-risk neighborhoods. Their career-focused programs help young people access and have a positive experience in their first job. YouthForce has two levels of work programs. The first is a cohort-based “teamwork” model where a large group of young people are working in the same place at the same time, with a YouthForce staff person on-site if there are any questions or problems. These programs, with the Seattle Seahawks and the Seattle Sounders, employ approximately 90 young people each year in 5-9 month jobs providing fan support, stadium tours to VIPs, and other duties as identified on game days by the stadium operators.

YouthForce also runs a “career” program where young people are placed in businesses for a more traditional internship experience. These internships can take place after school or during the summer. YouthForce brokers relationships with employers and sets up the internship, then runs an application process where youth apply to YouthForce and YouthForce selects several qualified candidates for each position. These candidates all interview with the employer, who makes the final decision. **In order to prepare for these experiences, youth can participate in YouthForce University. YFU has six components.***

YouthForce also does training with employers so they can be prepared for youth at their workplace. They discuss some aspects of youth development so supervisors can better understand what might be going on in the minds of young people, as well as the complex nature of kids’ lives such as that they are navigating school, family, development, and future-thinking all while performing in an environment that is very foreign to them. Both the youth- and employer-focused trainings are adjusted regularly based on feedback.

*YFU Components

Level 1: basic work skills

- Attendance and punctuality
- Professional appearance and attire
- Knowing how to communicate with and ask your supervisor for help
- Managing issues and being proactive about resolution, as well as being proactive in general
- Having a sense of long-term career goals and how this first job becomes part of that trajectory

Level 2: career goals

- Career exploration activities to build a vision for the future.

Level 3: building portfolios

- Resume, cover letter, writing sample, awards, academic work

Level 4: interviewing

- Connection events
- “Speed dating” activities

Level 5: teen employment conference

- Youth resource fair
- 201 students and 35+ companies each year

Level 6: building a post-HS plan

- Specific action steps to ensure a smooth transition to the next step



Job Readiness Skills for Youth

This section will dive into each skill and what it means in an attempt to be as specific and unbiased in our expectations of “readiness” on each of these skills. We will also talk about the progression of development in these skill areas as youth jobs become more complex. These skills include:

- Time management and punctuality
- Professional orientation
- Team work ethic
- Verbal communication
- Problem-solving

Time Management & Punctuality

By far the most important skill for an entry-level employee is the ability to show up on time. This is well-known to employers and youth, and all of the youth-serving providers we talked to had strategies for working with young people to help them navigate the basics of scheduling and transportation. However, time management extends far beyond the objective physical presence matching the time on a clock. To employers, how a person uses time, the choices they make in prioritizing work tasks, and the organizational systems—or lack thereof—that a person uses to manage their time and task priorities all feed into the reflection that a supervisor has about an employee.

At the most basic level, showing up on time is the first step, whether it is for an after-school program, a meeting set with a case manager to talk about job prospects or school. Youth-serving providers understand that life is complex, transportation in a vibrant city can be hit or miss, and that adults do not always value young people's time in a way that allows them to manage their schedules. The second step, thus, is working with youth to communicate their whereabouts, chances of tardiness, or absences with people who are expecting them, and then to communicate those things as soon as they become known to the young person. The rubber hits the road when youth are expected to interview for jobs or internships—the most fundamental step of “you never get a second chance to make a first impression” is demonstrating respect for the interviewer by showing up on time. In a job setting, most employers would prefer an employee to send a text message if their bus is late and still arrive on time than to never communicate their whereabouts at all.

As youth move into more independent positions, there becomes an expectation of time management in prioritizing work and accomplishing tasks. If asked, most people would agree that “getting work done on time” is fundamental to job success, but in many early-career jobs, this is somewhat ambiguous. As an office receptionist, is it enough to answer all of the telephone calls? If not, how much office orga-

MHA Labs found in their research that the single most powerful item in the hireability scale is **“manages time and does not procrastinate.”**

nization or ordering also needs to get done and in what amount of time? Learning to ask supervisors for specific deadlines and expectations becomes an important skill that communicates one's values around time management. Then, delivering on these deadlines becomes the most critical step. At more advanced levels, taking on additional tasks, staying busy with tasks related to the goals of the workplace, and having a system of task organization and time management (such as a Google Calendar or use of Outlook Tasks) become extremely useful if not essential. In fact, MHA Labs found in their research that the single most powerful item in the hireability scale is “manages time and does not procrastinate.” Working with young people on methods for task prioritization, motivation to stave off procrastination, and how to communicate status and activity become essential to advance to the next step in any job trajectory.

For many people, how one spends their time in a workplace setting also demonstrates their values toward the workplace, toward work in general, and toward other people. For example, if an employee is constantly late to meetings, the organizers may think that person does not value their time. If a person delivers their work product a day late, someone else may be unable to do their work on time because the first work

product was necessary for the next, which shows a lack of respect for their co-worker and the work of the whole team. As one youth focus group participant told me, “in retail and food service people get annoyed if you’re late because it means they can’t leave until you get there.”

To further complicate the situation, different people have very different expectations around time management, personal time, and values around time, so young people do not always have a consistent set of models to learn from. For example, everyone has that family member who is always a half hour late to events, and for whom the rest of the family is always waiting. In many youth-serving organizations, there may be a coach or mentor who is always late, who may have communicated about this with her supervisor (or not), but their understanding is not made visible to young people who simply observe the tardiness but not any accountability that goes along with it. When this happens, young people may think that some tardiness is acceptable. Thus youth programs need to have a full and thorough set of conversations with young people about how their use of time—on many dimensions—affects those around them.

Professional Orientation

One employer who works with a statewide association of manufacturing employers told us that their employers “simply want people who can show up on time and be ready to work.” Another employer said, “we want people to be enthusiastic about this job.” And yet a third told us, “in a customer service setting; we need people with a positive attitude.” “Professionalism” is an ambiguous term frequently used to describe these behaviors, but one that needs to be defined more concretely, so it is clear to youth and the expectations are the same across youth and adults.

Most of our youth focus group participants agreed that impulse control, biting their tongue, or needing to find a professional way to express their frustration was one of the most critical lessons they learned from an early work experience.

At a basic level, professional attitude is demonstrated by **appearance and attire**. An employee’s professional appearance is one of the first qualities an employer will notice, so as youth become employees they have to think about how they will present themselves as workers. Most entry-level and career development jobs have a dress code that needs to be rigorously adhered to. As jobs become a little more independent and professional, dress codes become less explicit and allow more individuality, but they are no less important for success. Young people need to be able to observe, follow, and ask questions about how their physical appearance shows up in each new workplace that they enter.

Perhaps the most important aspect of professional attitude is **composure**, or as one youth participant called it, “**emotional intelligence**.” He said, “in a lot of jobs, there are people who want to be jerks, and you have to hold it together. You can’t cuss out the customers. Some customers just want to start something, but you have to learn to stay quiet.” Most of our youth focus group participants agreed that impulse

control, biting their tongue, or needing to find a professional way to express their frustration was one of the most critical lessons they learned from early work experience. Unfortunately, many of these young people learned the lesson the hard way: they either said the wrong thing or didn't "fess up" about something they should have because of anger, fear, and a lack of knowledge about how to react. As a result, some were fired, another had her hours cut, one didn't get the "shift leader" position she expected, and several were so uncomfortable that they simply didn't return to work or actively quit their job. Only a couple of young people who reported this type of experience had a boss or co-worker talk to them about their emotional control and were able to learn with this support. The others realized their lack of skill in this area only upon reflection and some of them not until many years later.

As part of professional orientation, we also added a skill that is important to work on with young people but may be glossed-over: **the use of personal technology**. As one youth focus group participant told us, "motivation is a skill I had to learn. I worked alone in a coffee stand. When it was slow, I had to decide whether to text on my phone or clean the syrup bottles." Personal technology creates a distraction that is hard to resist, making it especially important that youth providers work through strategies that young people can use to minimize the use of technology to show their commitment to work. Employers can also help by reinforcing expectations about the use of technology, and by modeling professional behavior and holding young people to the same standards that adults in that workplace are held to. SkillUp Washington released the results of a survey of employers at SeaTac airport in 2017 to inform workforce development professionals about the needs and preparation required for jobs at the airport. According to one survey respondent, "[Good workers] need to be mature, on time, and absolutely have to be able to live without their cell phone while on the clock. I know this sounds very simple but believe it or not these are some of the bigger issues we are facing."⁹

While there was a time in history when leadership was seen as more focused on traits of strength, decisiveness, and ability to direct others, we now believe that leadership is inextricably about the ability to work with others to advance the goals of the organization.

Another aspect of professionalism we have included is having a **career orientation**. We know that many first-time workers and young people are not working in jobs that they want to stay in forever. Some young people think their job is completely unrelated to their interests, and this feeling can lead to underperformance. But generally when someone helps them understand the skills that they are building and how those skills are transferable to every future job, they are better able to commit to the basic tasks that may seem boring at the time. As young people progress into more independent experiences and begin to value skill-building, they need to learn to listen to and accept both positive and constructive feedback, and ultimately be proactive about asking for **feedback** and building relationships with supervisors and adult co-workers who can serve as mentors.

⁹SkillUp Washington. SeaTac Airport Company Survey. Report. March 2017. Retrieved from: <https://skillupwa.org/resources/seatac-airport-company-survey/>

Team work ethic

The ability to work with others in a group or on a team is often regarded as an important 21st century skill, and it was noted by most of the employers and youth providers that we spoke to. At the career development level, Juma Ventures defines one element of teamwork as “gets along and works together well with co-workers.” The item builds from **being helpful** and collegial to **taking initiative** and being **proactive** to, in a more professional setting, being able to put one’s own desires aside or and **make compromises** for the group gain, and then on to demonstrating appreciation and **valuing other people’s contributions** to the success of an initiative.

In their extensive study of work-related traits connected to hireability, MHA labs found that “Actively looks for additional tasks when own work is done” and “Actively looks for ways to help other people” are the key demonstrators that one has a team work ethic. The P21 Consortium uses the definitions, “Exercise flexibility and willingness to be helpful in making necessary compromises to accomplish a common goal” and “Assume shared responsibility for collaborative work and value the individual contributions made by each team member” to describe skills related to collaboration with others.

Youth providers increasingly are striving to help young people sort out how to act professionally in the workplace without masking or sacrificing their rich identity, culture, or primary language.

In defining “teamwork,” many people that we interviewed used the word “leadership” or concepts related to working with other people to achieve a goal. While some employers and providers identified “leadership” as an important concept

on its own, when asked to define it further, many people mentioned traits that could also be considered communication (persuades and convinces others), professional attitude (has shown dedication to agency or company goals), or teamwork skills (feels comfortable sharing knowledge with peers and is looked to for advice and guidance with peers). While there was a time in history when leadership was seen as more focused on traits of strength, decisiveness, and ability to direct others, we now believe that leadership is inextricably about the ability to work with others to advance the goals of the organization.

Verbal communication

including the ability to ask questions and demonstrate proactivity, and code-switching

Verbal communication is another item that just about every employer will say they require of a person to be ready for their job. But just as with the other skills, there are variations in what communication skills are necessary for different jobs. In many first-tier youth employment programs and entry-level jobs, young people are simply expected to be able to understand and **follow directions**. The next stage is being able to answer **work-related questions** in a way that others can understand, and respond to team members and customers clearly, courteously, and positively. As people build into more independent positions, they need to advance their communication skills to be able to **raise and respond to issues** or concerns, **ask questions of clarification** and, at the professional level, **ask meaningful questions** about tasks or challenges that may arise in the future, signaling positive and proactive thinking about work quality and goals.

It is important to note that MHA Labs tested several items to determine their linkage with youth job success. **One of the most surprising findings is lack of statistical weight attributed to most verbal communication items, especially “being articulate.”** MHA Labs explains that while verbal communication is often cited as a need by employers, especially HR managers, non-verbal communication factors are much more highly correlated to one’s Hirability Status. Beller believes this is likely due to verbal communication being one of several items that are heavily affected by HR managers’ implicit biases. Job supervisors, on the other hand, are more interested in on-the-job performance and are thus less susceptible to implicit bias framed by clarity of speech, verbal fluency, or sentence complexity. Articulativeness seems to be important in hiring decisions while other elements of verbal communication such as those listed previously are more important to success on the job.

For almost all young people entering the workplace for the first time, they will be building a new vocabulary and way of speaking. While employers may describe this as “building a professional vocabulary,” youth providers and young people are increasingly talking about “code-switching.” **Code-switching** recognizes that the words people use, their accent, and the inflection with which they speak signal certain things about where one is from, things a person is interested in, and sometimes one’s race, language of origin, or socio-economic class. One youth focus group participant told me that in her early jobs, she would say to herself,

While there was a time in history when leadership was seen as more focused on traits of strength, decisiveness, and ability to direct others, we now believe that leadership is inextricably about the ability to work with others to advance the goals of the organization.

“let me put on my best white girl act now” before walking into her workplace. People of color in the United States have often referred to the need to “act white” to be seen as a professional in the workplace. This has historically been necessary for people of color to attain certain jobs and promotions. Several youth providers told me that they still

talk with young people in their programs about how to speak, act, or dress “professionally,” but increasingly they are striving to help young people sort out how to do this without masking or sacrificing their rich identity, culture, or primary language. Youth providers noted that they weren’t sure whether employers understood that young people are often working on code-switching—a cognitively demanding task while one is learning it—and were hopeful that more employers could support new employees by allowing and encouraging them to bring elements of their own identity to the workplace, ultimately helping to make the workplace culture less “white.”

Problem-solving including demonstrating critical thinking

Problem-solving is another skill that is highly dependent on other skills and thus, absent a clear definition or criteria, can lead to a mismatch in expectations. To isolate problem solving skills separate from communication and work ethic, MHA labs focuses their research on elements that are commonly accepted as the problem-solving process:

The problem-solving process begins with recognizing that there is a problem—many people refer to this as **problem definition**. The process then moves into diagnosis and analysis of the problem to better understand it, then the **development of potential solutions**, choosing and implementing a solution, and ideally reflecting upon the result to determine whether and how to avoid or attend to a similar problem in the future. This process mirrors what we'd expect to see in our different tiers of first jobs or internships: in the initial or group-based experiences, young people are fully expected to recognize problems and begin to diagnose why there may have been a problem, and then to find a solution and implement it. As the jobs get more complex, it is generally wise for a young person to make problems visible to teammates or supervisors and work with them to solve those problems by making it clear that the person has thought about multiple solutions to the problem. In independent experiences, a lot of problems need to be handled individually and optimally, meaning young people have to be able to **think critically** about the **multiple solutions**, likely outcomes, and weigh the pros or cons of each to come up with a plan that solves a problem before it is visible or discussed with a co-worker.



What is High-Quality Job Readiness Training?

We believe that aligning our expectations with specific skills and outcomes is a great step toward improved program quality, but it's insufficient if youth programs are not helping young people gain these skills. This section will highlight some of the strengths of programs we found in our region. We will also address some program components that are popular or intriguing but have not demonstrated their value in preparing young people for jobs. Lastly, we'll talk about the importance of training for employers as an element of a high-quality youth employment system.

Program Strengths

We talked to or learned about over a dozen local programs that are preparing young people for first jobs or internships. These programs included school-based Career & Technical Education classes, one-time and multiple-session job readiness training programs at community-based organizations, and job-connected and job-embedded programs supporting groups of young people. Two of the common elements that are necessary for high-quality programs are: using scenario-based exercises as the primary learning modality, and building ample time into programs for self-reflection.

Scenario-Based Exercises

Hands-on learning, project-based learning, and experiential-learning are all methods based in research showing that when students are asked to learn something by doing it, they are much more likely to learn deeply and retain information than if they learn by memorizing, reading, or simply reciting information. For this reason, many youth programs create mock job scenarios for young people as a way to help them build their job readiness skills. Highline Public Schools conducts speed networking sessions several times throughout the year where young people have to write an “elevator pitch” about their career goals and deliver it multiple times in a row to adult professionals they’ve never met before. This builds their verbal communication skills and strengthens their professional orientation. Highline students also have the opportunity to visit professional workplaces throughout their high school career where they meet some adult employees, ask questions, and frequently engage in a problem or project that the company is working on.

MHA Labs provides a module called “boss your feedback” where youth are taken through several hands-on exercises to think about how to open themselves up to feedback, then they play a game where they develop a new product and do a skit to advertise it. Afterward, they reflect on ways that their team helped them create a compelling commercial (positive feedback), and then one way that their teammates could have been more helpful, as a way to help them develop, give, and then receive constructive feedback. This is one of many ways to simulate a stressful situation that can happen in a job or internship.

Self-Reflection Or Self-Evaluation Using A Written Tool

The ability to reflect honestly and critically on one’s skills, and the ability to take constructive feedback, are critical job readiness skills, but ones that do not come naturally to most people. Juma Ventures has an extremely clear rubric of expectations for program participants that serves as the basis for their training sessions, self-reflection, and discussion with supervisors about performance. Participants are expected to reflect and self-assess their current skill level against the rubric, and then bring that assessment to a conversation with their supervisor. During the conversation, the two will discuss both assessments, the evidence each considered for the rating, and what the young person can do to move to the next stage of advancement. The rubric contains 17 standards in six categories that all follow this highly-readable format (see next page).

FareStart engages in a similar practice in their barista training programs. Program participants set goals for their performance, then engage in daily or weekly sessions where program supervisors talk with participants about their progress toward these goals. This provides an opportunity for supervisors to help young people have a more realistic appraisal of their skills and strengths. It also provides a safe and structured opportunity for supervisors to give constructive feedback and work through that feedback with participants in a growth-oriented way. FareStart’s skills are written and shared with program participants so they can use a common language (see next page).

| Self Management | | | | | | |
|-------------------------|--|---|--|---|---|-------|
| Performance Standards | Unsatisfactory 1 | Inconsistent 2 | Proficient 3 | Exceeds Expectations 4 | Exemplary 5 | SCORE |
| Prioritizes Work | Is not on task during shift. Has distracting conversations/attitude when customers are present | Occasionally on task during shift. There are instances where Juma employee is distracting others, or on phone during shift but never in front of customers. | Focuses on work and does not use phone, text on the job or have distractions with other co-workers | Never uses phone or has distracting conversations with co-workers | Speaks to others about their phone usage, assists other staff with better prioritizing tasks at hand, and limiting distractions | |



FARESTART
Great Food. Better Lives.

Youth Barista & Customer Service Training Program

Program Design:

Students are advancing skills while they are engaged in on the job training. The program includes 7 weeks of on the job training focused on the fundamental principles of barista and customer service, that are delivered through kinesthetic on the job training in the FareStart Café at the 2100 Building. Students are paid \$13 hour. Case management is provided by our partner organization, YouthCare.

Program Goals:

Youth are advancing toward a future of self-sustainability through:

- Job or internship placement
- Gaining personal development skills (*self-confidence, teamwork, self-efficacy, communication, developing positive adult relationships, conflict resolution, critical thinking*)

Who We Serve:

Homeless, street involved youth ages 16-24 (*HUD definition of homelessness*)

Program Structure:

- Students attend "Preview Week" (*unpaid week to assess student's interest and readiness to be in the program*)
- Training duration is 7 weeks. (*First 2 weeks are in the classroom. Last 5 weeks are on the job in the café Monday – Thursday and in the classroom on Friday for job readiness training*)
- Classroom hours are 1pm-5pm the first 2 weeks. 3 hour OJT shifts are in the café between the hours of 7am and 3pm
- Students are paid \$13hr
- Students receive case management through program partner, YouthCare

Core Areas of Focus and Competencies:

Attendance: *Demonstrates commitment through punctuality and dependable, consistent participation*

Customer Service: *Team player that works with a sense of urgency, treats co-workers and customers with respect and enthusiasm to serve, accurate cash handling, operate POS, resolves customer concerns*

Food Safety: *Pass food handler's test, demonstrates sanitary kitchen practices, knows proper food temperatures and storage; minimizes food waste*

Equipment Knowledge: *Able to identify, maintain and safely use standard chef tools and barista equipment*

Knife Skills: *Demonstrates proper safety, appropriate speed and form*

Intriguing But Unproven: Badging/Credentialing and Online Training

As youth employment program managers across the country grapple with how to ensure that youth are prepared for their first jobs, many are considering methods of certification for youth who can demonstrate certain job readiness skills. Across the nation, Los Angeles has the largest well-organized certification program where approximately 2,300 young people earn a Youth Readiness Credential every year. In the past, the credential has not awarded any special jobs or privileges aside from alerts about new job postings, but program managers are exploring ways to create specialized credentials that would be required for certain high-demand jobs in specific sectors like IT or healthcare.

In LA, the way for a young person to demonstrate their skills is through a mock job interview with a professional volunteer. As a result, this effort seems to serve as both a community engagement mechanism as well as youth support and likely encourages some employers to participate in their youth internship program because they become connected with youth during the mock job interviews. We think this method of coalescing the community around youth employment is promising, but there is little evidence that the credential serves as a meaningful motivator for young people to participate in programs and build their skills.

Most of the cities that we researched utilized some form of online training in their youth employment program, either for career awareness, financial management, or job readiness. As noted earlier, Chicago offers online badges through their LRNG system and thousands of young people participate in those badge-earning experiences every year. Despite that, program managers acknowledge that even if a youth earns a badge, it doesn't mean they learned their skills using the online platform, and program managers don't have full faith that the online programs are accurately measuring the skills they purport to measure. And while the badging platform is broadly accessible in Chicago, only a small proportion of the youth in their program use it, and those students are most likely not the students who are the least job-ready. This is one indicator

Online modules and platforms can be helpful in skill attainment for youth if they are used in a high-quality job readiness training program and if the work done online is reinforced during in-person interactions.

that online badging platforms are not intrinsically motivating for young people.

Several of the citywide programs that we looked at across say they are providing "online

job readiness training" through Everfi. In fact, what Everfi provides is financial awareness training. The modules are extremely simplistic, with a single audio voice-over and minimal graphic engagement. There is generally one single "poll" question at the end, which loosely asks students to consider the content of the module as it relates to their own lives, but does not reinforce the concepts learned. It is possible to click through each module without reading/listening to the concepts and the system will still mark the module as "completed."

We believe that online modules and platforms can be helpful in skill attainment for youth if they are used in a high-quality job readiness training program and if the work is done online is reinforced during in-person interactions with case managers or teachers or through demonstration such as in a mock interview.

Absent these elements, however, we have yet to see a standalone online program that is widely believed to be supportive of youth skill attainment.

Training for Employers

Many of the people we talked to, including young people, youth providers, and employers, talked about the importance of training for employers, including both hiring managers and supervisors. We discussed earlier how a mismatch in expectations between youth and employers could lead to a challenging work situation, but there are several other reasons to do training for employers:

1. **To ensure internships are structured in ways that support youth development:** in most youth internship programs outside of the group-based/tier 1 programs, the person who establishes the internship and/or selects the interns is not the person who is hiring the young person. Typically a manager or organizational leader establishes a partnership with an organization, then delegates the project to an HR team member. The HR team member then works with departments to find a “host” and the organization to find the intern. The HR team member may or may not work closely with the host to craft an appropriate job description and build the host supervisor’s understanding of youth capabilities and expectations for their performance. In this case, training for both the HR team member and the host supervisor would be helpful.
2. **To help employers know the subtle signs of a struggle in the workplace or resulting from other life issues, as well as how they can reach out to help:** young people are masterful at hiding their weaknesses. In our focus groups, several youths shared anecdotes about not knowing how to do something and not feeling comfortable asking for help. “I guess I figured it out eventually,” one young person told us, “but I would have been more productive if I’d gotten help right away.” When supervisors are attuned to youth needs, they can intervene early and help, so youth don’t struggle in private.

Even those who have begun to work on their understanding of race and class likely have more work to do before they are completely bias-free in their interactions with people of color or from lower socioeconomic households.

3. **To help internship supervisors be the best bosses they can be, to increase young people’s aspirations in the workplace:** through their extensive surveys of youth interns and employers, MHA Labs learned a lot about what youth need from their supervisor. In short, young people need to know that their supervisors are people as well as bosses. It helps if the young person feels that their boss knows them a little bit - what their aspirations are, what they like to do, and how this job may or may not be part of a career path for them. Regardless of the answer, youth are more connected to their employer if they’ve had this conversation. As with all mentoring relationships, young people may not open up immediately to a new person, but there are some simple things bosses can do to make youth feel more comfortable, such as scheduled weekly check-ins, making

small talk and helping young people participate in office banter, and connecting young people to other adults for job-related and other mentoring conversations.

4. **To minimize race and class bias:** in many sectors of our economy, especially in Seattle, there is an emerging understanding of implicit bias and the effects of structural racism on personal beliefs, attitudes, and expectations. But this understanding does not extend to every employee in every office of our region, and even those who've begun to work on their understanding of race and class likely have more work to do before they are completely bias-free in their interactions with people of color or from lower socioeconomic households. There are a wide variety of exercises that can be used in employer-focused training that would help create a more supportive working environment for the youth of color or those from low-income backgrounds.

Supervisor training should also review the job readiness skills and expectations appropriate to the tier of job that each manager is hosting. Much like the youth job readiness training, using scenarios and self-reflection questions are useful for effective employer training as well.

LA Youth at Work

In 2006, Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa launched the Mayor’s Summer Youth Employment program called “Hire LA’s Youth.” At the same time, the Chamber began supporting an effort to dramatically expand the number of private businesses that offered youth internships and/or first-time employment to youth, and the training they needed to be successful in those opportunities. This program, called LA Youth at Work, is now being managed by UNITE-LA, a larger initiative that includes youth career readiness programming, coalition building and collective impact focused around youth success, and policy and advocacy work.

Under current mayor Eric Garcetti, the city and its public, private, and nonprofit partners have a new goal of hiring 20,000 youth by the year 2020. The City itself has quadrupled the number of job placements that they offer in advance of an anticipated increase in public-sector retirements, and the Chamber launched “LA Talent Challenge” to encourage private businesses to add 500 new tech sector jobs for youth this past year. The Chamber and LA Youth at Work have several other employer- and sector-specific initiatives to increase the number of jobs being offered by the private sector.

In order to ensure that young people are prepared for these first jobs and that employers have a good experience working with them, Hire LA’s Youth has been offering a “work readiness certificate” since 2006. In order to earn the certificate, youth must attend a 4-hour workshop and then participate in—and pass—a mock job interview. The curriculum, activities, interview questions, and scoring rubrics were developed in partnership between LA Youth at Work and the local chapters of PIHRA (Professionals In Human Resources Administration) and SHRM (Society for Human Resource Managers). The instruments were developed in 2006 and remain in use today, though program managers are planning a series of re-validation meetings with partners to determine whether an update is needed.

Every year, approximately 2,300 youth attempt the work readiness certification, with approximately 70% becoming certified. Certification is not required to get a job through Hire LA’s Youth, though it offers youth a successful skill to put on their resume and an experience to talk about in real job interviews. Youth who complete the certificate get access to a special alert email that tells them when new jobs are posted and gives them regular reminders of what to do to apply.

Skills Covered in the Work Readiness Workshop:

- Goal-setting
- Learning about key work-readiness skills (initiative, planning, self-management, etc.)
- Job-seeking
- Communications, including cold-calling employers and e-mail etiquette
- Resume and cover-letter writing
- Professional attire
- Interviewing
- How to act professionally in the workplace with a focus on “keeping your job”

After completing the the work readiness workshop, youth attend a mock interview, that also includes a math test and a written customer service. Students must pass both with a score of 75%. It is notable that these tests are not simple and they require strong reading skills because they are scenario-based. The interview then has four questions that youth must answer correctly in order to pass. These assess whether youth can express a genuine commitment to working for their success, whether they can commit to being in a drug- and alcohol-free workplace, whether they are on time, and if they can follow basic directions. After this, the young people must demonstrate success on three of the other domains from the list of:

- Professional attire
- Accuracy and attention to detail (as evidenced by resume and cover letter)
- Interview skills
- Ability to express why they are qualified for or would succeed at the job
- Work ethic

In order to conduct these workshops and do mock interviews for almost 2,000 young people, Hire LA's Youth partners with approximately 30-50 community organizations and schools throughout the city. They host "train the trainer" workshops for partner organization staff, and provide a detailed agenda for how to conduct a workshop. Mock interviews are conducted by agency staff as well as volunteers from PIHRA and SHRM at community organizations, schools, and libraries throughout the city.

Hire LA's Youth maintains a computer system that tracks youth through workshops and mock interviews, keeps track of who earns the certificate, and tracks volunteers and agency staff who've been trained to conduct workshops and interviews. The system asks for quite a bit of student information in order to align with the other systems used around the city, such as demographic information, family income, whether the young person attends school or not, is in the foster system, has stable housing, and/or is a parent.

As robust and helpful as this training is, LA Youth at Work still struggles to get students to participate and apply for employment. A large number of youth report that they don't understand the importance of working at a first job that may not be a "dream" job, don't want to earn minimum wage, or who choose to delay employment. LA Youth at Work combats this through their close partnership with community organizations who have skills in working with youth, by creating partnerships with employers and sectors to make jobs more attractive to young people such as healthcare and technology, and by working directly with employers to help them understand how to structure and support interns in a way that makes an entry-level job more appealing to youth.



Recommendations

Use the developmental continuum as the backbone of all conversations and initiatives sponsored by partners and aimed at improving workforce outcomes for youth and young adults in the region. Work with partners and providers to gather training resources that align with the five core skill areas in the continuum and make those resources widely available in the region.

Work with internship hosts to identify the tier for each job they are offering, and then work with youth program providers to ensure that young people's current abilities match the skills expectations of jobs in that tier.

Work with youth program providers to assess their job readiness training programs against the skills listed in this report. Where there are gaps, partners and organizations should work to find or develop resources that can be used with young people to fill in those gaps. **In our interviews with local program providers, we found some who were only focusing on career awareness and financial literacy but who thought they were providing job readiness training.** It is especially important that these organizations begin working with young people to understand and build their job readiness skills.

Youth providers should explicitly share the skills criteria with young people and use this as a tool during their job readiness training program. Ideally, any young person working in a program this summer would be able to point to their current skill level on the continuum. Some will intuitively know what they need to learn to get to the next level while others will need training or work experience to progress.

Provide training to all employers, so they are prepared to support young people as effectively as possible. Both HR team members and internship supervisors should attend training, so their expectations for the youth they are hiring are clear to each other and aligned with the tier of job they are offering. Training should be in-person, interactive, scenario-based, and cover the job skills continuum in detail as well as issues of implicit bias, code-switching, and how to be a great people manager.

Additional recommendations that may be actionable for summer 2018, but likely involve inter-agency coordination and/or additional staff time to research and develop:

The partners should consider using MHA Labs' youth performance evaluation, called the Hirability Assessment, and officially becoming a Working Impact city.¹⁰ The primary beneficiary would be youth program participants who would receive a structured performance evaluation from their supervisor. If supervisors complete this tool, they are then more likely to have a performance-related feedback conversation with their youth interns, which is a tremendous learning opportunity for young people. Additionally, the region would begin to develop a dataset linking MHA Labs' 12 key job readiness skills with hireability in our region. This would allow us to build data-based profiles of successful youth workers in different jobs, tiers, and industries. While MHA Labs may develop those profiles based on data from other cities, it is less likely to have an impact than if the (relatively simple) data analysis were rooted in information about our local economy.

¹⁰ <http://mhalabs.org/working-impact/>

Long-term recommendations aimed at increasing the quality of internship experiences and the sophistication of our youth job training system:

The partners should consider better alignment of their youth employment programming in order to simplify the entry points, handoffs, and quality of experiences for both youth and employers. This would include a coordinated website, application, jobs database, youth job readiness training expectations, and a coordinated effort to rally employer energy and engagement in youth job readiness experiences. We talked with at least two different youth providers who were providing programs at the stadiums. We talked with four youth providers who provide internships at Amazon. We talked to over a dozen youth providers who all have separate applications for their individually-sourced jobs. And yet none of these programs have enough size or scale that a young person who is currently disconnected could find a portal online and apply for summer youth employment experiences, they would always need to go through an entity or organization. As evidenced by the Chicago example, as well as programs in Boston, New York, LA, and many other cities, programs can retain their individuality yet still participate in some shared services that streamline the experience for youth and employers.

Provide more support to middle- and high schools in the region to begin working on job-readiness skills early, so more low-income students and students of color can access opportunities than currently are today. We know that most schools in the region work on career awareness (resume building and interviewing skills). We hope that more school counselors, Career & Technical Education teachers, Advisory teachers, and core academic teachers who talk about careers & employment will read this report and share the continuum with students. The partners could host workshops for teachers to build intersections between their curriculum and lesson plans and some of the job-readiness skills listed in this report.

Consider building out a regionally-recognized Job Readiness Certificate and corresponding assessment so motivated students can prove their skills to advance into higher-level jobs than they might otherwise be expected to qualify for, and also to demonstrate the importance of these job readiness skills. As noted in the report, the certificate or badge would be most meaningful if it is tied to preferential hiring in specific jobs or sectors and is an unbiased assessment of a young person's skills. This certificate would be useful in conjunction with a centrally-organized application and job matching system and would help to build energy for job readiness training in the region.



Appendices

Appendix A: Job Readiness Training Developmental Continuum

| | Career Development Jobs | Independent Jobs | Professional Internships |
|---|---|---|---|
| Skills needed to start this type of job | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can navigate traffic and transportation to arrive on time. Is able to adapt to different schedules on different days. Can follow a dress code. Has a positive attitude. Has a desire to be successful on the job. Gets along and works well with coworkers. Is able to follow directions and ask for clarification if needed. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arrives on time and is rarely absent without cause.* Can articulate the importance of getting work done on time. Appearance is professional, ie: matches the standard of others in this workplace. Actively looks for ways to help other people.* Actively looks for new tasks when own work is done.* Asks questions of supervisors or adult co-workers for clarification, context, and or general interest. Communicates professionally while doing main job tasks, as well as in a job interview. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows up early to some shifts and is ready to begin work on time. Is able to make independent decisions about how use time and complete tasks. Brings energy and enthusiasm to the workplace.* Exercises flexibility and willingness to be helpful in making necessary compromises to accomplish a common goal** Is able to choose appropriate communication style at all times - professionally, casually, and while making small-talk with co-workers, supervisors, and customers. |
| Skills learned in this type of job | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contacts supervisor when tardiness is possible. Is positive and enthusiastic. Takes responsibility for his or her actions and does not blame others.* Self-advocacy: is able to calmly talk to a supervisor or mentor about a desire or concern. Is able to (graciously) accept criticism.* Is able to receive constructive feedback. Is able to work with others to achieve a task. Is able to communicate professionally in this context - as adults do who are employed in this setting. This may include switching between casual and formal conversation styles. Unpacks problems into manageable parts (MHA). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates commitment through punctuality and dependable, consistent participation. Gets work done on time.* Manages time and does not procrastinate.* Stays calm, clearheaded, and unflappable under stress.* Is able to act professionally at the worksite all times, even on breaks. Uses personal technology only on breaks. Is able to articulate how this job fits into a trajectory of career development. Takes initiative - ie: chooses tasks to do without being asked. Demonstrates ability to work effectively and respectfully with diverse teams** Raises issues, concerns, or ideas that may affect work in the near or long-term future; is proactive. Is able to communicate professionally in multiple contexts - in 1:1 meetings, in group meetings, in informal settings. Recognizes and reports problems, devises and implements plans of action, and addresses problems before they arise. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tracks own time and reports hours honestly. Is able to articulate how specific skills learned in this job will be transferrable to other jobs / industries in the future. Has talked to one or more people in the workplace about serving as a mentor or a reference in the future. Assumes shared responsibility for collaborative work, and values the individual contributions made by each team member.** Is able to express personality while maintaining professionalism by fluidly switching between communication styles and between self-interests and interests of the team. Generates multiple potential solutions to problems.* Identifies new and more effective ways to solve problems.* Is able to make complex decisions: specifies goals and constraints, generates alternatives, and considers pros and cons of decisions. |

-  **Time Management + Punctuality**
-  **Professional Orientation**
Appearance, attire, attitude, demeanor, thinking about this job as part of a career trajectory
-  **Team work ethic**
Leadership
-  **Verbal communication**
Ability to ask questions, be proactive, and code-switch
-  **Problem-solving**
Critical thinking and decision making

Continuum created for the City of Seattle Office of Economic Development, Seattle Region Partnership, and King County by Rachel P. Klein, Consultant. May 2018. For more information, please visit <http://bit.ly/jrt-report-seattle-may2018>.

*Source: MHA Labs, mhalabs.org

**Source: P21 (Partnership for 21st Century Skills), p21.org

Additional items are inspired by tools created by Denver Public Schools, Juma Ventures, YouthForce, and Career LaunchPad.

Appendix B: Interview Contacts

Partners/Sponsors

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Sasha Gourevitch | Seattle Office of Economic Development |
| Michael Davie | Workforce Development Council of King County |
| Samara Reich-Thomas | King County |
| Paige Shevlin | King County |
| Alessandra Zielinski | Seattle Region Partnership |
| Suzanne Towns | Seattle Region Partnership |

Youth Providers

| | |
|---------------------|-------------------------|
| Joanne Bowditch | FareStart |
| Caitlin Cordell | Career LaunchPad |
| Melissa Jones | YouthForce |
| Mala Kessay | Seattle YMCA |
| Denise Johnson | PortJobs |
| Roslyn Kagy | Highline Public Schools |
| Mason Moore | Juma Ventures |
| Michelle Thomassian | Highline Public Schools |
| Makayla Wright | SOAR |

Employer Perspective

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Jackie Ivy | Seattle Region Partnership/Target |
| Tara James | Seattle Dept of Human Services |
| Darius Mensah | Educurious |
| Jaclyn Ng | Bloodworks NW |
| Javana Polenska | Educurious |
| Caitlin Spence | Educurious |
| Morgan Stonefield | ANEW |
| Debbie White | Seattle Department of Human Resources |
| Deena Pierott | Seattle Department of Human Resources and iUrbanTeen |

Other Cities

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Ever Hillebrand | LA Youth at Work |
| Jill Young | After School Matters |
| Samantha Deane | After School Matters |
| Kristine Madsen | UC Berkeley / Robert Wood Johnson Foundation |
| Dan Yao | One Summer Chicago |
| Vanessa Weatherington | Washington DC Office of Youth Programs |
| Selena Wilson | East Oakland Youth Development Corporation |
| Kristine Madsen | UC Berkeley / Robert Wood Johnson Foundation |

Focus Group Participants

Highline

Alejandra Barnes
Carson Godinez
Audry Bernal
Kelehua KaApana
Nefetina Bolin
Emily Kuhn
Brandyn Callier
Sonya Marano
Corvalli Wammer
Amin Shifow

King County/ReOpp

Pavielle Montes
Tori Felder
Tevin Gladney
Freda Crichton

Appendix C: Workshop Outline for Youth Providers

In our analysis for this report, we differentiated between “career awareness” skills and activities like resume writing and interviewing vs. job readiness skills like those noted in the continuum. Employers and youth both told us that career awareness skills had little to no effect on their ability to be successful in their first job or internship. As such, we have recommended that youth programs identify the amount of career awareness work that they do vs. job readiness training and discuss whether that’s the direction they want to be going in, or just where they’ve ended up. Below is an outline that facilitators can use to lead a workshop to help youth program leaders work through this exercise.

Workshop title: Job Readiness Training For Youth

Workshop Goal

- Participants will learn about the latest research on what skills are most critical for youth success in their first job or internship, and work through an activity to determine whether their current programming will effectively help youth learn those skills

Materials Required

- Participants should have access to or bring a copy of their job readiness curriculum, program schedules or agendas, activity plans, and/or promotional materials they use for their programming
- If participants do not have this written down, they should bring a written list of the skills they are trying to teach in their program. This should be pre-work and should be discussed in the invitation
- Copies of the Continuum of Job Readiness Skills for Youth for each participant

Room Organization

- People should sit with a co-worker from their same organization, ideally both a program manager or director and youth program leader or instructor

Time Required

- The program runs 1 hour and 40 mins
- Schedule workshop for 2 hours to accommodate a break and people who arrive late

Agenda

1. Introduction (10 mins)

- Introduce yourself
- Talk about the goal of this project: to ensure youth are successful in first jobs and internships
- Talk about the sources: youth themselves, MHA labs, other cities, employers
- Talk about the difference between career awareness and job readiness

2. Share continuum (25 mins)

- Ask participants to read it and talk to their partner: what do they notice about it? (5 mins)
- Ask for 2-3 people to share their insights (2 mins)

- Ask for questions of clarification (5 mins)
- Summarize YOUR insights, and the progressions through each of the 5 key skills (10 mins)

3. Program analysis work (60 mins)

- Participants have time to go through the skills they are focused on in their program and match against the developmental continuum or the list of career awareness (including financial literacy) skills. The group will spend the first section just collecting and analyzing the facts. After this, we will dig into how we feel about those facts.
- **Step 1: Discuss the following questions (15-20 mins):**
 - For each skill in our program, is it career awareness or job readiness? If job readiness, which category?
 - How much of your program time are you spending on career awareness vs. job readiness?
 - How deeply do you think young people have learned the skills after they work on them in your program? Is there a difference in their depth of knowledge on career awareness vs. job readiness skills?
 - For the students we're serving, do they have access to career awareness or job readiness training elsewhere?
 - After 15-20 mins, ask pairs to share insights with the other pairs at their tables (approximately 2-3 pairs per small group discussion) (10 mins)
- **Step 2: Make meaning of your analysis (15-20 mins):**
 - When young people leave our program, what are we expecting they will go and be able to do?
 - Are we happy with the balance of our focus? Are we spending more time on career awareness than we'd like? Less?
 - If we want to make a change, what is that change, and how might we go about it?
 - If we're happy with the balance, is there anything else we could do to make our program more effective?
- **Share out (10 mins): How many teams are...**
 - Happy with the balance they have?
 - Wanting to find more time for career awareness work?
 - Wanting to focus more on job readiness skills?
 - Ask 2-3 teams to share their insights with the group

4. Wrap up (5 mins):

- Thank everyone for their participation
- Share any reflections you have
- Exit ticket asks: what help do you need to take the next step in improving your program?

Appendix D: Employer Engagement

In several sections of this report, we noted areas where employer support and partnership is critical for youth success. This workshop helps employers have a more nuanced understanding of youth skill development and how they can help support career awareness and access for more students.

Workshop Goals

- Ensure alignment between the core set of job readiness skills and industry demand
- Employers leave with a more nuanced understanding of the core job readiness skills and how these skills progress as youth participate in more independent and professional jobs
- Employers leave with a more detailed understanding of the skills they expect young people to have when starting their jobs, as well as the skills they expect to develop while in those roles

Agenda (60 minutes):

1. Introduction (5 mins)

- Introduce yourself
- Talk about the goal of this project: to ensure youth are successful in first jobs and internships
- Talk about the sources: youth themselves, MHA labs, other cities, employers
- Talk about the difference between career awareness and job readiness, and the fact that we found the bulk of youth providers focusing on career awareness, not job readiness
- Talk about why employers should concern themselves with youth employment efforts:
- Ask the group, “why is your company motivated to help young people?”
 - Share these reasons, if not stated by others:
 - *Helps to build the talent pipeline in the region, and in your sector*
 - *Working with local public schools helps tap into a more diverse workforce than companies may currently have*
 - *It is a low-cost way to contribute to the community, and build employee engagement*

2. Share continuum (25 mins)

- Ask participants to read it and talk to their partner about the following questions (15 mins)
- Do these seem like the right core set of skills for jobs of increasing professionalism and across a variety of industries?
- Do you notice anything about the language used to describe these skills that you might not have thought about before?
- What skills might be missing that are important for all industries?
- What skills need to be added for our industry, specifically?

- Ask for 2-3 people to share their insights (2 mins)
- Ask for questions of clarification (5 mins)
- Summarize any insights that weren't mentioned, especially regarding the progressions through each of the five key skills (5 mins)

3. Program analysis work (20 mins)

- Participants have time to go through the job description for their program, or write one if they don't have one, and compare against the skills they expect young people to come with when hired, and develop while on the job (15 mins)
- **Outcome 1:** an updated job description, with clarity around skills to be developed
- **Outcome 2:** thoughts about how to hire youth to appropriately select for the skills that are required to start this job.
- **Outcome 3:** recommendations for job supervisors to:
 - a) Help them ensure young people are developing the skills outlined in Outcome 1
 - b) Ensure supervisors have the same expectations for youth and their development as the employers at this meeting have. This may lead to conversations about implicit bias, beliefs about young people today, and/or general ways to be a supportive people manager.

4. Share out (5 mins)

- Ask 2-3 teams to share their insights with the group

5. Wrap up (10 mins)

- Talk about the recommendation for employer training on working with youth, implicit bias, and how to be a good boss
- Reinforce the reasons why employer participation is critical:
 - Career awareness activities like field trips and internships help to encourage all young people—not just those from middle-class and wealthy families—have access to living-wage jobs in our region.
 - Career awareness activities help demystify jobs that aren't yet popularized via TV or movies, as well as jobs that may not seem accessible to women, students of color, students from low-income families, or other student groups.
 - Getting involved with your local schools and school districts allows true career-connected learning to happen. Find ways to partner with teachers, principals and their industry pathways, and work with them to create meaningful learning experiences.

Rachel Klein is a consultant based in Seattle, WA. She has been working toward more equitable outcomes for young people in America's schools for almost 20 years as a grantmaker, researcher, technologist, program director, and professional development leader. Rachel earned her B.A. at the University of Michigan and her M.P.P. at Harvard's Kennedy School. Learn more about her projects and community involvement at www.linkedin.com/in/rachelklein.

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