

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT SUMMER:

**Crisis Response and Lessons for
the Future of Collective Action
and Work-based Learning**

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**STUDENT SUCCESS
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Executive Summary

This report shares findings from the Youth Empowerment Summer, a collective action effort led by ExpandedED Schools, Beam Center, and Hive NYC Learning Network that mobilized in 2020 during the onset of Covid-19. Facing the abrupt elimination of the largest youth employment program in the United States—New York City’s Summer Youth Employment Program—a rapid response ecosystem of advocates, educators, community leaders, and youth activists mobilized to take action. Together, they worked to create conditions that provided the city’s most vulnerable youth with robust work-based learning experiences during a period of uncertainty, precarity, and unprecedented need.

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Over the course of the spring and summer of 2020, the YES coalition engaged in a wide range of efforts, each responding to distinct problems that evolved over the course of this period. Budget cuts spurred collaborative advocacy and mobilization of stakeholders to collectively envision, and influence, what a restored city program might look like. As some form of funding restoration became increasingly likely, the coalition shifted, coordinating actors across sectors to help build infrastructure within and around a wholly new, remote, City program. This effort included raising over \$2 million in funds to support collective impact work, with over \$1 million distributed to 55 rapid response partnerships that resourced City-contracted organizations with curriculum, training, and programmatic placements for youth. Across these partnerships, novel approaches to remote work-based learning were put in place to provide over 11,500 learning experiences for youth. These approaches aimed to simultaneously meet the social and emotional needs of living in a global pandemic while also supporting equitable youth futures through career-oriented learning.

The research effort, co-led by Student Success Network and Telos Learning, conducted a mixed method study to capture and analyze this broad range of activities. We gathered data focused on the experiences of youth, educators, organizational leaders, coalition leaders and partners, advocates, and municipal actors, through interviews, program site visits, focus groups, observations of professional convenings, surveys, and organizational documentation. The research team then analyzed data to address two lines of inquiry: The first related to **the nature and impacts of the collective action**

coalition, and the second related to the kinds of **pedagogies and youth development practices in remote work-based learning programs** enacted as part of partnerships supported by YES to serve youth.

FINDINGS: COLLECTIVE ACTION AND RAPID RESPONSE

The study's analysis of collective action and rapid response efforts focuses in two areas. The first is the formation of the YES coalition (Chapter 2), which explores the conditions that shaped and enabled collective action, tensions that emerged in this process, and lessons learned. The second evaluates the impacts of the YES coalition (Chapter 3) around its focal goals of advocacy, policy influence and coordination, and supplemental support for policy implementation.

Coalition formation

The study found that the YES coalition—made up of youth-serving organizations, advocacy groups, intermediary networks, private funders, and teen activists—emerged in relation and response to a number of interwoven factors. The crisis context of Covid-19 that instigated a move to remote learning across New York City's education systems and the subsequent elimination of funding for the city's Summer Youth Employment Program each played central roles in spurring stakeholders to take coordinated action in the youth development and work-based learning sectors. However, a number of other factors intervened as well. Critically, the nature of the City's budgeting process created a long period of uncertainty as to the status of the City program and questions around the degree to which it would be restored,

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creating a vacuum to be filled when it came to youth-serving organizations seeking clarity and stability around planning for summer learning opportunities. Meanwhile, the racial justice uprisings of the early summer of 2020 contributed more urgency around municipal programs focused on community investment, adding fuel to the advocacy messages the coalition was rooted in.

While these external factors certainly created urgency, a collective and coordinated response was not inevitable. Retrospective analysis highlighted how the wide and deep existing relationships within the youth development and work-based learning sectors in the city, made possible centrally by intermediary organizations with strong networks, acted as foundational social fabric from which the coalition formed. These relationships and the trust they entailed, combined with the degree of urgency inherent in the crisis, enabled a swift, adaptive, and ambitious response. Speed and early action within an intentionally developed coalition of well-connected actors led to information sharing, which contributed to the group's capacity to subsequently identify and adapt to shifting problems. And the coalition's utilization of collaborative routines that enabled large-scale contribution from diverse actors across the field led to broad-based alignment around key goals, forming a stable focus for collective work.

However, this process of coalition formation was not without challenges. The study found two tensions, in particular, that presented risks to the possibility of both effective and equitable collective action. The first related to the challenges of simultaneously advocating for restoration of City funding while also aiming to influence how

a restored City program would be structured. Perceptions that organizations represented by coalition leaders would disproportionately benefit from the ways in which restored funding might be structured—suspicions that financial self interest was at play—were ultimately navigated, but highlight the challenges associated with organizational positionality and its role in coalition building.

The second tension related to the delicate and complex dynamics of intergenerational advocacy in a high stakes and fast-paced environment. In that the YES coalition embraced collaboration between adult and youth advocates in multiple areas of its work, it had to navigate how to represent youth perspectives in contexts where they were not always able to be present. Retrospective analysis showed unique and even rare degrees of adult/youth collaboration within the coalition; youth leaders participated in planning and decision-making contexts that seldom include them. This collaboration was characterized by respect and deep valuation of youth perspectives and interests by adult allies, but careful attention was required to not misrepresent their perspectives, highlighting the need for increased intentionality around and sensitivity to dynamics of power within intergenerational coalitions.

Broadly, the dynamics of YES's coalition formation offer insights into how crisis can create a window of opportunity for change in terms of who sets priorities, and how, and highlights possibilities for how inclusive, community-based processes of coalition development can coexist with the values of speed, creativity, and alignment in moments of urgency.

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Impacts of collective action

YES acted as a civic coalition, representing a unique blend of existing collective action models, and drawing on elements of emergency response, collaborative advocacy, collective impact, community-based participatory design, and peer-led open learning networks. Therefore, we characterize the effort as a “rapid response ecosystem” that leveraged a wide array of collective action interventions in response to distinct and shifting problems, each aiming to address those goals that were most pressing at different points in the course of the spring and summer of 2020.

In evaluating the impacts of the YES coalition, the study examined the “stabilized” lines of activity following its formation period, which included: (1) advocacy for funding restoration,

(2) instructional policy influence, (3) instructional policy coordination, and (4) instructional policy implementation support.

YES’s work to restore funds for the City’s youth employment program utilized models of **collaborative advocacy**, spanning groups that represented SYEP providers, community-based informal learning organizations, and teen activists. The coalition worked to align core messages across these actors, employed a high-powered lobbying firm to help set advocacy strategy, supported public awareness via press and social media, engaged in direct messaging to municipal actors and representatives, and, in particular, elevated the role and perspectives of teen leaders across these activities.

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The ultimate outcome of these advocacy efforts—the restoration of partial funding and introduction of a modified City program in the form of “SYEP Summer Bridge”—can be considered a qualified success. From a policy perspective, full funding restoration had been unlikely, given the significant barriers presented by the Covid-19 pandemic and the political dynamics surrounding the New York City budget. The City program that was ultimately implemented reflected many of the policy goals of the restoration effort, and was a measurably more desirable outcome than youth being engaged in no program, with no stipends, at all. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge the degree of austerity and reduction of public services implicit in this outcome—a shift from serving 75,000 students to 35,000 students—in order to keep a broader perspective on what was, and was not, achieved with regard to policy funding restoration.

In parallel to efforts to restore funding through advocacy, the YES coalition aimed to engage in **policy influence** vis-a-vis the possibility of a restored City program, and worked to do so by engaging coalition members in community-based participatory design. In an explicit acknowledgement that the instructional policy from previous years—one centered on in-person placements of teens in workplaces—was not going to be viable within the pandemic context, YES worked to articulate a possible instructional vision that could ground an alternative program. Taking a “big tent” approach, it deliberately brought together groups of organizations that were intended to be representative of the youth development and work-based learning fields, putting in place multiple participation structures, including a smaller design committee of over a

dozen organizations and a larger advisory group in which representatives from over 100 organizations participated. This approach was part of an effort to establish YES as a coalition that could achieve consensus among diverse organizations during a time of volatility.

The aligned vision for what a restored program could look like that was articulated by the coalition—one that departed from traditional work placements and emphasized career-oriented Project Based Learning, following the precedent set by SYEP policy in 2019—was ultimately quite similar to what the Summer Bridge program ended up looking like. While the study was not able to assess the precise degree to which YES’s attempts to influence SYEP Summer Bridge instructional policy had a direct impact, the target youth outcomes put forth by YES and the official outcomes of Summer Bridge were nearly identical, with some small differences in emphasis. Beyond this qualified success, the work to align the broader coalition around a collectively articulated model gave actors in the ecosystem a critical extended window in which to understand and begin planning for the likely programmatic priorities. This played a stabilizing role during a period when funding status for the program was in flux and when, as a result, official policy guidance was absent.

A third line of activity YES engaged in was **coordination of policy infrastructure**, in particular, aiming to promote trisector collaboration with the technology industry in order to support a new instructional element—Workplace Challenges—that would be part of Summer Bridge. Workplace Challenges represented a pedagogical approach wherein groups

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of youth were given a “challenge” by industry professionals and worked to create a solution that would be shared with the professionals. Since there was no direct precedent for this element of the City program, YES supported relationships and aligned partners who turned out to be key to its implementation. In particular, YES connected with Tech:NYC, a consortium of technology companies in the city, helped orient it to the specifics of what its role would entail, and connected it to City actors. Additionally, the coalition funded technical assistance and curriculum development efforts that ended up becoming an element of official guidance distributed to providers around this element of Summer Bridge.

The final element of the coalition’s work focused on **instructional policy implementation support**, a set of efforts that were wholly independent of, but aligned with, the official Summer Bridge program infrastructure put in place by the City. By the time SYEP Summer Bridge was announced, SYEP providers had 26 days before they would begin their programs with youth. This period was a flurry of preparation for implementation. In a final set of activities, YES sought to support providers in meeting the requirements of Summer Bridge instructional policy through funding of aligned supplemental partnerships, support for partnership formation and brokerage, and development of a peer-led, decentralized professional learning community during the program period.

Core to these support activities was the creation of a fund and associated request for proposals (RFP). The YES coalition ultimately provided over \$1 million in funding to 36 partners that would

provide curriculum, technical assistance, and virtual Project Based Learning sites that could be leveraged by SYEP providers. While providers have historically leveraged external partners of this sort, YES formalized this practice by developing an infrastructure for identification of these “content partners,” ensuring they were aligned to policy, and then creating mechanisms for partnership formation. YES supported a total of 55 partnerships across 42 organizations, including just shy of one third (n=19) of SYEP providers that participated in Summer Bridge. Of these 55 partnerships, 65 percent (n=36) were attributed to utilization of YES brokerage mechanisms, and all but one of them (98 percent) reported that they would either “probably” or “definitely” continue beyond the summer, pointing to a more long-term outcome around development of field-level social capital.

In working to support these partnerships, YES developed a decentralized peer-led professional learning community that gathered through a series of virtual convenings held twice-weekly during the period of program implementation in July and August 2020. Spanning six weeks, this included 12 convenings, which most often attracted supervisor-level staff, and averaged approximately 30 attendees. Study data suggested an overall positive orientation towards these structures, and the study found numerous examples of community members actively bringing back lessons to colleagues within their organizations or adopting tactics or practices shared during the convenings. More broadly, we heard consistent perspectives from those who participated regarding the value of mutual support as having been especially helpful during the stressful context of the summer.

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Ultimately, the supplemental supports provided through the coalition had a wide reach, supporting 153 staff salaries and training 127 educators. Across all of these actors, the YES coalition supported over 11,500 learning experiences for youth. While the study did not aim to directly evaluate

the degree to which these programs achieved learning outcomes for students, a majority of those involved in YES-supported partnerships (74 percent) reported that the partnership positively impacted their ability to reach focal youth outcomes related to work-based learning.

\$1,010,272

Program funds distributed

36

Contracts awarded

55

Partnerships facilitated

153

Staff salaries supported

127

Educators trained

11,570

Learning experiences for youth



5,166

via SYEP providers

2,329

via career panels

1,777

via curriculum partnerships

2,298

via virtual work site placements

FINDINGS: ADAPTIVE PEDAGOGIES IN REMOTE WORK-BASED LEARNING

The youth-serving organizations we focus on in the study faced substantial challenges, which we detail in Chapter 4. The pandemic context meant that learning models had to be remote-only, and developing these required wholesale rethinking of how organizations would support youth. The City's funding cuts and a restoration that was both partial and came just weeks before the launch of youth programs meant that leaders needed to simultaneously navigate timeline challenges, new policy requirements, and drastic reductions in staff resources.

Within this context, the study aimed to understand the choices that organizations and the educators within them made around how to best serve youth. Its analysis of remote work-based learning focuses on questions of how youth-serving organizations approached program model design (Chapter 5) and what kinds of pedagogical moves educators made to infuse social and emotional support within remote work-based learning (Chapter 6).

Design of remote work-based learning models

While youth-serving organizations were all working within the same broader context of the pandemic and the complex local policy landscape of New York City, our study revealed important differences in the programs they put in place. Organizations approached both high-level program design questions and more micro-level choices in distinct ways within the constrained context of remote learning, compressed timelines, and

staffing challenges, with substantive differences in what implementation looked like on the ground.

In Chapter 5, the study analyzes six cases that each involved SYEP providers that utilized supplemental supports from the YES coalition, with some receiving direct funds for program development and implementation and others that leveraged supplemental partnerships with curriculum providers or virtual Project Based Learning sites that their youth took part in. Each offered experiences linked to different sectors, including engineering, music production, public health, finance, and environmental justice.

In our first case, a social service organization prioritized synchronous time, high-touch facilitator training, and a low youth-to-facilitator ratio in its program. Youth gained time to build community, receive individual support, and were given more choice in their projects.

The second also involved a social service organization, in this case enrolling a large number of youth and placing them in large cohorts. Its facilitators learned program curricula—provided through an external partnership—on their own. Youth were not able to engage in small group work required by the curriculum's experiential learning model, and some found it difficult to take collaborative projects seriously.

A third case examines a program with a high number of youth per facilitator that prioritized independent small group projects. Youth formed connections and spent the majority of their time actively participating, but the single program facilitator was less able to provide individual mentorship.

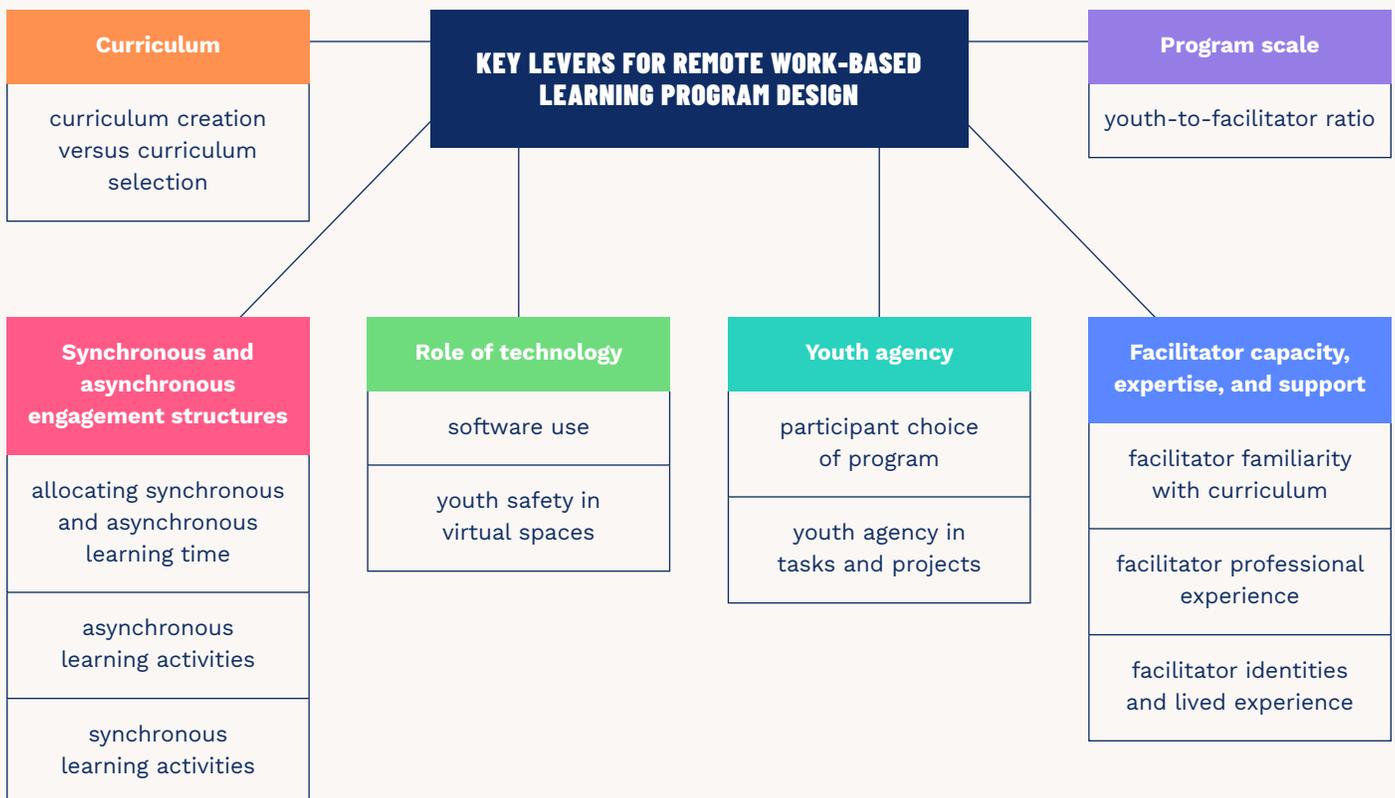
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In the fourth a professional musician wrote and facilitated her own Project Based Learning curriculum for small groups of 15 youth. Youth collaborated in virtual breakout rooms and created authentic industry-oriented portfolios that doubled as avenues for self-expression.

The fifth case involved a team of facilitators with various levels of professional experience who delivered an engineering curriculum. Facilitators with industry experience ran workshops and supported less experienced teaching assistants (TAs), while TAs facilitated projects with small groups of participants.

In the final case, an organization designed a Project Based Learning curriculum for young people with disabilities. The small cohort size and large number of facilitators allowed young people to receive instruction tailored to their own pace and encouraged teamwork.

Analysis across the cases revealed differences in six aspects of remote program model design: (1) **curriculum**; (2) **facilitator capacity, expertise, and support**; (3) **program scale**; (4) **role of technology**; (5) **synchronous and asynchronous engagement structures**; and (6) **youth agency**. Within each of these, the study identified key levers for impact—decision points across these areas that influenced the nature and quality of interactions between educators and youth (see below).



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While, in many instances, the study found that choices around a single key lever for impact had a direct influence over youth experience, the analysis also showed that, in many cases, decisions made around one lever affected others.

For instance, one organization solved the challenge of needing to produce robust Project Based Learning experiences for the large numbers of youth it served, in a short timeframe, by leveraging an external partnership that provided a technology-enabled curricular platform that less experienced facilitators could “plug into.” However, the large youth-to-facilitator ratio, combined with a decision that youth should not be in breakout rooms without adults due to safety concerns, meant that there were fewer opportunities for in-depth collaboration between youth.

Another organization faced similar challenges around high youth-to-facilitator ratios. However, a facilitator with deep familiarity with her curriculum creatively designed youth participation structures and strategically employed technology to promote peer-to-peer problem solving and collaboration.

Broadly, the findings of this analysis highlight the need for program designs to consider multiple dimensions of program structure that might be employed to create robust learning experiences. And while our analysis did not reveal any “silver bullets” when it came to these questions, it affirmed the importance of high quality curricular models, professional development and experience, and appropriate scale and attention to the viability of mentorship, while also highlighting new elements related to remote models as such

models consider structuring synchronous and asynchronous time and use of technology. Finally, these findings also reaffirm the reality that the broader structures in which program designs operate in—the ability for organizations to leverage partnerships from within the larger ecosystem, the policy contexts with associated requirements, and the ability to find and hire high capacity staff—all have profound implications for the program configurations and structures that are possible.

Humanizing pedagogy for equitable futures

Where our analysis of program models, summarized above, revealed important contrasts when it came to the overall structures that were put in place, the final analysis of the study (Chapter 6) aimed to look more granularly at how educators employed pedagogies tailored both to the life contexts that youth were facing during the pandemic and to the needs they had to develop career-linked competencies that would support them to pursue equitable futures. We found that educators took advantage of the shift from work site internship placements to a project-based model, experimenting with the ways in which they could tailor curriculum, provide mentorship, design group projects, and leverage their professional networks to expose students to a variety of careers, mentors and professionals, and large audiences to view and celebrate final projects. While the analysis does not aim to be comprehensive, it highlights and details a wide selection of approaches identified within the study data that offer a picture of the kinds of high leverage practices employed by educators as they aimed to meet the needs of youth during a turbulent summer.

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Our interviews with youth revealed several social and emotional needs around coping with the pandemic. Some youth wanted a summer program experience that would help distract them from quarantine life and offer them a space where they could regain a sense of connection, purpose, stability, and control through interactions with their peers and a focus on their futures. Other youth voiced a need for space with trusted and caring adults where they could directly process the emotional impacts of the pandemic, such as anxiety, depression, trauma, and grief. Still others wanted a program experience that would allow them to develop a positive outlook for the future, and to see themselves as contributing to that future by, for example, working to contribute to the needs of their communities during a time of crisis.

Our discussions with program directors and facilitators revealed that they were aware of these social and emotional needs around coping with the pandemic and that they were aware of the challenges of meeting these needs in a remote learning environment. As described to us, providing youth with consistent connections and a meaningful sense of purpose can be difficult in a Zoom room full of screens whose cameras are turned off and mics are muted and/or through a mostly asynchronous individualized curriculum of work tasks that could feel like an extension of online school. Additionally, positioning youth to contribute to their communities was not straightforward in a remote setting where youth were no longer directly placed into work sites.

In response to these challenges, however, our analysis found that programs devised and enacted a variety of pedagogical strategies and workarounds to make the most of the remote learning experience, and ultimately provide youth with much needed social and emotional supports. To build a sense of community, programs figured out ways to offer youth informal spaces in which to hang out and get to know each other, to create dynamic virtual interactions where adults and youth played off each other's energy, and to develop a group identity based on daily routines, shared language, and mutual accountability. To hold space for vulnerable sharing, programs intentionally connected their youth to caring adults who they could identify with, gently pushed them to take steps outside their comfort zones, and allowed them to creatively share their personal experiences on the media platforms they were most comfortable with. To revitalize hope, programs showcased the inspirational work of youth who started organizations to advocate for more just and sustainable futures, found ways for youth to partner with people in their communities to develop solutions that would contribute to community well-being, and helped youth to see otherwise unrecognized potential in themselves.

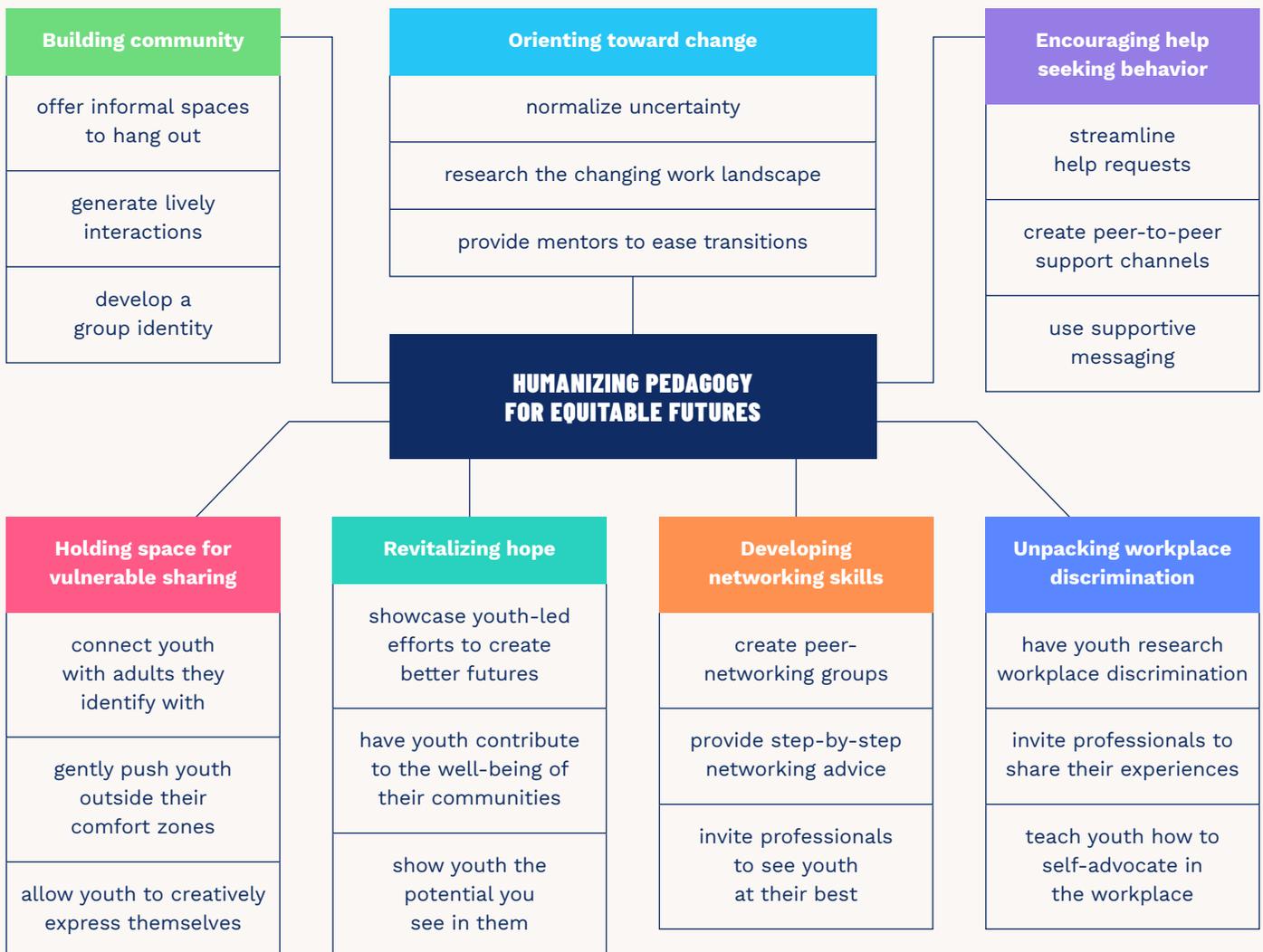
In addition to programs using pedagogical strategies to help youth cope with the pandemic, program leaders also recognized social and emotional needs around helping youth feel more comfortable and confident pursuing professional opportunities around topics such as making connections to professionals and exploring careers. Educators in our study identified, for example, that youth may feel intimidated by

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professional networking, unsure of how to deal with workplace discrimination, embarrassed about reaching out for help, and stressed out about major life transitions and not “having it all figured out.” Educators employed a variety of pedagogical strategies to explore these areas.

Many programs intentionally configured Project Based Learning in ways that would bolster the professional skills and opportunities of youth who have been subjected to the marginalizing

forces of racism, sexism, classism, and ableism, among others, and who are likely to encounter these same forces at an institutionalized level in the workplace. As one of the program directors articulated the connection between Project Based Learning models and an equitable futures orientation: “One of the highlights is to discover extraordinary talent in young people who don’t know they have it, because they’re from a socio-economic context where the resources don’t exist to recognize it.”



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Towards this end of meeting youth's social and emotional needs to support their equitable futures, some programs worked to equip youth with professional networks and coached them on the skills needed to identify, reach out to, and follow up with potential mentors. Other programs trained youth to understand workplace discrimination in relation to their own intersectional identities, and advocate for themselves in the workplace. Other programs created ways to streamline the process whereby youth could reach out for help and resolve issues related to completing assignments and receiving pay. Additionally, some programs helped youth orient to change at various levels. Some programs had youth research the shifting work landscape and identify individuals and industries that found ways to thrive during the pandemic, while other programs matched youth to near-peer mentors to help them learn about and smoothly transition into college life.

Across the pedagogical approaches we identified, the study found that the goals of social and emotional support were not separate from those related to preparation for work. Instead, many of the programs we studied highlight how these goals could be mutually reinforcing. Indeed, we do not see these practices as ones to be discarded upon a return to “normalcy”—they represent a deeply relational, communally-oriented, and responsive approach that many youth development and work-based learning programs have historically emphasized. While their importance was elevated during the summer of 2020, we believe that program leaders and policy makers should consider what changes might be put in place so that they can remain present down the line.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for intermediaries, systems leaders, and advocates

Prioritize and support open participation, collective action, and trisector collaboration.

The YES coalition took a collective approach that brought together youth organizations, youth leaders, and, to a lesser extent, municipal actors. This approach, critically, was not simply about acting together, but about utilizing open participation and design routines that drew on the values of collaborative community development demonstrated by YES leaders. The collective approaches of YES created common ground during a summer of volatility and paid dividends despite short timelines and unpredictable circumstances. A similar model in future years and in other geographies could do the same.

Build and sustain the cross-organizational infrastructure needed to support quality programming. We saw from YES that intermediaries are well positioned to coordinate ecosystem-wide supports, including professional learning and training, filling “gaps” in the ecosystem by systematically identifying and supporting partners, and providing connective tissue that supports stability through turbulent times. Intermediaries can, in partnership with practitioners and City agencies, leverage their bird's-eye view of the field to develop supports needed across the ecosystem and create efficiencies through cross-organization coordination and organizing. Intermediaries actively taking on this role can remove the burden from individual providers to build ancillary supports in addition to running their programs.

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Lean into roles and activities that stabilize the organizational ecosystem. YES emerged in response to a crisis context; however, its core functions—connecting stakeholders, disseminating information, advocating for shared priorities, influencing and coordinating policy, supporting professionals and front-line implementation—are valuable in any setting. Strengthening that connective tissue in non-crisis contexts can support the ability for the ecosystem to rapidly mobilize and remain stable when crises do occur.

Elevate mutual priorities, and create accessible ways for stakeholders to engage in addressing them. In the spring of 2020, crisis conditions spurred rapid alignment around shared challenges as well as urgency for widespread engagement in addressing them. Additionally, technology reduced typical barriers to engagement (e.g., geography) and made coordination possible. Moving forward, fields of youth development and work-based learning can orient toward greater collective focus on mutual priorities, as well as the creation of accessible means to engagement, as they mobilize large and diverse collectives of stakeholders.

Invest in partnerships with fellow intermediaries, systems leaders, and advocates. YES demonstrated that collaboration and broad engagement are possible, but not inevitable. YES both emerged from and drew on a strong social fabric of organizations that were the heart of its coalition. The relationships, capacities, and leadership abilities of these groups and others created the foundation on which YES was able to build an infrastructure and ecosystem to support New York City youth through the summer of 2020. Moving forward, it is critical

to sustain and build on these partnerships for the benefit of youth and communities, both during times of crisis and not.

Recommendations for designers of work-based learning programs

Our findings strongly suggest that community-based nonprofits have deep capacity when it comes to creating and implementing high quality, responsive, and rich work-based learning experiences, provided there is thoughtful consideration in their design. While there are no “silver bullets,” program designers have six areas of decision points at their disposal that, considered intentionally, can reinforce program goals: *curriculum; facilitator capacity, expertise, and support; program scale; role of technology; synchronous and asynchronous engagement structures; and youth agency*. Within each area, there are key levers of impact that should be configured intentionally. Program designers should consider the following lessons that we gleaned from case studies when utilizing each lever in their own program design:

Consider the pros and cons of creating a curriculum in-house versus sourcing already existing curriculum. Advanced planning time and outside funding allowed program providers to write curricula in-house. Entrepreneurship, science, tech, and arts organizations who offered program providers both a curriculum and facilitators familiar with that curriculum eliminated the need to train staff at provider organizations. Program providers whose staff facilitated an external partner’s curriculum require additional planning time to investigate curriculum requirements (such as facilitated small group activities) and to prepare staff for a new model.

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Consider how facilitator familiarity with curriculum can be deepened, regardless of who developed it. Facilitators who have deep experience with a program—either through writing the curriculum themselves, delivering the curriculum previously, or engaging in it as participants—may more easily adapt activities to fit participant needs and program requirements. For facilitators who are new, invest in deep training and coaching models before and during program launch.

Make choices around staffing models that explicitly take into account alignment of professional experiences, identities, and background with program goals and participants' lived experiences. Facilitators with professional experience in a particular industry are best positioned to facilitate activities and projects authentic to that industry. Those who are near peers to participants and/or recent program alums may more readily identify with youth, but may be more effective when they are part of a team that includes more facilitators with deeper experience in youth work. More broadly, youth-serving organizations should aim to hire, support, and promote facilitators who share experiences and identities with youth participants.

Creatively deploy resources, including supplemental funds, partnerships, and technology, to maintain low youth-to-facilitator ratios and make the most of higher ratios when they can't be avoided. Low participant-to-facilitator ratios encourage individualized support and relationship-building, and allow for facilitated team projects. In cases where high youth-to-facilitator ratios are the reality, creating structures where youth can work independently on small

group projects without facilitators present, and strategic use of collaboration and communication technologies, can foster active participation and peer connections.

Actively configure technology approaches and policies to develop industry-specific skills and maximize participation, feedback, and communication among facilitators and youth. Youth can develop marketable skills through engagement with industry-specific software, and processes of collaboration, feedback, and group conversation can be enhanced through attention to communication-oriented technologies, whether traditional video-conferencing software or industry-oriented collaborative platforms like Slack.

Balance synchronous and asynchronous program time, and leverage the best aspects of each mode of engagement. More synchronous learning time allows for more intensive support from facilitators, while more asynchronous learning time allows more opportunities to apply knowledge and skills independent of facilitators in the context of deep, collaborative projects. Strategic use of technology can blur the lines, with asynchronous communication channels supporting real-time feedback and support for youth, or independent work time structured within the context of “live” meetings.

Structure and promote youth agency both at the program and project level. Youth engage more deeply, and develop skills more relevant to their desired futures, when given more opportunities to choose both the kinds of programs they enroll in and the projects they work on within them. Strategic partnerships

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and deployment of interest-based program selection mechanisms can create greater choice and alignment of work-based learning with what youth are looking to learn. And creating models that actively give youth options in roles, tasks, and projects promotes youth agency once they're enrolled.

Recommendations for front-line educators and youth workers

Youth workers can consider how they can leverage pedagogical strategies that support seven key and interrelated areas that actively provide youth with social and emotional supports within the context of career-oriented learning:

Intentionally build community among youth.

Strong community supports and a sense of being part of a collective can help youth regain a sense of connection and purpose. Educators should ask themselves: how can we create spaces for youth to hang out in dedicated, informal ways, enjoy lively group interactions, and develop a group identity?

Hold space for vulnerable sharing. Especially in broader contexts of social unrest and destabilization, youth have heightened needs to share and process their experiences. Educators should ask themselves: How might we help youth connect with adults they identify with, step outside of their comfort zones, and creatively express themselves around their inner lives?

Revitalize hope. Regardless of broader social contexts, it's critical for youth to have an engaged sensibility around the future of the world, their local communities, and their own personal trajectories. Educators should ask themselves: How are we ensuring that youth can be inspired by youth-led efforts to create better futures, contribute to the well-being of their communities, and see the potential that we see in them?

Develop networking skills. It's not just what you know, it's who you know. Professional connections can lead to invaluable mentoring experiences and acts of brokering that advance youth's careers, and should be a focus of work-based learning. Educators should ask themselves: How can we support youth to practice networking with their peers, demystify networking at each step of the process, and invite professionals to see youth at their best?

Unpack workplace discrimination. Youth who are critically aware of how discrimination plays out within the workplace in relation to their own identities experience positive outcomes, including an increase in clarity of vocational goals, occupational attainment, and job earnings. Educators should ask themselves: How are we helping youth research workplace discrimination, learn how professionals have experienced and navigated workplace discrimination, and understand how to self-advocate in the workplace?

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Encourage help-seeking behavior. Help-seeking behaviors allow youth to mobilize social supports and institutional resources to advance their life goals, but these behaviors are stratified by race and class. Educators should ask themselves: How can we make it easy for youth to submit help requests in a simple and streamlined way, create peer-to-peer support channels, and ensure that youth feel supported, not punished, for requesting help?

Help youth orient to change. Not all youth know what they want to do with their careers, and career trajectories often don't follow linear pathways. More than that, careers and industries dynamically change over time—some collapse while new ones emerge. Educators should ask themselves: How are we creating opportunities for youth to normalize uncertainty in the career exploration process, research the changing work landscape, and prepare for and adjust to major transition phases?

Recommendations for policy makers

While the study did not systematically examine or evaluate the nature of work-based learning policy, in that its site of study occurred in relation to and in the context of those participating in the implementation of a broader municipal program, we offer some general recommendations for those creating policy. Critically, while many of these recommendations are longstanding and have been acknowledged within policy scholarship and communities, we see them as important to reinforce as issues they relate to continued to emerge in our data.

Engage those who are closest to the challenge, and closest to the solution, in deliberations about municipal program design around youth development and work-based learning. This includes both practitioners and youth themselves. Youth leaders, in particular, should be engaged deliberately, early and often, and educators should pay close attention to how to represent their perspectives. Youth have an enormous amount of expertise about what is needed and what works when it comes to citywide programs, and should have leadership roles in their design. Similarly, youth-serving organizations that do the work on the ground to implement City-supported programs have decades of insights and experience to draw on about what works, what doesn't, and what their communities need.

Create transparent, accessible, and timely lines of communication with providers, partners, students, and families. Without a clear understanding of expectations, youth-serving providers and partners cannot operate effectively, and program quality suffers. Municipally-supported youth development and work-based learning programs should aim for maximally accessible formats when disseminating crucial information and multiple opportunities to engage with policy guidance in order to reduce confusion and time spent translating between parties.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Consider how multiple policy requirements might interact, reinforce, or, potentially, work at cross-purposes with one another. While this is a core principle of policy design, our study highlighted ways in which multiple elements of municipal programmatic policy sometimes reinforced one another, but also sometimes worked against one another. Rooting and aligning policy and programmatic requirements in a broader, coherent, instructional vision, along with consultation with key stakeholders prior to implementation, can hedge against these scenarios.

Expand the boundaries of how young people can build work-based learning skills. The rich, community-embedded and project-based programs profiled in this study highlight both the needs and potentials of work-based learning that doesn't take the form of traditional work placements. Often better suited to the developmental and career-oriented needs of youth, programs like these, when tied to serving an authentic need either of a community or partner such as a company, can provide robust, skill-based, and social and emotionally supportive experiences that are powerful entry-points into professional life.

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