INTRODUCTION

In May 2015, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio and First Lady Chirlane McCray launched the Center for Youth Employment (CYE or the Center), a first-of-its-kind office charged with bringing coordination, focus, and rigor to expanding and strengthening programs that help young New Yorkers prepare for career success. CYE was given both a numerical and quality target. The numerical goal was to support at least 100,000 mentorships, jobs, and internships per year across all publicly funded youth workforce programs by 2020, up from about 62,000 at the time of its launch. The quality goal was to address several enduring challenges in the youth workforce ecosystem. These include increasing attention and resources for vulnerable populations; to improving employer engagement platforms and efforts; and to more effectively linking the City’s workforce development and education systems to more effectively help every young New Yorker build skills, gain work experience, and explore potential career paths.

CYE works to create meaningful change through policy advocacy, program design, partnership support, thought leadership, and resource development. Uniquely within the youth workforce ecosystem, CYE looks across subsystems, programs, funding streams, and subpopulations to identify and solve system failures and programming gaps. Intentionally positioned and privately resourced as a project of the nonprofit Mayor’s Fund to Advance New York City (Mayor’s Fund), CYE sits adjacent to but outside government. This allows CYE to bridge different agencies and offices within government, the private sector, philanthropy, and the service provider community.

CYE’s structure and organization reflects the conviction that building a functional system to effectively serve every young New Yorker requires close stakeholder coordination and collaboration. CYE works with leading employers to consider and support youth workforce programs through a lens not of altruism, but of self-interest: seeing these programs as a means toward building pipelines of diverse, homegrown, custom-trained talent.

Earlier this year, the Mayor’s Fund engaged Public Works Partners (PWP) to assess the Center’s approach, results to date, and potential new directions. Through a series of one-on-one interviews, focus groups, secondary source research, and data analysis, PWP has developed this short case study. As the following pages detail, PWP found that the Center is playing an outsized role driving growth and innovation within New York City’s youth workforce ecosystem, and is positioned to deliver change on a much larger scale in the years ahead.

To fulfill its charge, CYE had two primary tasks: bring more employers to the table, and more effectively organize and align system stakeholders to deliver “more and better” youth employment and related experiences. Emphasizing the value of youth workforce programs as a means to develop talent, CYE launched a first-of-its-kind employer recruitment campaign led by Mayor de Blasio and created seven sector-specific “Industry Funds.” Through these efforts, the Center has helped drive nearly 1,000 new employers to hire interns since its launch.

At the same time, CYE has begun the difficult but vital work of connecting stakeholders and programs into a more intentional, coherent, and effective youth workforce system. Working with a wide range of government and nonprofit partners, the Center has launched new initiatives to deliver summer programming that blends education and work-based learning (CareerCLUE), year-round services for high-need young adults (P3), and job retention and advancement supports for newly hired entry-level young adults (CareerLift). These innovative new programs begin to address longstanding gaps in services and hold potential for replication or scaling.

Already, CYE has helped drive a rethink of the City’s 55-year-old Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP). For the first time in 2016, SYEP incorporated the NYC Department of Education (DOE) into youth jobs programs at a significant scale. The CYE team has also begun to advance a collaborative approach toward the shared youth workforce development mission across multiple City agencies, helping to coordinate efforts to deliver better workforce programs for vulnerable youth in the shelter, foster, and juvenile justice systems.

This case study offers detail on CYE’s structure and role within the youth workforce ecosystem, highlights its achievements, and offers some reflections on lessons learned from the first three years of the Center, as well as possible next steps to build upon and further leverage its work.
CYE BY THE NUMBERS

CYE’s holistic perspective within the youth workforce field, and flexibility to tailor its role to fit the needs of a particular initiative, positions the Center to identify pain points within the system to create needed change. CYE does so by playing five distinct roles: catalyst, advocate, connector, agenda-setter, and capacity builder.

10
Launched 10 new programs.

$40 MILLION
Directed almost $40 million in new government grants, public dollars, and private and philanthropic donations to support career exploration activities.

1,000
Engaged almost 1,000 new employers to hire interns.

109,264
Supported the growth of internship, employment, and mentorship placements in New York City from 62,000 in FY15 to an anticipated 109,264 in FY18—two years ahead of the original target.
CATALYST
CYE promotes innovation in the youth workforce field. For example, in partnership with local intermediary JobsFirstNYC and national nonprofit Social Finance, CYE recently launched CareerLift. Operated by Seedco and Madison Strategies Group, this philanthropically funded initiative supports newly hired young adults with services that help them stay employed and advance in their careers. The project also evaluates employer turnover costs and return on investment in retention services, with an eye toward developing a potential third-party payor model that could dramatically shift how workforce services are financed.

ADVOCATE
CYE advocates on behalf of youth employment programs, both within City government and among the City’s most prominent employers and philanthropists. CYE regularly engages stakeholders across private and public sectors to support new initiatives through financial contributions, thought partnership, and direct work with youth. With the Mayor’s Fund and the Mayor’s Office of Strategic Partnerships, CYE also helped spearhead two city-wide campaigns for high quality internships in 2017 and 2018, calling upon employers to hire summer interns—leading to hundreds of new employers engaged.

AGENDA-SETTER
CYE frequently serves as a critical thought partner to agency staff, spotting challenges both within and across programs. For the most part, City agencies focus on managing current programs and contracts, leaving limited bandwidth to reflect on thoughtful and creative reforms to ongoing programs. CYE team members help agencies address that need by providing perspective, research, and reflections on changes that can help scale, improve, or connect existing or new programs. In this role, CYE helped shape the 2017 Youth Employment Task Force Final Report, which proposed sweeping changes to SYEP and closer links between classroom learning and work experience. The Center also worked closely with the City University of New York (CUNY), the DOE, DYCD, and the Human Resources Administration (HRA) to ensure that programs serving the same population more intentionally connect across agencies and funding streams.

CONNECTOR
With at least seven City agencies involved in youth workforce development—and none singularly responsible for it—youth employment programs frequently operate in silos. CYE creates linkages between these agencies to develop new programming that closes gaps and leverages the partners’ respective strengths. Two examples are CareerCLUE (Community Learning, Understanding, and Experience), a school-based summer enrichment model that blends for-credit academics, career exploration, and paid work experience; and the New York City Performance Partnership Pilot (P3), a “two-generation” approach that serves Opportunity Youth (young adults ages 18-24 who are neither in school nor working) parents and their young children through a federal grant that CYE and DYCD jointly developed and secured.

CAPACITY BUILDER
CYE works with stakeholders to share knowledge and resources needed to successfully implement new programs with City personnel, service providers, and employers. In 2016, CYE published the Employer Best Practices Playbook to share success strategies of businesses that utilize interns. Later this year, in partnership with DYCD and the Hetrick-Martin Institute, CYE will release a best practices manual to help youth employment providers develop inclusive and affirming programming for LGBTQ youth accessing workforce services.
CYE has undertaken a diverse array of initiatives to support its vision of an integrated youth workforce system. Three in particular illustrate the impact of CYE’s innovative approach on the larger youth workforce ecosystem.
SUPPORTING HIGHER QUALITY SUMMER JOB OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP), administered by the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD), provides New York City youth between the ages of 14 and 24 with paid summer employment for up to six weeks in July and August. These work experiences help youth to gain valuable work skills and employers to add capacity while helping to shape the future workforce. Historically, low employer participation and funding constraints have limited DYCD’s ability both to serve the number of youth interested in SYEP and ensure a varied and developmentally appropriate range of stimulating work placements in growing sectors.

CYE focused on two SYEP service options—Vulnerable Youth (VY) and Ladders for Leaders. The emphasis on VY stems from CYE’s founding mandate to provide more and better work experiences for high-need youth. Meanwhile, the focus on Ladders stems from the sense that employers would be most responsive to the Ladders cohort, a group of academically high-achieving young people—and thus more receptive to CYE’s core premise that firms should consider youth employment programs from a perspective of self-interest, rather than altruism.

CYE and the Mayor’s Fund engaged in intensive employer engagement and resource development to dramatically increase support for high-quality, developmentally appropriate work experiences. CYE moved to boost employer participation in Ladders in 2016 by establishing seven “Industry Funds” to support high-quality internships in high-growth sectors. Working through City offices, industry intermediaries, or trade groups such as the Real Estate Board of NY and NYC & Co., the initiative leverages donations from larger companies to offer youth industry-specific enrichment activities and subsidize smaller companies’ ability to host interns. This approach supports development of a motivated, work-ready talent pool in each industry and ensures greater variety in available placements. Since 2015, CYE and the Mayor’s Fund have directed $8 million to Ladders for Leaders and added 453 new employers to its roster. As a result, Ladders for Leaders participation spiked from 475 youth in 2014 to 1,855 in 2017—an almost 400 percent increase. The Industry Funds’ mission has since expanded to support high quality internships with DOE and CUNY programs as well.

CYE pursued a similar strategy to support the Vulnerable Youth cohort, raising over $800,000 in philanthropic and private sector donations and identifying new public funds to leverage. One hundred sixty-five new employers have come on board since CYE’s establishment, and program participation has grown from 1,000 youth in 2015 to 3,170 in 2017.
BLENDING EDUCATION AND CAREER EXPLORATION TO CREATE MORE DYNAMIC LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

PROBLEM STATEMENT
While public education and youth workforce programming have typically operated independently in New York City, many practitioners recognize that integrating learning in the classroom and employment experiences can have compounding positive effects for youth.

STRATEGY & RESULTS
In collaboration with the DOE and other partners, and in keeping with the recommendations of the 2017 Youth Employment Task Force Final Report, CYE leveraged its expertise to develop new program models that enhance career exploration inside and outside of the classroom. For example, CYE, the Mayor’s Fund and the DOE Fund for Public Schools raised $250,000 to launch CareerCLUE, starting with three pilot high schools in 2016. CYE played a lead role in designing the new summer program, which blends classroom instruction with site visits and supervised projects to help young high school students gain exposure to the workplace and consider their career path in a supportive, structured environment. In 2017, DOE and CYE expanded the program to eight schools; in 2018, CareerCLUE will be integrated into a new “school-based” option within SYEP, with 14 schools and up to 420 students participating.

CYE helped design or support other projects that similarly bridge classroom and workplace to grow the number of career exploration opportunities. For example, the Career and Technical Education (CTE) Industry Scholars Program, developed in close collaboration with the Partnership for New York City, offers CTE students high-quality internships directly related to their studies that are available during the academic year.

These efforts have brought greater focus to opportunities that integrate classroom and on-the-job learning. Reflecting on CYE’s contribution to the workforce field, Per Scholas’ New York Managing Director Kelly Richardson commented: “Perhaps most important is a clearer link between publicly funded secondary and postsecondary education and career services. Workforce development in NYC has a history of being fractured and disconnected from publicly funded education, and CYE is starting to repair that.”
Vulnerable youth, such as those involved in the justice, foster care or homeless shelter systems, face a unique set of challenges when pursuing education and career opportunities. Many either struggle to access employment at all or find themselves funneled into low-wage jobs with no clear path forward.

Across several programs, CYE fostered coordination among agencies to integrate the necessary support services into workforce programming. This ensures not only that more vulnerable youth would be served (see above), but that they could consistently participate in and reap the benefits of youth workforce activities.

CYE and DYCD jointly created and co-lead a monthly Vulnerable Youth intergovernmental working group. The group, which includes the NYC Administration for Children's Services (ACS), NYC Department of Homeless Services, the NYC Department of Probation, and the DOE, works internally to engage the nonprofit community to refine career exploration program structures and better account for the barriers that high-need youth typically face. These meetings strengthen information sharing and coordination among agencies, and enables the team to develop resources like the “VY Handbook,” which helps orient new agency staff to better serve participating youth.

The working group grappled with the challenges associated with recruiting youth to participate in VY summer jobs, with required documentation—such as working papers—one oft-cited barrier. CYE engaged the Mayor's Office of Operations to expedite nonprofit providers' access to the needed documentation, found new public dollars in partnership with the Young Men's Initiative and the Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity (NYC Opportunity) for agencies to bring on new staff to assist with participant and employer recruitment, and worked with DYCD to create a referral tracking system to facilitate interagency coordination.

CYE also partnered with DYCD, ACS, nonprofit provider Opportunities for a Better Tomorrow, NYC Opportunity, and the Children's Cabinet to successfully secure federal funding for a Performance Partnership Pilot (P3) program grant, which supported a newly launched initiative to help teen parents with childcare while they earn their high school equivalency degree and prepare for the workforce.

CYE's involvement helps agency staff to think beyond day-to-day operations and consider how to raise the quality of services for vulnerable youth on a broader scale. One participant in the Vulnerable Youth SYEP working group noted: “These relationships were in place before CYE came on board, but CYE streamlined processes and made sure the [necessary] conversations took place more frequently.”
In the three years since its launch, the Center for Youth Employment has learned from its setbacks as well as its successes. These lessons, drawn from conversations with CYE staff and stakeholders, will help inform the organization’s work going forward.

✔️ The challenge is less about fixing programs than building a system.

CYE has long described its mission as delivering “more and better” youth employment. Having achieved its original mandate—to offer more than 100,000 career exposure opportunities per year across all programs and put a spotlight on quality through new program models and supporting evaluations—CYE’s understanding of its role has evolved to emphasize connectivity and consistency within the ecosystem, adding “together” to “more and better.” Without appropriate transition supports and infrastructure, even high-quality programs can fail to move the needle for youth.

✔️ Culture change takes time.

From its outset, CYE pledged to raise the quantity and quality of employer relationships within the youth workforce system. Through Industry Funds, a public media campaign, and direct outreach, the Center effectively communicated that self-interest should guide how employers interact with the public system, helping to recruit hundreds of new employers. CYE has successfully pushed a similar message within City government: that workforce programs are most effective serving youth when they also solve problems for employers, from adding short-term capacity to filling long-term talent pipelines. But CYE and its partners are still working towards a transformed system that immediately and effectively addresses employers’ concerns—including the mismatch between candidates’ skills and their own hiring needs, slow response time from government, and a plethora of uncoordinated requests from providers—and empower them to serve as public champions for these programs.

✔️ Work across institutions to make change within them.

CYE initially focused on working primarily with specific institutional partners and existing programs. Over time, CYE concluded that a more effective approach was to identify gaps between programs and subsystems, and attempt to build “solution coalitions” with multiple stakeholders within and beyond government to address them. Surfacing collective challenges, such as how to create developmentally appropriate work experiences for 14-15 year olds or better coordinating in support of vulnerable youth, helps agencies and other partners share the burden of changing policies. In turn, this gives partnering institutions a stronger incentive to consider needed reforms.
Over its first three years, CYE made strides in creating new linkages between government, philanthropy, nonprofit providers, advocates, and private sector stakeholders to support youth workforce programming. Diverse entities praise CYE as a navigator of complex relationships and a catalyst of innovation - and are calling for the Center to more fully embrace this role in its future.

Based on stakeholder feedback, the following are potentially three areas of further focus for the Center as it seeks to accelerate the work of building a functional system that delivers value for young New Yorkers and employers.
The success of CareerCLUE illustrates the value that integrating education and workforce programming can offer youth. CYE intends to implement this concept on a much larger scale.

In the last several years, the CUNY, DOE, and DYCD all have announced major reform initiatives focused largely or in part on career readiness. CYE is working with these partners, as well as the Mayor’s Office, employers, service providers, advocates, and funders, to align these initiatives within a coherent youth development and career readiness framework that guides youth from adolescence through early adulthood toward career success. Shared employer engagement and more robust information exchange across providers, schools, and City agencies will reinforce the system reform—and make it easier for employers to engage with government and providers.

To that end, one service provider suggested a larger coordinating role for the Center going forward. “CYE could serve as a convener across youth-serving public and private agencies to better coordinate asks of employers, streamline services across and between programming, create a single intake process to refer students to appropriate program/service options, and remove inefficiencies and duplications in program processes and services” across agencies and funding streams.

The challenge of “Opportunity Youth”—young adults ages 18 to 24 who are neither in school nor working—highlights a system failure that carries enormous consequences for both youth themselves and communities across the five boroughs. Building upon its efforts to better serve vulnerable youth and leveraging its ties to funders, advocates, and providers beyond government, CYE is particularly well positioned to help the City address this issue. CYE can engage its stakeholder partners to coordinate a comprehensive plan to reduce the number of Opportunity Youth, building upon the excellent programs with experienced staff already serving this population. By leveraging its fundraising capacity and institutional knowledge gained through programs like SYEP, P3, and CareerLift, CYE should continue to invest in proven strategies. Moving forward, the Center should identify ways to enhance initiatives like the Out-of-School Youth model operated by DYCD and the collaborative program models developed by external partners such as JobsFirstNYC. The Center can also work more closely with City agency partners such as HRA and the Department of Small Business Services to help them serve 16 to 24 year olds at risk of disconnection with culturally and developmentally appropriate program interventions.

Building on its success convening specific stakeholders in existing collaborations, CYE can strengthen its role as conduit between stakeholders. For example, CYE can gather employer perspective on issues impacting the early career labor pool and communicate this information to decision-makers in City government. Sharing information in the other direction, CYE can help shape a more integrated public narrative regarding the benefits employers accrue in bringing youth into their companies, serving to demystify New York City’s massive—and frequently, for outsiders, confusing and frustrating—public workforce system.

CYE has an opportunity to systematically convene stakeholders and institutionalize communication mechanisms. With a platform to join representatives from the employer, service provider, advocate, and funder communities, as well as every City agency involved in youth workforce, CYE can help New York City advance beyond day-to-day coordination to facilitate long-term, collaborative planning.
The following individuals generously gave their time and shared insights to help inform this case study through interviews, focus groups, or survey responses. PWP and CYE are grateful for their participation.

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