

PROMISING PRACTICES IN YOUNG ADULT EMPLOYMENT

HANDS-ON MULTIDISCIPLINARY CAREER EXPLORATION AND MENTORSHIPS

Supported by the National Fund for Workforce Solutions | By Stacey Wagner

As the numbers of young adults disconnected from the workforce continue to rise, the National Fund for Workforce Solution's Young Adult Initiatives aim to test and implement new strategies for targeting America's young adults.

Starting in 2013 with the Youth/Industry Partnership Initiative (YIPI), the National Fund has funded the development and evaluation of innovative methods aimed at targeting and engaging America's young adults.

The Young Adult Initiatives are:

- › Identifying effective methods in connecting young adults to industry partnerships;
- › Describing the characteristics of effective partnerships between employers and education and training providers; and
- › Cultivating a network of top employers experienced in recruiting young adults and sharing with them the National Fund's best practices for young adult recruitment.

The National Fund's Young Adult Initiatives ultimately seek to develop a deep understanding of how industry partnerships and employers most effectively engage young adults, and share this information so that employers and workforce development collaboratives across the country can access the potential of and invest in the millions of young adults across the nation.

A number of National Fund collaboratives have begun creating and implementing young adult workforce strategies and some are already seeing results. The practices presented here represent some of those burgeoning successes. It is expected that these successes (and other projects similar to these) will benefit from the new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Youth Program, which requires that, by 2016, 75 percent of workforce board youth funding be spent on out-of-school youth. Additionally, 20 percent of youth formula funds must support paid and unpaid work such as internships. This public funding in support of out-of-school youth, paired with the support of the philanthropic community, such as the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation, will catalyze improvements in public/private initiatives for these youth, and in the communities where they live.

MILWAUKEE'S TECH TERN MODEL

A multidisciplinary career exploration program that provides urban youth workforce **readiness, academic skills, hands-on training, and career exploration** across multiple disciplines including health care, architecture, engineering, and construction.

Four commonalities make Milwaukee's Tech Tern (technical internship) approach to youth-focused career awareness and employment replicable:

1. Workforce development aligned with economic development
2. Industry partnerships engaged in on-the-job training, internships, and apprenticeships
3. Enhanced teaching methods based on new requisite skills and employer demands
4. Industry partnerships and education and training providers working together to engage students in a talent pipeline (with multiple talent options).

These components are specific to this project. Other communities that wish to engage young adults in employment-related activities such as internships, mentorships, on-the-job-training, and apprenticeships will face their own specific challenges in terms of political, economic, social and cultural environments. However, in spite of idiosyncratic local conditions, this model is applicable to the communities that choose to invest in it, and the initiative described here is considered successful by its partners.

The Milwaukee Area Workforce Funding Alliance Collaborative

The Milwaukee Area Workforce Funding Alliance (the Alliance) is a consortium of private and public funders of workforce development (including education, job training and placement, and support services) dedicated to increasing employment that benefits both businesses that need skilled workers and individuals seeking good jobs with family-supporting wages. The collaborative's goals include advocating for policies that sustain effective workforce partnerships, strengthening and expanding the workforce system by leveraging local investments, building the capacity of the workforce system, improving career advancement opportunities for low-income individuals, and helping employers get the skilled workers they need.

Program Purpose and Goals

One of the Milwaukee Area Workforce Funding Alliance's members, Froedert Hospital, has always had a commitment to the community that is reflected in the collective vision of the Alliance. As part of their own initiative to increase the number of diverse suppliers with whom they work, Froedert helped create Tech Terns, which is a multidisciplinary career exploration program that provides workforce readiness, academic skills, hands-on training, and career exploration across multiple disciplines including health care, architecture, engineering, and construction. The driving principle of this initiative was that it be industry led, provide real-world learning experiences, have active mentorships, and take place within the local community.

The partners for the Tech Terns program were:

- › Froedert Health and the Medical College of Wisconsin
- › CannonDesign (architecture firm)
- › Mortenson Construction
- › Milwaukee Public Schools/Bradley Tech High School
- › WRTP/BIG STEP (nonprofit training provider)

Project Elements

The public-private partnership collaboration for wide-lens career exploration took place via a construction project, the Center for Advanced Care at Froedert & the Medical College of Wisconsin. The project includes the design and execution of the state-of-the-art vascular center, transplant center and integrated rooms for surgeries, and other procedures for Froedert Health and the Medical College of Wisconsin. The building (610,000 square feet) is located in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin. This project was a unique opportunity to present career awareness and on-the-job training for local high school students interested in designing and building things, as well as for the business and education partners involved in the project, in which new partnerships between education and industry were started. It was expected to:

- › Help create a pipeline of ready talent for future employment in the region
- › Demonstrate the kinds of careers available "in industry"
- › Provide real world experiences of jobs
- › Eliminate stereotypes of both jobs and industries

- › Showcase various credentialed workers (e.g., “work-to-learn”, apprentices, two-year degrees, four-year degrees and Master’s degrees)
- › Model an industry-education partnership

Project Activities

The mentorship project with the Bradley Tech students lasted two and a half years and included 11 day-long on-site sessions. There were 18 male students, most of whom were African American of low income, urban backgrounds. Throughout, the students had opportunities to learn how and why things are constructed, how academic education enables that and what, exactly, professionals do in their jobs. They also received mentoring from the partners on a two-to-one basis, so that at any given time outside the classroom, two partner organizations were mentoring a youth.

The students learned firsthand how to design and construct a building. This included designing mechanical, electrical, and plumbing components, including a cardiac unit. CannonDesign’s team explained what an interior designer does, why it matters (functionality), and what materials might be used for different types of buildings. Students toured a steel shop and learned how steel is bent, and how technology is used in design and construction. They learned about building codes and what they are used for, how to calculate a volume of dirt, and got a chance to operate an excavator, among many other activities. The young adults thus got to see what is involved at every stage of conception and construction.

WHAT WORKED

Business Champions

Getting “business buy-in” wasn’t an issue in this program as the project was initiated by businesses, specifically Froedert Health, CannonDesign, and Mortenson Construction. Together, they outlined the plan and then explained their business’s involvement to their C-suites. The CEOs wholeheartedly supported the project and its expected outcomes. Initially, they thought this program could be easily expanded to solve the region’s skills gaps in design and construction, but in the end, they settled for helping develop a tangible, successful set of career pathways for urban youth. Solving the region’s skills gaps will require additional partners and dedication from more stakeholder organizations.

The Learning Mirror

It turns out that, in this case, learning went two ways. The professionals found the students intelligent, creative and enjoyable, and learned that their original preconceptions of the kids were misguided as the students demonstrated hard work, focus, and dedication. The students thrived on the “doing” part of the program and wanted to know more with every visit. And the students realized what real world jobs were like and how academics play a big part in job success, even if you aren’t sitting in an office. The class valedictorian at Bradley Tech participated in Tech Terns and most Tech Tern students received honors in various disciplines. Compared to their high school classmates, the Tech Terns had among themselves, a higher GPA (one grade above average), nine percent better attendance, and three-point higher ACT scores.

Finally, employment no longer seemed as out-of-reach as it had before for these urban youth, as many earned summer jobs and internships at design, construction, and health care firms. Additionally, some received scholarships to postsecondary education institutions such as Morehouse, University of Wisconsin-Madison, and University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. All but one of the 18 participating students graduated from high school, and all felt the program to be a significant component of their education.

Lessons from the Partnership

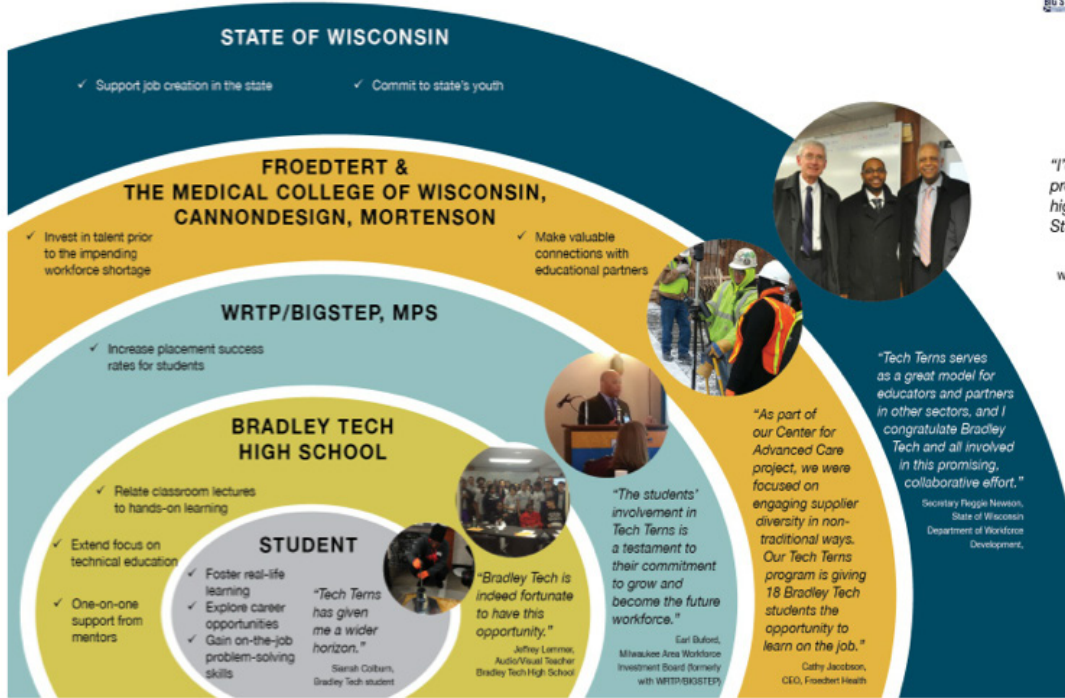
These tips should help other programs of this kind from reinventing the wheel:

- › When working with young adults, remember that the learning context needs to include hands-on, experiential lessons that tie back to academic work.
- › When designing the program, ensure that the partners each fulfill a specific role and make sure each partner knows what that role is.
- › If the partnership starts from employer demands, it will be more successful than if academia or community-based organizations put together a program and then try to get employers to participate.

At A Glance

PARTNERS	COMMITMENTS FROM PARTNER	CHALLENGES FACED AND OVERCOME	PROJECT ELEMENTS
Froedert/Medical College of Wisconsin	<p>To inclusion and supplier diversity</p> <p>To growing the next generation of employees for health care and for Milwaukee</p> <p>To mentor the program's youth</p>	<p>The challenges were cross-cutting among the partners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › How to get alignment, support, and buy-in from the building's owner in spite of perceived and real liabilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Help create a pipeline of ready talent for future employment in the region › Demonstrate the kinds of careers available "in industry"
CannonDesign	<p>From the top of the company</p> <p>To preparing urban, low income students for careers in high-demand professions and skilled trades</p> <p>To working with Bradley Tech</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › How to get internal approval in the partner businesses from the C suite › No model to follow › Considered dangerous work › Businesses are not educators per se 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Provide real world experiences of jobs › Eliminate stereotypes of both jobs and industries › Showcase various credentialed workers (e.g., "work-to-learn", apprentices, two-year degrees, four-year degrees and Master's degrees)
Mortenson	<p>To proactively address the declining workforce in the construction industry</p> <p>To provide real world exposure for high school students</p> <p>To improve diversity for the Milwaukee Area construction industry</p> <p>To instill a passion for construction and hire those individuals who have it</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › How to develop a partnership with teachers to reinforce classroom learning › How to develop partnerships to pay for basics such as hard hats, boots, transportation, etc. › Identifying students willing to make a "long-term" commitment to the project while they are in school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Model an industry-education partnership
MPS and Bradley Tech High School WRTP/BIG STEP	<p>To provide transportation, coordination, equipment and permissions for the students</p> <p>To tie on-site learning to the classroom curriculum</p> <p>To ensure firsthand exposure to jobs to inform expectations</p>		

VALUE OF TECH TERNS PROGRAM



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