

The City of Minneapolis STEP-UP Program, managed by City of Minneapolis Employment and Training, is a public-private sector partnership designed to provide low-income Minneapolis youth with a comprehensive array of employment and training services that focus on helping youth achieve life-long self-sufficiency. The STEP-UP program helps the youth participants learn work readiness skills, obtain a job, explore diverse career opportunities, gain vital skills, develop professional connections, and prepare for college and careers. Thousands of youth have succeeded through STEP-UP, effectively building the foundation of the 21st century regional economy.

STEP-UP addresses racial and economic disparities in employment by providing work opportunities for economically disadvantaged and at-risk youth in need of work readiness training and legitimate work experience. STEP-UP successfully serves a majority of youth from challenged neighborhoods and families of color. In 2015, 91% of participants were youth of color, 15% had a disability, 10% were English Language Learners, 3% had involvement with the juvenile justice system, 2% were teen parents and nearly 100% came from a low-income family. Research shows that early work experience can have a lifelong impact and youth who begin work in their teens have historically better earnings and better connections to employment over time than their peers.

The hallmark of STEP-UP's success, and a great benefit for youth, is work readiness training. This training was implemented in response to feedback from employers regarding the level of skills that youth were bringing to their workplaces. While some youth came prepared with basic employability skills, others struggled with the fundamentals required on the job. In response to this employer concern, STEP-UP designed and implemented a twofold approach:

1. In collaboration with the Minneapolis Regional Chamber of Commerce, a basic employability skills curriculum was designed. Youth that complete the work readiness training, in combination with the summer work experience, receive a Work Readiness Credential approved by the Minneapolis Regional Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber views this as a tool that their employers can use to identify qualified job candidates, and the youth can use to add value to their resume.
2. STEP-UP created a tiered approach to match youth to employers. This approach allows for appropriate training of youth so they are matched to employers based on their level of work readiness. Employers are matched with youth that can help grow and support their business.

STEP-UP serves both youth and employer needs by simultaneously building on the strengths of each party. Effective training of both interns and supervisors builds a solid foundation to provide learning-rich employment experiences.

Job seeker impact (i.e. benefits, outcomes for job seekers)

To further our efforts and make certain that Minneapolis youth have their summer work experience needs met, three STEP-UP components are available including; STEP-UP Explore, Discover, and Achieve. Through these three components, youth are aligned with an employer based on their age and level of work readiness. A young person needing special support or training may be matched with a position in STEP-UP Explore. Youth with little work experience may begin with a subsidized work experience in the non-profit sector in STEP-UP Discover. As youth develop skills and more defined career goals, they may progress into a more skilled and competitive internship in STEP-UP Achieve. This tiered approach meets both the developmental needs of the youth and provides an incremental laddering approach to progressing in the workplace.

- Explore participants come from a targeted population of 14-21 year old youth who may have special needs and/or are current participants of a year round school program with a career focus (such as Upward Bound).
- Discover youth have minimal work experience, are most often 14-18 years old, are eager to learn new skills, and are matched with wage-subsidized positions within the non-profit community.
- Achieve youth are 16-21 years old and are best prepared for challenging and self-directed Internships that are generally employer-paid and located in private-sector businesses.

When youth are provided with employment opportunities, they gain a much better understanding of the important connection between school and work. Mentorships on the job enhance that understanding and youth may be open to furthering their education after recognizing the positive benefits of earning a wage and the education/employment connection.

Employer/Community impact (i.e. benefits, outcomes for non-job seekers)

STEP-UP is recognized as a national model for youth workforce development, emphasizing the training and preparation of interns and leveraging investment from the private sector. An engaged business sector, including 236 businesses in 2015, is critical to the success of the program. The number of employers and the variety of real, valuable work experiences make STEP-UP a sought after experience. Of the estimated \$2.5 million in wages earned by STEP-UP interns in 2015, \$1.1 million was paid directly by private businesses. Based on employer evaluations, over 96% of STEP-UP supervisors reported that the program has been a great success at their organization. Employers report that the organizational needs that are addressed by having a STEP-UP intern include providing extra help at a minimal cost and

increasing diversity in their company and industry. The organization also receives benefits at an employee level including growth and development through the experience of supervising and mentoring interns, the opportunity to 'give back' to the community by

supporting young people, and helping to build a stronger workforce for the regional economy.

Identification of those involved, including collaborators

STEP-UP leadership starts with support from both governmental and business leaders:

- Former Mayor of Minneapolis, R.T. Rybak, now executive director of Generation Next, recognizes that STEP-UP is a key component of the Minneapolis Promise to youth. As such, he leads the effort to inform businesses of the value of hiring motivated, diverse, and talented STEP-UP interns. Rybak's leadership and support have made it possible to employ over 21,000 Minneapolis youth since 2004.
- Richard Davis, Chairman, President, and CEO of U.S. Bancorp, co-chairs STEP-UP with former Minneapolis Mayor Rybak. Richard Davis has been involved in the program since its inception in 2004, providing guidance and support for the program, in addition to hiring as many as 30 interns each summer.
- The Minneapolis Workforce Council and Youth Council also have leadership oversight responsibilities to STEP-UP. These members also actively participate in mock interviews with the STEP-UP participants as part of work readiness training.

Community partners are critical to the success of STEP-UP. Using a community based model of service, Minneapolis Employment and Training contracts with the following organizations to operate the components of STEP-UP:

- AchieveMpls leads STEP-UP Achieve, the private sector component of STEP-UP. AchieveMpls is responsible for youth recruitment in the schools, work readiness training for approximately 2,100 youth, and the establishment and maintenance of the STEP-UP alumni network.
- Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board operates the classroom training for STEP-UP Discover interns. Each intern participates in a three-hour weekly class and has the opportunity to earn high school credit.
- Minnesota Workforce Centers (part of the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development) manage many aspects of the STEP-UP Discover and STEP-UP Explore components including interviewing and matching youth with internships at participating non-profit organizations and monitoring the employers and interns throughout their summer experience.
- Project for Pride in Living (PPL) provides work readiness training for STEP-UP Discover interns, preparing youth for their summer work experience with 12 hours of classroom training. In addition, PPL offers a specialized healthcare

training for STEP-UP Achieve interns that are matched with positions in healthcare.

The City of Minneapolis prominently posts STEP-UP recruitment and application details on the City webpage. The STEP-UP page can be found at [www.minneapolismn.gov/step-up](http://www.minneapolismn.gov/step-up). This page includes a video along with instructions and the application link. Through the STEP-UP Facebook page, staff is able to communicate with the community and youth. In addition, community members interact with the page through posts and messages.

#### Leveraging/alignment of outside resources

In 2015, AchieveMpls recruited 147 employers to hire STEP-UP Achieve interns. Participating businesses represented a mix of public, private, and non-profit businesses. STEP-UP Achieve focuses on recruiting meaningful and challenging employer-paid internships. The private sector paid or supported 631 STEP-UP interns.

The Twin Cities business community is increasingly recognizing the value of hiring STEP-UP Achieve's young, diverse, and motivated interns. In 2015, the top private sector employers included Wells Fargo and US Bancorp, and HealthPartners. While some larger businesses are able to hire several interns, smaller to medium size businesses that are able to hire one to five interns are also well-represented within STEP-UP Achieve.

Internships in the private sector offer STEP-UP Achieve youth a unique chance to learn about corporate or small business culture, build connections to business professionals, and explore career pathways in greater depth.

#### Ability for use or replication by others

STEP-UP aims to help others can learn from our design and results. City of Minneapolis Employment and Training is exploring how best to support other communities in the implementation of the STEP-UP

internship model, ensuring that communities are developing working models that include the necessary elements for success and provide quality experiences. There are numerous components in STEP-UP that add to program success, and at the very basic level, they include the following:

#### Required elements of the STEP-UP model:

- A plan for youth recruitment and application
- An employer recruitment plan and dedicated staff to implement the plan
- Business and government leadership willing to promote the model and leverage participation
- A work readiness curriculum that will prepare interns for employment success

- Partnership with schools and other key community stakeholders
- Funding for staff, training, and youth wages

STEP-UP is a prime example of an innovative solution to local youth and employer needs. City of Minneapolis Employment and Training is pleased to share a model that is positively impacting our next generation of local talent.