YES 2020

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT SUMMER:

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

April 2021

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About the Youth Empowerment Summer

The Youth Empowerment Summer coalition formed in response to the Covid-19 crisis as New York City worked to transition to remote learning. With the goal of providing early work experiences for teens during Summer 2020, a group including more than 100 nonprofits, community-based organizations, private funders, advocacy groups, and intermediary organizations came together to ensure that as many teens as possible had high quality experiences. Its work combined efforts around policy and advocacy with supplemental partnerships, funding, and peer-led learning among youth workers and educators. The coalition was organized and co-led by ExpandED Schools, Beam Center, and Hive NYC Learning Network.

About Student Success Network

Student Success Network is a community of 80 organizations working together to improve programming, practice, and policy to close opportunity gaps for youth in NYC. Founded in 2013 by the leaders of 15 education and youth development organizations, SSN was built on a shared belief that social emotional learning is critical for preparing youth for long-term career and life success. Today, SSN fuels intentional collaboration, elevates effective practices, and mobilizes practitioners and young people to solve pressing challenges, ultimately creating a stronger, more coordinated, and more effective nonprofit sector to ensure youth can thrive.

About Telos Learning

Telos Learning is a research, design, and strategy firm focused on advancing educational justice through institutional change and collective action. Our work spans formal K12 schooling as well as the out-of-school learning sector, with a focus on youth learning pathways around technology and computer science education, creative media design, and digital literacies. We specialize in issues of organizational development, in particular the role of networks in supporting processes of learning, improvement, and collective impact. Grounded in commitments to collaborative design and democratic participation, Telos partners with education institutions, foundations, intermediaries, coalitions and government agencies to generate insights through basic and applied research, develop novel strategies for impact, and create new designs for equitable learning.

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CONTENTS

Executive Summary

This report shares findings from the Youth Empowerment Summer, a collective action effort led by ExpandED 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.

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,

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.

POLICY INFLUENCE VIA COMMUNITY CO-DESIGN
of alternative programmatic strategy

SUPPORTING INSTRUCTIONAL POLICY IMPLEMENTATION
through supplemental funding and coordination

COLLABORATIVE ADVOCACY
for restoration of city funds

COORDINATION OF POLICY INFRASTRUCTURE
needed to implement a restored program
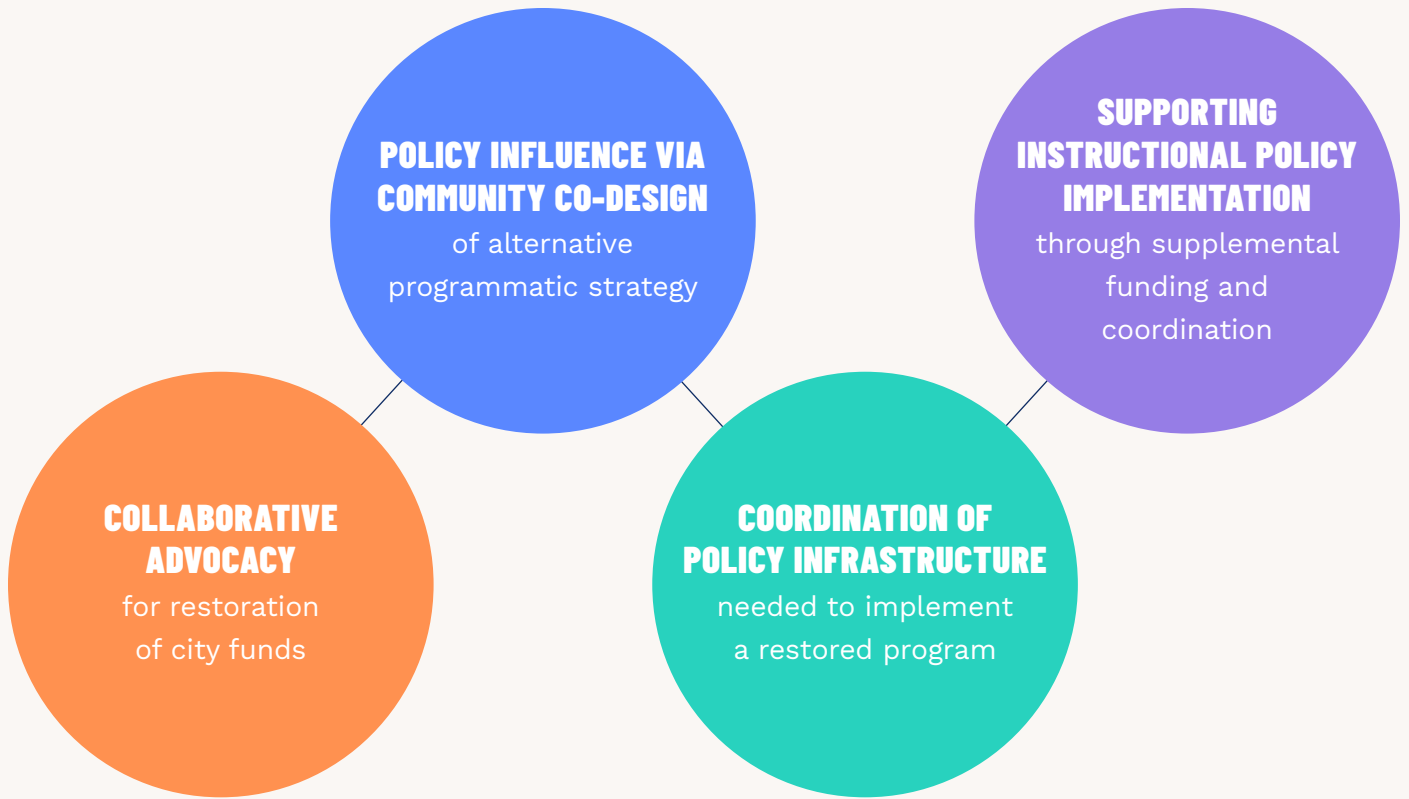
Impacts of collective action

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.

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

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.

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.

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).

KEY LEVERS FOR REMOTE WORK-BASED LEARNING PROGRAM DESIGN

Curriculum
- curriculum creation versus curriculum selection

Program scale
- youth-to-facilitator ratio

Synchronous and asynchronous engagement structures
- allocating synchronous and asynchronous learning time
- asynchronous learning activities
- synchronous learning activities

Role of technology
- software use
- youth safety in virtual spaces

Youth agency
- participant choice of program
- youth agency in tasks and projects

Facilitator capacity, expertise, and support
- facilitator familiarity with curriculum
- facilitator professional experience
- facilitator identities and lived experience

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.

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

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."

Building community
- offer informal spaces to hang out
- generate lively interactions
- develop a group identity

Orienting toward change
- normalize uncertainty
- research the changing work landscape
- provide mentors to ease transitions

Encouraging help seeking behavior
- streamline help requests
- create peer-to-peer support channels
- use supportive messaging

HUMANIZING PEDAGOGY FOR EQUITABLE FUTURES

Holding space for vulnerable sharing
- connect youth with adults they identify with
- gently push youth outside their comfort zones
- allow youth to creatively express themselves

Revitalizing hope
- showcase youth-led efforts to create better futures
- have youth contribute to the well-being of their communities
- show youth the potential you see in them

Developing networking skills
- create peer-networking groups
- provide step-by-step networking advice
- invite professionals to see youth at their best

Unpacking workplace discrimination
- have youth research workplace discrimination
- invite professionals to share their experiences
- teach youth how to self-advocate in the workplace

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 intermediates 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.

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.

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 back-ground 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

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?

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.

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.

1

Introduction

1.1 Overview

The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in the winter of 2020 prompted a nationwide crisis in the United States and around the globe. Among the many other inequities it laid bare, the pandemic highlighted the central role that educational institutions play, not only in supporting learning, but in providing foundational social fabric to those communities with the greatest need. Yet the nature of the crisis and failure of leadership at multiple levels meant that once again these communities were faced not just with marginalization, but with direct threats to their economic security, to their social welfare, and to their very health and well-being.

The case of the abrupt elimination, and then partial restoration, of the largest youth employment program in the country—New York City's Summer Youth Employment Program—in the spring and summer of 2020 exemplifies this dynamic. At the same time, the details of what happened in the city in response to the funding cut offers a counterexample of how things might look different when communities advocate for what they need and work together in the face of adverse conditions. Facing the full elimination of a program that had previously supported 75,000 youth with critical early work experiences and summer wages, a rapid response ecosystem of advocates, educators, community leaders, and youth activists worked to respond to this crisis. Together, they worked to create conditions that made it possible for the city's most vulnerable youth to be provided with robust work-based learning experiences during a period of uncertainty, precarity, and unprecedented need. This report shares findings from this effort—the Youth Empowerment Summer (YES).

> *Facing the full elimination of a citywide work-based learning program, an ecosystem of advocates, educators, community leaders, and youth activists worked to respond to this crisis. This report shares findings from this effort—the Youth Empowerment Summer.*

The story of YES took place across a wide range of sites and settings that all shaped the educational opportunities and experiences of young people living in New York City in the summer of 2020.

The municipal offices where policy deliberation and decision-making took place. The social media feeds, pages of local press and online petitions where advocacy for restoration played out. The Zoom meetings, ever-present under Covid-19, where groups of educators collaborated to develop alternative visions for how to support youth during a pandemic. And, of course, the youth development organizations where young people worked with and were supported by educators working under crisis conditions. The work conducted to research and document this effort spanned all of these, and the analysis provided in this report is intended to offer lessons across them.

For **educational leaders, intermediaries, and advocates,** the report offers a view into a collective action effort that spanned functions of policy advocacy, influence, coordination, and support, highlighting both opportunities and tensions for those who aim to organize adaptive coalitions within education that are positioned in relation to established institutions.

For **youth-serving organizations** engaged in design and implementation of work-based learning experiences, it offers findings on how leaders within educational organizations adapted to the conditions of the summer of 2020, the kinds of learning experiences they created, how they pivoted career-oriented programs to remote settings, and what these models suggest for future approaches to program design in work-based learning.

For **front-line educators**, it highlights ways that youth development professionals, teaching artists, industry professionals, and others who

directly worked with youth aimed to create positive environments, offer social and emotional support, and enable positive development and learning in the context of remote work-based learning experiences and in the trying everyday lives of young people living within a pandemic.

For **policymakers and funders**, it offers potential models and considerations for youth development and work-based learning, while also shedding light on the critical roles that community-based collectives that include practitioners, organizational leaders, and young people themselves can play within these fields.

And while the story and analysis contained in this report is tied to the crisis context of Covid-19, we see many of the lessons—related to educational policy and advocacy, to organizational leadership and large-scale collaboration, to pedagogy and social and emotional support—as ones that have relevance beyond the unprecedented conditions faced in 2020. For those aiming to support equitable futures for youth and communities, the pandemic has been a wake-up call around needs that must continue to be addressed. We hope that responses to it, one of which is offered here, can offer insights into how the fields of youth development and work-based learning might operate as they move forward.

1.2 A context of crisis

While the word is perhaps overused, there are few better characterizations than "unprecedented" to describe the situation in New York City that emerged around youth and summer learning opportunities in 2020. As one of the earliest global hotspots for Covid-19, New York City experienced a surge in the virus in the spring of 2020, with the CDC referring to the city as an "epicenter" of the outbreak during the period of February 29 through June 1 (Thompson et al., 2020). Over 200,000 cases were reported, with the fatality rate approaching 10 percent of confirmed cases. And as with all other aspects of the pandemic, low income communities and communities of color were disportionately hit, with race and income being even greater factors than age when it came to mortality (Schwirtz & Cook, 2020).

At the same time, New York City schools closed on March 15, and throughout the spring, the city's young people experienced continued inequalities when it came to educational opportunity. Schools attended by majority Black and Latinx students were found to be eight times more likely to report poor engagement or low attendance than those with lower Black and Latinx student populations, according to data from the New York City Department of Education (New York City Council, 2020).

As we explore more deeply in Chapter 2, it is in this context that Mayor de Blasio abruptly announced the immediate cut to the city Summer Youth Employment Program, citing health and safety concerns. A program that had in the prior years been expanded to reach over 75,000 youth disappeared in an instant, a move towards austerity in a moment when marginalized communities needed more support, not less.

It is no surprise that in the context of the racial justice uprising following the murder of George Floyd in late May, protests and calls for defunding police and reallocating resources into community development were woven into the demands of youth advocates and their allies across the city.

As young people faced down a summer of uncertainty and continued suffering in their communities, critical programs meant to support them were being eliminated.

> *As young people faced down a summer of uncertainty and continued suffering in their communities, critical programs meant to support them were being eliminated.*

1.3 Life, disrupted: Youth futures under Covid-19

Emerging research is beginning to show just how dire the effects of Covid-19 have been for young people from low income and minoritized communities in terms of both their immediate lives and their futures. A harrowing glimpse of this reality can be seen in a nationwide survey conducted in August 2020, with a diverse sample of over 1,300 youth aged 15–21, which focused on how youth were experiencing disruptions due to the pandemic along with a variety of educational and career-related perceptions (Goodwin Simon Strategic Research, 2020). It found a significant increase in youth holding multiple jobs, up 10 percent from 2019 to 2020, with almost half of those reporting taking positions as "essential workers." While they were working at increased rates, data indicated that, at home, responsibilities for taking care of younger family members fell disproportionately on Black and Latinx youth compared to their white peers. At the same time, youth outlooks and hopes about their futures darkened. Just over a quarter of youth surveyed reported feeling clear about their future job or career goals, down almost 20 percent from 2019, with the drop more pronounced for Black and Latinx young women. The survey also found an

almost 10 percent drop in perceptions among youth that college is a worthwhile pursuit, down to 62 percent from 71 percent in 2019. And with regard to the pandemic, in that moment of August 2020 when the survey was conducted, over 50 percent believed that in the United States, "the worst was yet to come," and that figure was higher for Latinx female respondents (62 percent) and Black female respondents (60 percent). With the benefit of hindsight as we write this report in early 2021, we see these young people as, unfortunately, prescient in their sensibilities.

Overall, these data offer retrospective confirmation of what youth advocates during the spring and summer of 2020 already understood from their own experiences: that this was a profoundly turbulent period for young people, that they faced hardship and strain in their daily lives, and that uncertainty about their futures was growing. The calls for more investment in youth opportunities, rather than less, were well warranted—youth needed emotional support and relationships with caring adults, they needed the summer wages that would help as their families strained under financial hardship, and, critically, they needed access to the future opportunities that summer jobs have historically aimed to provide.

> *Research confirms what youth advocates during the spring and summer of 2020 already understood from their own experiences: that this was a profoundly turbulent period for young people, that they faced hardship and strain in their daily lives, and that uncertainty about their futures was growing.*

1.4 New York City's Summer Youth Employment Program in 2020

Established in 1963, New York City's Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) represents the largest initiative of its kind in the country. Traditionally, it's served youth aged 14–24 across the city's five boroughs with six weeks of entry-level work, and associated wages, in a wide array of sectors.

As we've noted, prior to the summer of 2020, SYEP had grown in 2019 to serve almost 75,000 young people. In that year, youth were placed across over 13,000 work sites for six weeks, with over $110M in wages distributed at the New York State minimum wage of $15 an hour (NYC Department of Youth and Community Development, 2019b).[1] The number of youth enrolled represented a significant expansion of the program historically—in the summers of 2010–2013 it served, on average, less than half that number.

The year 2019 also incorporated an additional element of the program that was particularly relevant to how efforts to envision a viable program during the pandemic unfolded—the introduction of Project Based Learning (PBL) for younger youth (14–15). Whereas the SYEP program historically focused centrally on direct work placements in nonprofit, public, and private sectors, in 2019 the introduction of PBL aimed to provide greater opportunities for career-readiness through engagement for younger youth in skill-building programs run largely by community-based organizations, exploring areas such as media literacy, advocacy, health and wellness, environmental justice, and STEAM (NYC Department of Youth and Community Development, 2019c).

As the pandemic arrived in New York City, it became clear fairly quickly that the program would not resemble its traditional implementation, but the complete elimination of the program, announced by Mayor Bill de Blasio on April 7, 2020, shook the field and spurred a rapid response. Put forward initially with a rationale of health and safety concerns, one that later shifted to implementation concerns around the viability of finding youth work site placements, the immediate effect was dramatic. SYEP providers—a group of approximately 70 large social service organizations across the city that prepare and place youth into work sites—experienced what some saw as, in effect, a retroactive funding cut. They had 24 hours, which was then extended by a week, to shut down programs, and expenses beyond that window would not be recognized by the City. Staff were laid off and furloughed, and both recruitment and planning efforts—critical in order to pivot to remote programming—were drastically curtailed or halted.

On July 1, almost three months later, an alternative city program, under the name Summer Bridge, was introduced when the City Council passed its budget. The intervening period, which we explore more deeply in Chapters 2 and 3 of this report, involved a mix of efforts by stakeholders aimed at advocating for funding restoration, envisioning what a possible program might look like, and creating the conditions for its success.

The design of the new Summer Bridge program was radically different from that of prior years of SYEP. Its reach was drastically reduced, serving approximately 35,000 youth, almost half the number reached in 2019. Rather than receiving

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[1] Older youth (16–24) received the minimum wage in the context of work placements, while younger youth (14–15) received $700 stipends and primarily engaged in Project-Based Learning experiences. In some SYEP programs, such as Ladders for Leaders, youth were able to receive higher than minimum wage compensation.

wages, youth participants were paid stipends of up to $1,000, much reduced from the amount they earned in prior years. Beyond this, the program was fully remote, and centered on career exploration activities, as opposed to more traditional direct work site placements that have youth engaged in formal early work experiences where they report to a supervisor. The model represented a significant departure away from classic "work" toward learning about different careers, skill building, and making connections with professionals.

Youth experienced a blend of three central program elements, with slightly different requirements depending on age group. The first was Project Based Learning, programmatic experiences most similar in form to more "traditional" STEM, arts, activism, and creative media enrichment programs, but facilitated remotely by youth workers and specialists such as teaching artists, industry professionals, and technologists. The second was Workplace Challenges, a new element unique to Summer Bridge, which entailed career preparation activities in which small groups of young people engaged in solving a real-world problem or challenge issued by an industry partner. The final was a self-guided digital career exploration curriculum, Hats & Ladders, that included work readiness subjects such as resume writing, interviewing skills, workplace communication, financial literacy, and civic engagement. While engagement in the platform prior to the pandemic was intended to be for orientation purposes for a small number of hours, within Summer Bridge youth were required to spend a substantial percentage of their time—from 25–30 percent of their total experience depending on age group—

on the platform. We outline more complete details and requirements associated with Summer Bridge in Appendix B.

1.5 The Youth Empowerment Summer rapid response ecosystem

As noted, the announcement of SYEP's complete elimination was received by those connected to the program with shock, and spurred action to avert an additional crisis layered on top of the already harrowing conditions that NYC youth and their communities faced during the pandemic. It was in this context that Youth Empowerment Summer emerged as a rapid response ecosystem made up of educators, community-based organizations, employers that had acted as work sites, preexisting educational networks, philanthropic actors, government representatives, and, critically, youth activists who were the direct victims of the cuts.

Driven by a collective sense not only that young people needed to be actively supported during the coming summer but also that it was possible to envision a "retooled" city program in a remote context, the group built on early conversations that had begun prior to the cut. What began as a small handful of individuals across youth-serving organizations quickly, and intentionally, expanded, first to a couple dozen and then to over 100 groups and individuals that worked on parallel lines of activity in a rapidly shifting context.

FIGURE 1.1 **The four central lines of activity of the Youth Empowerment Summer rapid response ecosystem.**
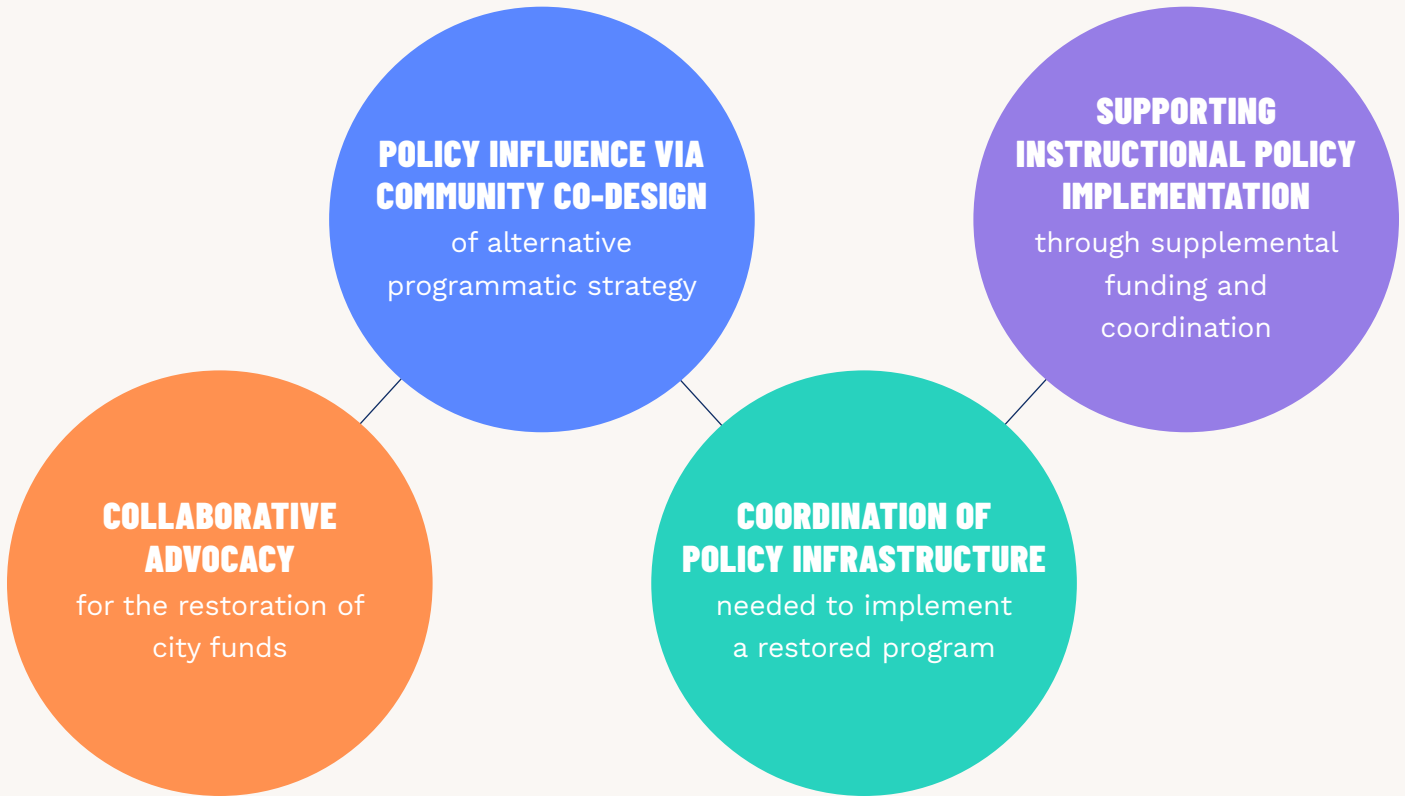
What began as a small handful of individuals across youth-serving organizations quickly, and intentionally, expanded, first to a couple dozen and then to over 100 groups and individuals that worked on parallel lines of activity in a rapidly shifting context.

Ultimately, the coalition's work spanned (1) advocacy for restoring City funding, (2) collective visioning to articulate and influence the design of an alternative city program, (3) helping to coordinate new infrastructure needed to put the program in place, and, finally, (4) supporting its implementation through funding supplemental partnerships and a facilitated community of practice among youth-serving organizations.

While for many of the early weeks of the coalition's formation in April, led by ExpandED Schools and Beam Center, the group was operating in an environment of uncertainty and many unknowns, a key value of such wide engagement and participation was that the group was able to share emerging information more quickly and

adapt its strategies in response. By early May, however, the facts on the ground had somewhat stabilized, and, consequently, the group was able to more clearly target its efforts. It seemed clear to many that some form of funding restoration for the program was likely to come as the City Council worked on its budget, and, in response, the goals of YES solidified into the fourfold value proposition outlined above.

A key feature of the work was the wide diversity of actors engaged within and throughout the YES effort, and the mix of public engagement, more traditional politics, large-scale collaborative design techniques, coalition building, and peer-to-peer professional learning.

> *A key feature of YES was the wide diversity of stakeholders involved in it, and the ways it mixed public engagement, more traditional politics, large-scale collaborative design techniques, coalition building, and peer-to-peer professional learning.*

Within its advocacy efforts, YES supported vocal youth activists from the group Teens Take Charge, enlisted high-powered lobbyists, and coordinated with existing work-based learning and community development coalitions of United Neighborhood Houses and HERE to HERE to create an aligned public campaign for funding restoration.

In developing a collaboratively-articulated alternative program model, YES engaged SYEP providers (like DreamYard and United Activities Unlimited), institutions that had previously been SYEP work sites for youth (like Wildlife Conservation Society), contractors that had worked with the city on SYEP (including Hats & Ladders and Youth Development Institute), and existing youth development networks (such as Student Success Network, Hive NYC Learning Network, and the Partnership for Afterschool Education).

In working to coordinate the development of new infrastructure that would support the newly developed program element of Workplace Challenges, YES funded the development of technical assistance models and worked to bring in private sector partnerships through the Tech:NYC network and connect them with city actors at City Hall and the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD).

And in creating supplemental support for the Summer Bridge program once it was announced, YES also raised funds from philanthropic actors, including the New York Community Trust and the Pinkerton Foundation, supporting what ended up being 55 partnerships between SYEP providers and specialized educational organizations who gathered in a community of practice facilitated by Hive NYC Learning Network.

In reflecting on the collaboration among this coalition, one YES organizer reflected on the critical willingness for actors from different sectors to "step outside their lanes." Organizers shared that they saw these groups working together not simply on the basis of how their organizations or how their particular constituencies might benefit from an alternative summer program, but toward a broader sensibility around youth and community needs.

In practice, YES acted as a civic coalition representing a unique blend of a number of existing collective action models. In one sense, it resembled approaches of emergency response and disaster management (Lorenzi et al., 2013), wherein groups quickly mobilize, move beyond traditional roles, and engage in time-sensitive actions to rapidly organize around the conditions brought on by a crisis. Being made up of actors aiming to exert public pressure on government bodies, YES enacted principles of advocacy coalitions (Sabatier & Weible, 2007) that carefully coordinate demands to present a united front. In working to develop a high-level programmatic vision that intentionally aligned and organized multiple sectors around shared goals, it enacted principles of collective impact that are increasingly common in educational and social sectors (Kania & Kramer, 2011; Henig et al., 2016). Throughout its work, the coalition also regularly drew on principles of participatory design and cooperative codesign, wherein multiple sets of stakeholders closest to a problem at hand ideate together to come up with viable, impactful solutions (Muller & Kuhn, 1993; DiSalvo et al., 2017). In its efforts to support diverse and interest-driven learning experiences across a specific geographic region, YES drew on models of youth pathway ecosystems (Ching et al., 2015; Penuel et al., 2016), notably those pioneered with STEM ecosystem initiatives (Traphagen & Traill, 2014). And, in its commitment to peer-to-peer learning and experimentation, as educators worked to support youth in new and complex remote programs, YES indexed approaches taken within open learning and innovation networks (Santo et al., 2016).

> *YES acted as a civic coalition representing a unique blend of different collective action models.*

Indeed, the question of "what YES is a case of," and when and how lessons from it might be relevant to future work in education, policy implementation, community development, and advocacy is important to consider. This report aims to make clear how YES's activities played out across multiple levels, and, in doing so, aims to create takeaways that might inform future work in these areas.

1.6 Research methods

Just as the YES coalition came together under adaptive conditions, so too did this research effort that aimed to understand how it played out. The approach taken by the project, in addition to rapid mobilization to create and implement a viable research design, was a broader commitment to research-practice partnership (RPP) (Coburn & Penuel, 2016). In contrast to traditional evaluation and scholarly-driven research studies, in RPPs, researchers and practitioners collaboratively determine what central problems of practice an inquiry might address. Within this effort, the research team worked with YES coalition leaders to develop an approach that would simultaneously aim to understand the initiative in order to (1) support its organizers to improve future work; (2) generate insights relevant to practitioners, policymakers, organizational leaders, and intermediaries both within and beyond the initiative; and (3) contribute to the broader knowledge bases related to focal lines of inquiry.

Within this report, we address two lines of inquiry, the first related to the **nature of the rapid response ecosystem vis-a-vis issues of collective action**, and the second related to the **adaptive remote pedagogies within work-based learning programs** enacted as part of the partnerships that YES supported to serve youth.

> *This report addresses two lines of inquiry:*
> + *the **nature of the rapid response ecosystem vis-a-vis issues of collective action**, and*
> + *the **adaptive remote pedagogies within work-based learning programs** implemented in the YES coalition.*

1.6.1 Study participants

As the YES ecosystem spanned multiple levels of activity in the context of a broader citywide initiative, study methods and data involved a range of participants:

+ **Youth** who participated in YES-supported SYEP programs;
+ **Youth program facilitators** and **organizational leaders** who were either directly supported through YES funds, were partnered with those who were, or were more broadly involved in planning or implementing youth development programs in New York City during the summer of 2020;
+ **YES coalition leadership** who were involved in the organization and implementation of the initiative; and

+ **Advocates**, **municipal actors**, and **city contractors** who were connected to the initiative.

1.6.2 Data sources

Centering on a qualitative data set and augmented by targeted quantitative data, the study methods and associated data sources used in this research were chosen to create a robust foundation for analysis. While the crisis conditions that characterized the focal period of study meant that not all planned elements of data collection came to fruition, the data collected represent a cross-section of activities, actors, and experiences, and included:

+ Semi-structured interviews (n=62);
+ Remote youth program site visits (n=17);
+ Youth focus groups (n=6);
+ Video recordings from YES professional convenings (n=17 sessions totaling 22 hours);
+ Organizational documentation from YES, news articles, and YES awardees (n=57);
+ YES awardee final reports (n=26); and
+ Citywide survey responses (n=88 responses).

Taken individually, each of the data sources provided useful context and potential basis for claims, but looked at collectively, these sources supported analysis rooted in triangulation to provide greater confidence in the findings we share in this report.

No single analytic technique was employed across the entire research effort. Each chapter, outlined below, utilized targeted data from within the broader data corpus and discrete analytic approaches based on its focus.

In the next section, we outline the specific issues addressed in each of the chapters of the report, and a full methodology can be found in Appendix A.

1.7 Report road map

Chapter 2 describes and analyzes the conditions and events that were critical to the formation of the YES coalition during its emergence in the spring of 2020, seeking to understand the evolution of the ecosystem in terms of what problems it was addressing and how it landed on its key goals. The first section of the chapter aims to capture this period of formation, followed by an analysis that explores three themes that shaped YES's formation: (1) contextual factors that influenced YES, (2) evolution of the problem the ecosystem was seeking to address, and (3) emergent tensions between program design and advocacy during the period of its formation. The final section of this chapter discusses lessons and implications for the field from this period of formation, offering insights into some of the ways in which crisis can create a window of opportunity for change. In the case of YES, this change centered on who sets the priorities and program designs for summer youth development, and how. The concluding section of this chapter explores these lessons.

Chapter 3 articulates the strategic approach that stabilized after the turbulent period of YES's formation and the impacts that it had around its four priorities: (1) advocating for funding restoration, (2) influencing instructional policy, (3) coordinating instructional policy, and (4) supporting the implementation of instructional policy through supplemental partnership funding and a facilitated community of practice. For each of these areas, the chapter outlines the key actions

taken by the initiative and offers an assessment of how these actions played out with respect to the coalition's core goals. It concludes with an exploration of how YES might be understood as a proof of concept through multiple lenses including collective action, the role of partnerships in work-based learning, the value of decentralized peer-based professional learning, and the role of coordinated ecosystems as stabilizing forces in the context of crisis.

Acting as a bridge between the ecosystem-centered focus of the first two chapters and the on-the-ground programs and pedagogies examined in the later chapters, **Chapter 4** offers a view into the experience of organizational leaders and supervisors in youth-serving organizations as they experienced the events of the spring and summer of 2020. It highlights how these leaders experienced both the broader Covid-19 crisis and the SYEP funding cuts within their organizations, the realities of laying off and furloughing staff, navigating information vacuums associated with their expectations regarding what the summer would look like, and the ways they pivoted to put in place plans for remote programming. It then explores their experiences once the Summer Bridge program was introduced, including their rapid scramble to set up programs and engage in recruitment, adaptation to new policy designs and requirements, and the ways they leveraged partnerships in this context.

Chapter 5 focuses explicitly on the question of how youth-serving organizations within the YES ecosystem engaged in program design choices that enabled facilitators to create supportive learning environments for youth. It offers a view into six different programs, utilizing case examples

to illustrate how each addressed different elements of remote program design for Project Based Learning, including: (1) curriculum; (2) facilitator capacity, expertise, and support; (3) program scale; (4) synchronous and asynchronous engagement structures; (5) the role of technology; and finally, (6) youth agency. It then examines key "levers," or decision areas, within these program elements, lessons that can be taken away from the decisions these focal programs made, and key questions for program leaders and policymakers to address in these areas as they engage with issues of remote program design.

Chapter 6 highlights the ways in which youth workers enacted humanizing pedagogies in the context of remote learning during the pandemic. Through the lens of social and emotional support, it examines seven areas of practice in which educators aimed to support youth: building

community, holding space for vulnerable sharing, revitalizing hope, developing networking skills, unpacking workplace discrimination, encouraging help-seeking behavior, and orienting to change. For each, the chapter shares emerging effective practices that can guide educators both in the contexts of remote programming and in-person learning.

Across these chapters, the report hopes to honor the monumental work put in by educators, advocates, community leaders, and youth themselves as they navigated the pandemic summer of 2020. We focus on providing clear accounts that surface key dynamics, tensions, and lessons, with an emphasis on how the combined efforts across this rapid response ecosystem might provide an opportunity for learning by stakeholders in the youth, community, and workforce development fields.

2

Emergence of a Rapid Response Ecosystem: How the YES Coalition Formed

2.1 Overview

Youth Empowerment Summer (YES) was a rapid response ecosystem developed by a coalition of organizations involved in youth and workforce development in New York City during the spring and summer of 2020. Led by ExpandED Schools, Beam Center, and Hive NYC Learning Network, the effort sought to engage dozens of organizations to intervene in an unprecedented crisis: the arrival of Covid-19 in NYC in March and the subsequent elimination of the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP), the largest youth employment program in the United States, in April.

Drawing on more than a dozen stakeholder interviews, coalition documentation, and public records (see Appendix A for full methods), this chapter describes the conditions and events that were critical to the formation of the YES coalition as it emerged through this crisis in the spring. It then offers an analysis of five key factors that shaped YES's formation and closes with a discussion and implications for the field moving forward.

On April 1, 2020, 12 organizations in the youth development ecosystem met to begin to form a "collective of partners to help... envision and design scenarios for engaging youth" during the pandemic. Six days later, NYC's Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) announced that SYEP, which had grown to engage 75,000 youth annually since its creation in 1963, would be canceled in 2020 and its funding eliminated almost immediately. Four months later, on July 1, the NYC City Council officially announced a new budget, which included "SYEP Summer Bridge," a new, remote program for 35,000 youth in lieu of SYEP that summer.

During this period, from April to July 2020, YES engaged in direct, adversarial advocacy to restore funding to SYEP; facilitated collaborative, community-based design work to prepare for a remote summer of youth development; and raised funds to support these twin efforts as well as the possibility of YES acting as a replacement program following SYEP's cancellation. YES's emerging goals and value proposition to the field during this period were in flux, and stabilized in May as a program that would complement SYEP by:

A. Advocating for **funding restoration** (vis-à-vis SYEP Summer Bridge),
B. Seeking to **influence the design of instructional policy**,
C. Materially helping to **coordinate the necessary infrastructure for instructional** policy, and
D. Supporting **instructional policy implementation** through privately funded supplemental partnerships and a facilitated community of practice.

The first section of this chapter aims to capture this period of formation. An analysis then follows that explores three themes that shaped YES's formation:

1. *Contextual factors that influenced YES*
   While YES developed most centrally as a response to the pandemic and the SYEP cut, it also was shaped by a number of other contextual factors, including recent, pre-pandemic changes to SYEP instructional policy; the structures of the NYC budgeting process; and the backdrop of increased civic engagement and widespread uprisings for racial justice in summer 2020.

2. *Evolution of the problem*
   As a crisis response effort, YES was solving for different problems at different points in time as realities around it shifted and as it made headway in achieving its goals. The shifting nature of the problem(s) are a key characteristic of this period of YES's formation.

3. *Tensions between program design and advocacy*
   YES encountered challenges as it was simultaneously organizing the field to articulate a viable design alternative to the traditional, in-person city program while also advocating

for the restoration of SYEP funding. Diverse actors involved in YES shed light on the complexity of sustaining parallel efforts toward advocacy and preparing for implementation. YES collaborators navigated this complexity by establishing the legitimacy of the initiative and leveraging their own social capital; at the same time, legitimacy and social capital proved so valuable that they prompted additional challenges.

The story of YES's formation offers insights into some of the ways in which crisis can create a window of opportunity for change in terms of who sets priorities, and how.

The final section of this chapter discusses lessons and implications for the field from this period of formation. Taken as a whole, the story of YES's formation offers insights into some of the ways in which crisis can create a window of opportunity for change. In the case of YES, this change centered on who sets the priorities and designs the program models for summer youth development, and how. The conclusion section of this chapter explores these lessons:

1. **Those who are closest to the challenge are closest to the solution.**
   From the earliest moments of its formation, YES meetings were attended by and held on behalf of youth-serving organizations and youth themselves. These groups would bear the consequences of layering crises during summer implementation, so their perspectives were prioritized during the period of formation in the spring.

2. **Build coalitions that are diverse by design.**
   By building a deliberately diverse coalition of organizations and elevating youth leadership, YES provided a model for how such a coalition could include a broad set of stakeholders and establish broad agreement. The effects of this broad agreement were evident in both advocacy and program design work.

3. **Navigating intergenerational advocacy is important—and complex.**
   Youth leadership was a defining element of the work of the YES coalition, and it also came with a set of responsibilities and challenges. Youth leaders may be closest to the challenge and may be part of diverse teams, as described in the lessons above—and their participation, in particular, deserves deliberate attention and consideration.

4. **Urgency and technology supported widespread engagement.**
   Urgency spurred motivation for widespread engagement with YES, and technology simplified the means of engagement. These two factors were important, and in the appropriate context, are instructive: The lesson we draw from this is not to manufacture urgency or to insist on the use of technology in future work, but to instead point to the importance of collective focus on mutual priorities and the creation of accessible ways for people to engage in addressing them.

5. **Collaboration and broad agreement are possible, but not inevitable.**
   YES's work to spur collaboration and broad agreement, and indeed to generate evidence to support each of the lessons above, relied on

preexisting networks, infrastructure, and resources within the youth development ecosystem in New York City—namely, Teens Take Charge, United Neighborhood Houses, HERE to HERE, Hive NYC Learning Network, Student Success Network, the Partnership for After School Education, and ExpandED Schools, among many others. In this concluding lesson, we acknowledge the critical importance of sustaining such distributed capacity and infrastructure for the benefit of youth and communities, both during times of crisis and during calmer periods.

These lessons, though valuable, should in no way suggest that the crisis of spring 2020 was valuable per se. Although the extreme circumstances of a global pandemic, mass uncertainty, and a (temporary) complete cut to SYEP's funding created the conditions for these lessons to emerge, our research effort aims to document them so that they can be applied in non-crisis contexts. The lessons drawn in this chapter should continue to inform our work in the future—the austerity and ensuing crisis it provoked should not.

2.2 Formation of the YES Coalition

FIGURE 2.1 Timeline of YES coalition formation and core activities in the spring and summer of 2020.
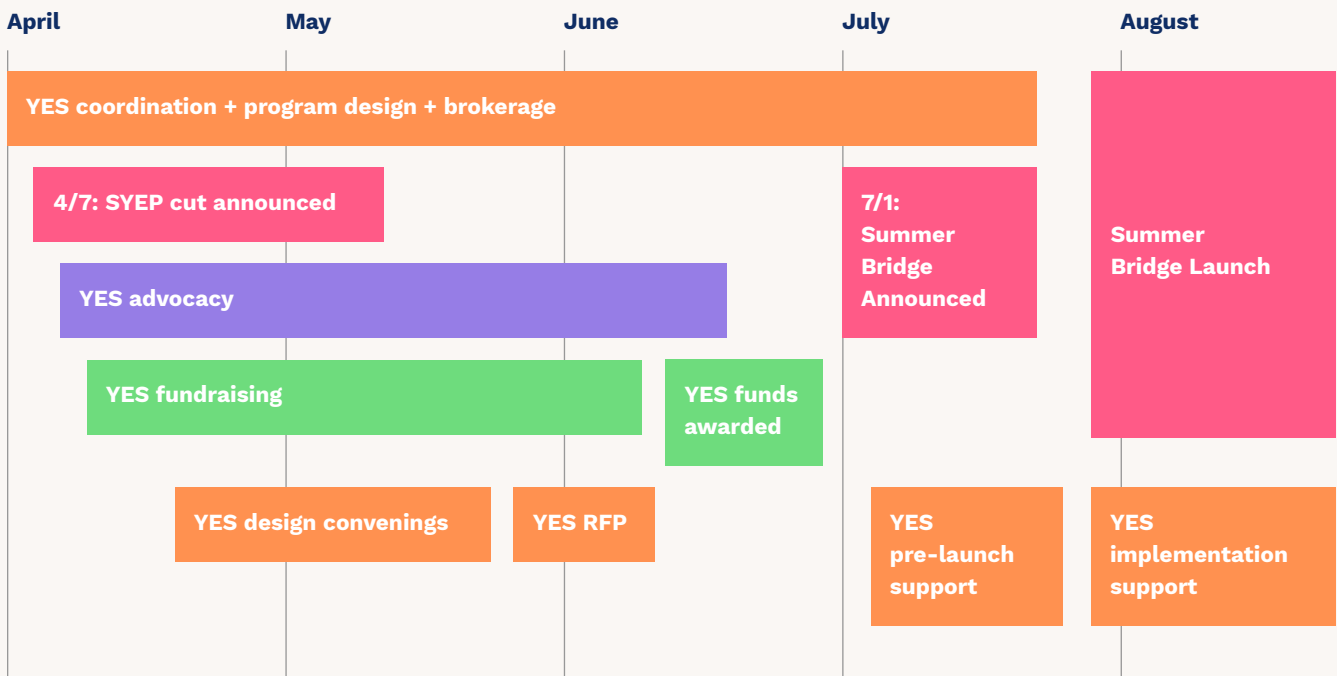
2.2.1 Responding to the pandemic

Following the first documented death from Covid-19 in the U.S. on February 29 in Washington State, concerns began to rise across New York City in early March. We interviewed employees at youth development organizations who shared that their workplaces were weighing whether or not to stay open, and early meetings among youth development stakeholders indicated a sense of concern for summer plans (for more information on the conditions that youth development leaders were facing during this period, see Chapter 4). In the second half of the month, Brian Cohen (Executive Director of Beam Center and member of the Hive NYC Learning Network governance council), Alison Overseth (Chief Executive Officer of the Partnership for After School Education) and Saskia Traill (President and CEO of ExpandED Schools) began a correspondence that would later evolve to become Youth Empowerment Summer (YES).

At the beginning of April, there were widespread concerns about potential disturbances to SYEP during the coming summer. YES leadership hosted a meeting on April 1 with nine additional participants from the youth development ecosystem in New York City to consider what the crisis would mean for summer youth programming. Other actors in the city's youth development and work-based learning ecosystem were also responding to growing concerns about potential implications for the summer. Teens Take Charge, a youth-led education advocacy group, launched an advocacy campaign online (Beecham & Kwek-Rupp, 2021),[1] and United Neighborhood Houses, an advocacy organization representing NYC-based community development groups,

hosted meetings to coordinate a response to anticipated cuts with their partner organizations.

2.2.2 Responding to the SYEP cut

On April 7, the Mayor's office announced a complete cut to SYEP's funding. SYEP providers received a letter that informed them that they had 24 hours to shut down their programs, and that no expenses incurred after that 24-hour period would be recognized by the City. This deadline was later extended by one week. Advocates moved quickly in response. Teens Take Charge had collected 5,000 signatures to their petition by April 8 and 10,000 signatures by April 10. Eighty organizations in United Neighborhood House's network cosigned a letter in response to the cuts. YES convened partner organizations to collaborate on what it might look like for SYEP to run safe, remote program designs that could engage youth who had been planning to participate in the program.

In the weeks that followed, the coalition formally adopted the name Youth Empowerment Summer and held Design Group meetings on April 15, 22, 24, and 27 that focused on safe program models for youth engagement during the pandemic. In late April and early May, in the midst of these design sessions, YES hosted larger Advisory Panel convenings, with open invitations that attracted over 100 participants to each meeting. The more frequent, and smaller, design sessions, usually attended by representatives from 15–30 organizations, focused on information sharing (including policy and advocacy updates) and grounding the new YES coalition's four programmatic elements, which it used to engage the much larger Advisory Panel: program design

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[1] For more details on the advocacy work of Teens Take Charge during the spring and summer to restore SYEP, see the report The Story of #SaveSYEP, authored by two members of Teens Take Charge: https://www.heretohere.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/The-Story-of-SaveSYEP.pdf

and quality, program partnerships, evaluation, and program needs. The YES coalition pursued a "big-tent" strategy in this design and advisory work, seeking broad participation from diverse actors in the youth development field through utilization of community-based participatory design techniques. Within the context of this large-scale collaborative design work, a broad base of practitioners worked to envision and come to agreement on how it might be possible to run a restored, remote version of SYEP, even while the fate of the program was still unknown.

> *The YES coalition pursued a "big-tent" strategy in its design and advisory work, seeking broad participation across the field through utilization of community-based participatory design techniques.*

With program design sessions underway, YES began a simultaneous advocacy effort. YES leaders established relationships with youth advocacy organizations, policy advocates, philanthropists, and Tusk Strategies, a combative lobbying firm. YES then connected these different groups with each other, advancing their priorities and elevating youth leaders in strategy meetings with lobbyists and others. Evidence of public advocacy—not just from members of the YES coalition, but across New York City—appeared in social media, the press, and in statements from civic leaders. Before the end of April, some youth development organizations and advocates began to expect that partial funding would be restored to SYEP.

In support of these parallel program design and advocacy efforts, YES began fundraising. In the midst of so much flux and uncertainty for the city and for SYEP, the goals of this fundraising effort sent different signals to different stakeholders. The result was that some perceived YES as juggling dual priorities of advocacy and program design; others perceived YES as positioning itself to act as a replacement for the cancelled SYEP, a possibility its leaders briefly considered pursuing but quickly moved away from once it became clear that restoration of funding had a strong chance of succeeding.

2.2.3 Stabilizing YES's value proposition

Despite the chaotic policy landscape and lack of clear expectations for the summer, YES moved forward with program design and advocacy efforts through the month of May. By the end of the month, YES's overall value proposition had stabilized as a complement to SYEP (which had not yet been publicly replaced with SYEP Summer Bridge), and YES had published an RFP that aimed to provide funding for supplemental partnerships that would support implementation of anticipated summer programming.

Overall, YES's complementary role had four parts: advocacy for funding restoration, influencing instructional policy design, materially coordinating instructional policy infrastructure, and summer program implementation support. The interventions and findings regarding how these four components played out are explored in Chapter 3; and additional details of this stabilizing period are described in Appendix C: Timeline of YES Coalition Formation Period.

With the formation of YES having stabilized in May and early June, it moved forward to deliver on its value proposition through the summer. Outlined more extensively in Chapter 3, YES engaged in iterative feedback cycles with organizations that responded to its RFP, it awarded contracts for supplemental partnerships totalling over $1M, it brokered dozens of partnerships to support SYEP Summer Bridge providers, and it continued to host convenings in support of partners and providers. Following the announcement of New York City's new budget and the introduction of SYEP Summer Bridge on July 1, YES ended advocacy efforts and redoubled its focus on implementation support.

SYEP Summer Bridge began on July 27 and concluded five weeks later, on August 28.

2.3 Analysis
2.3.1 Contextual factors that shaped YES
The YES initiative was a rapid response to crisis—first to the pandemic, then to the SYEP cut. Understanding the formation of YES requires attention to this backdrop, and to other broad influencing factors that shaped the initiative.

2.3.1.1 The Covid-19 pandemic
The first death in the U.S. related to Covid-19 happened at the end of February in Washington State, and over the course of the next month, the U.S. in general and NYC in particular were thrown into chaos by the crisis. Covid-19 was declared a national emergency on March 13; school buildings in NYC closed on March 15; by the end of the month, the city was setting up makeshift morgues in preparation for enough Covid-related deaths to overwhelm existing infrastructure (Gingras et al., 2020). The depth of trauma and

uncertainty throughout the city during this period can't be understated. It formed a central backdrop as YES came into clearer focus during the period of its formation.

2.3.1.2 The SYEP cut
SYEP was created in 1963 and is beloved by many New Yorkers. Since 2015, it has become even more popular, expanding from reaching 40,000 to 75,000 youth (Lew, 2019). The complete cut of this $125M program on April 7, issued with an immediate 24-hour period to shut down, triggered a reaction of disbelief ("If in January you had told me that I would be fighting against a 100% cut in SYEP, I would have laughed... it would have been inconceivable," one advocate shared with us) and moral offense ("This is truly cruel," shared another).

> *"If in January you had told me that I would be fighting against a 100% cut in SYEP, I would have laughed... it would have been inconceivable."*

2.3.1.3 The introduction of Project Based Learning to SYEP in 2019's instructional policy
In 2019, DYCD introduced Project Based Learning (PBL) to SYEP's instructional policy as an element of the program distinct for younger youth (ages 14–15), while older youth (16–24) engaged in its more traditional work site placements. This marked a significant shift in instructional policy from previous years, which had no PBL requirements and only one set of expectations for all SYEP participants. Along with this policy change, DYCD introduced new professional supports in 2019 for SYEP providers to meet these expectations around PBL. The precedents

of these changes shaped 2020's instructional policy and were compounded by the complexities of adapting them to the fully remote circumstances of the summer.

The formation of YES interfaced with this period of instructional policy change: both the immediate short-term changes (adapting to crisis conditions) and the longer-term (introducing PBL) efforts.

2.3.1.4 The mechanics of the NYC budgeting process

Once the SYEP cut was announced, it was clear that the path to restoration would take time. In an email dated two days after the cut, one YES collaborator noted: "There's a possibility that [...] either the feds, the state, or the [New York City] council would restore the program. The problem is timing and funding: the first two probably won't and the last can't until too late." The expectation that funding from the City Council would be "too late" is a significant factor that created the policy context of the formation of YES. In the end, the City Council did allocate funds to announce SYEP Summer Bridge with the approved budget on July 1 as a public-private partnership that would engage youth later the same month. However, this timing left no budget from mid-April to July 1 to support SYEP providers' staff time that would otherwise have been dedicated to recruiting youth or making the transition to a fully remote program. As soon as the cut was announced in April, the timeline of this period was predictable: Once the executive budget proposal in mid-April showed the SYEP cut, the City Council didn't have the opportunity to confirm any restoration of funding, despite its growing support for restoration, until the full budget was finalized at the end of June. As one advocate described this period:

"So there's this period through all of April where the budget is still being negotiated, and with each call we get more and more assurances that the money will be put back in for at least half, so there were different numbers that floated around from different sources, but there's this period of time now where providers have been told, 'stop reimbursing,' so they're laying off staff, they're moving staff off the program, they're cancelling program sites... And yet simultaneously, we're being told the money will be put back in, but you must wait till June.

So you sort of have this huge opportunity cost, because of the way that the budget process operates, that leaves you in this gap of information. There's nothing on paper. And if you are a nonprofit in New York City, you know, if you don't have it on paper, don't believe it. And if you have it on paper and it sounds really good, be very skeptical of it."

YES entered into this period in the spring with infrastructure and resources to support policy design, coordination, and implementation. In this way, YES's value proposition was in part predicated on the inflexibility of the city's budgeting process.

2.3.1.5 Advocacy, civic engagement, and uprisings for racial justice

The timeline above notes the youth-led advocacy of Teens Take Charge, the broad stakeholder engagement of United Neighborhood Houses, and the role of YES in coordination, funding, and enlisting Tusk Strategies. What is not included in this picture is the larger social context of uprisings for racial justice in the spring and summer of 2020. On July 3, the *New York Times* published a

headline stating: "Black Lives Matter May Be the Largest Movement in U.S. History" (Buchanan et al., 2020). By the time the City Council was finalizing the budget that created SYEP Summer Bridge, the Black Lives Matter movement had heightened a public demand to defund police departments and reallocate those funds to community services, particularly in communities of color. The advocacy effort to restore SYEP, which primarily engages youth of color, dovetailed with this message. As described by the *Gotham Gazette*, a local publication, "SYEP had become the symbol of the mayor's entrenchment with the police department at the expense of young people" (Khurshid, 2020).

> *On the backdrop of uprisings for racial justice in the spring and summer of 2020, one news outlet noted that "SYEP had become the symbol of the mayor's entrenchment with the police department at the expense of young people."*

Put together, these five factors shaped the macro-environment that situated the emergence of YES.

2.3.2 Evolution of the problem

The goal of YES evolved through the turbulence of these broad influencing factors. We identify discrete points in time at which YES (re)positioned itself to solve different problems:

First, the pandemic response:

+ Focal problem 1, ASSESSMENT, emerged.
+ ASSESSMENT: Assess the impact of Covid-19 on community-based organizations and informal learning providers in afterschool and summer contexts.

Then, the SYEP funding cut response:

+ Focal problem 1, ASSESSMENT, gave way to focal problem 2, DESIGN.
+ DESIGN: Design safe, remote youth engagement options for summer 2020. At first this did not directly involve advocacy.

Next, the introduction of simultaneous, combative advocacy efforts:

+ Focal problem 2, DESIGN, remained and focal problem 3, ADVOCACY, was added.
+ ADVOCACY: Engage in adversarial advocacy with Tusk Strategies, and directly support Teens Take Charge and work with United Neighborhood Houses.

Next, the introduction of fundraising:

+ DESIGN and ADVOCACY remained, and, temporarily, focal problem 4, REPLACEMENT, was added.
+ REPLACEMENT: Establish a trisector collaboration that could, if necessary, provide a SYEP-like experience without SYEP itself.

Finally, the stabilization of focus on four problems in May:

+ DESIGN and ADVOCACY shifted their orientation, REPLACEMENT quickly adjusted to become SUPPORT for implementation of the restored Summer Bridge program, and YES cohered into a four-part value proposition:
  – Advocacy for funding restoration (led by Teens Take Charge)
  – Instructional policy design (with an inclusive, big-tent approach)
  – Instructional policy coordination (supporting official instructional policy through brokerage, information sharing, and funding)
  – Instructional policy implementation support (through shared sensemaking, partnership development, funding, and peer-led professional learning)

This evolution happened in the course of about six weeks, from the beginning of April to the middle of May. The rapidly changing nature of the problem itself is noteworthy because the underlying context of YES is that it was a rapid response initiative—and yet, what it was responding to was changing through the layered crises of the spring. Even after YES's value proposition stabilized in May, some elements of its expected value didn't entirely match what the field needed or could accommodate: Initially professional development and open curricular resources were significant parts of YES's anticipated implementation support; by the summer, these elements were of variable use to SYEP providers—the reality of when SYEP was restored and the short period of time between restoration and program implementation made utilization of such resources sometimes untenable for providers.

The volatility of the spring was further complicated by the high stakes and high visibility of YES working through this evolutionary process: It was in the middle of publicly-engaged advocacy campaigns while building a cross-sector coalition, seeking to raise millions of dollars, and designing implementation-ready solutions. These complexities were the nexus of tensions that YES needed to address in order to stabilize.

2.3.3 Tensions around program design and advocacy

The interdependence of YES's program design and advocacy efforts created tensions that were simultaneously generative and problematic. Advocacy efforts needed to have a safe, implementation-ready remote program model for work-based learning to advocate for:

Since the mayor's cancellation cited health and safety concerns, advocacy needed to point to a viable remote version of SYEP. When the mayor's rationale pointed to business closures (De Blasio, 2020), advocates needed program models that demonstrated that youth employment options were possible online. And, without advocacy, any programs that were designed would have little chance to reach implementation—these dual efforts were interdependent.

Organizations in the youth development ecosystem were, by necessity, already drafting their own plans for adapting their programs to the circumstances of the pandemic. Yet having a diversity of possible program models complicated the advocacy that followed the announcement of the cut: Different implementation models threatened to fragment a unified front of advocates, and advocates feared that fragmentation would be easier for policymakers to resist. YES's coalition, already collectively working on what youth program design for the summer could look like before the cut was announced, offered an inclusive space for advocates to rally around a common vision.

The YES coalition, already collectively working on what youth program design for the summer could look like before the SYEP cut was announced, offered an inclusive space for advocates to rally around a common vision.

But the risk of fragmenting advocacy work meant that the coalition was at times fraught. From the perspective of YES, this risk was accepted as part of the challenge that the coalition was addressing:

> *"And we were also aware that the youth development machinery [...] was advocating for a gajillion different things right now. They were still pushing for guidance, like, 'Are we allowed to operate? Are you gonna cover our PPE costs?' There were still questions from operating af-ter-school remotely in spring. [...] There was a lot of pushback to ExpandED like [...] 'Who do they think they are? They're gonna do this? We do this.'"*
>
> — Saskia Traill, ExpandED, 10.23.2020

Despite these differences, others in the coalition describe their motivation for joining as being both strategically advantageous and a way to mitigate risk of fragmentation. One advocate put it this way:

> *"The way that I remember it happening was that the announcement on [April 7] had caused a lot of tension across the field, and then a lot of individual efforts started to happen, and we sort of bumped into each other, and it was like: 'What's going on here? How can we be working together?'*
> *[...]*
> *...the way that we tried to work it was: We give each other the information that we can share, and that way we can ensure that we don't end up in so far different camps that that can be used against us."*

At the same time, ExpandED was fundraising, and, if successful, would receive funds as an SYEP provider within the context of the program models it was designing and advocating for. This tension was especially pronounced before YES's value proposition stabilized in May: There were brief periods in which some stakeholders thought YES might become a replacement to an irrevocably canceled SYEP in 2020, not a supplement to a restored SYEP. The range of (mis)conceptions about YES's ambitions and potential sources of funding introduced another challenge to the coalition's formation: To what degree was YES advocating to restore SYEP? And, to what degree was YES advocating for money that would support the coalition's organizers and partner organizations? Another member of the coalition recounted:

> *"...and then there started to be some sniping behind the scenes of... 'Are these people trying to become an intermediary to get money?'"*

YES occupied a delicate space in the ecosystem. In the end, many of these tensions were resolved as YES's value proposition stabilized: SYEP Summer Bridge was introduced as a public-private partnership, and YES established itself in a complementary role to SYEP Summer Bridge.

2.3.3.1 Navigating tensions via legitimacy and social capital

A series of enabling moves were critical to the YES coalition being able to resolve complex tensions while responding to multiple crises on a compressed timeline.

From the first meeting, entitled "Summer Learning Discussion," on April 1, the initiative that would become YES was focused on forming "a strong collective of partners to help/lead [DOE and DYCD] to envision and design scenarios for engaging youth this summer." Anchoring this collective of partners under YES, rather than any other site or set of partners throughout the city, required YES leaders to establish a sense of legitimacy that would influence others to come to their table.

> "On that day, on April 1st, it was intended to be a cross-cutting group, and particularly I think with attention to SYEP providers or SYEP ecosystem members who used SYEP in ways that furthered their organization. [...] But it was also intended to be a deliberate mix of different kinds of ecosystem members. So a small group, and a trusted group, but a mix of folks."
>
> — Saskia Traill, ExpandED, 10.23.2020

This inclusive approach proved critical throughout the program design work in the spring. Open-invite convenings in April and May hosted hundreds of people, with the first open event on April 23 having 122 participants on Zoom. In addition to engaging a diverse group of actors in the ecosystem, the "big tent" approach, as one interviewee described it, helped to build trust even as YES's direct advocacy efforts unsettled some organizations because of its combative nature.

> "I got calls that second week of April with a lot of consternation that these were the wrong [advocacy] tactics for youth development. And I think the sense that SYEP was competing for after school and for other funds, and that this program model would change what nonprofits were being asked to do, was really scary to some of the folks who advocate for the field, meaning the field of status quo. And I think it's important, not to make it sound too negative 'cause I do get it, it's like, 'We're trying to support people who are in crisis, serving families in crisis, and you're designing some new program model, some bells and whistles, like you guys are crazy.' And it was like, 'But a lot of your members are actually on this design team. They actually are... They're in this and they're excited about it because it feels optimistic and hopeful and youth-oriented.' It was like, this is about young people's needs, and I think it felt also... The way in which the meetings were not role-alike meetings, I think was also really refreshing. The people were able to see multiple perspectives in what the ecosystem needed to accomplish this summer."
>
> — Saskia Traill, ExpandED, 10.23.2020

The "big tent" approach helped to build trust even as YES's direct advocacy efforts unsettled some organizations because of its combative nature.

YES's program design work had also established a sense of legitimacy in the field because it established itself early in the crisis. Program design meetings had begun before the announcement of the SYEP cut, before YES's advocacy started, and before the coalition was branded as "YES." In some ways, this placed a firewall between design work and advocacy work and kept a clear focus on supporting programs.

> *"And I will say that because of the purity of the program design team, if you will, knowing that they were not being led by the lobbyists and that it was already moving, it felt... Those meetings felt like barn raising."*
>
> — Saskia Traill, ExpandED, 10.23.20

In places where this "purity" and momentum weren't sufficient to attract the support of necessary stakeholders, key choices by YES leaders and allies to use their own social capital proved to be important sources of legitimacy. One philanthropic leader brought with her leading policy advocates, lobbyists, venture capitalists, and funder networks, and others.

> *"You know, this resource that we don't talk about, that, well, we're talking about it more and more, but usually, we don't talk about, which is actually more precious than funds, which is access, right? It's access, and networking, and in this piece that people like me are so... You know, I grew up in this space, it's just my swimming pool. I'm like, 'Okay, I know this person, I know that person, I can call this person and if I don't, I'm one degree of separation away. So I can do that.'"*
>
> — Philanthropic leader, 10.20.20

Others used their social capital to support YES as well. For example, one early coalition member connected YES to youth development organizations and youth leaders directly, and then vouched for Dr. Traill and YES behind the scenes.

> *"I think I called City Hall once or twice, and then called some other people on behalf of [Dr. Traill] just to vouch for her and defend her, because, I think, you know, what she was doing was amazing. 'Cause the fact is, yeah, while she does get money out of it, she also is putting her organization's long-term funding on the line by taking risks. Because if you piss somebody off, that could have long-term implications for people whose salary depends on you to feed their kids. So I have a lot of respect for her."*

> *"I think it was largely a trust issue. On one side... There were some people inside city government that didn't know ExpandED and [Dr. Traill]. And I just thought she was doing amazing work, and I also could understand how, since she was also sort of potentially seeking money out of it, that there would be questions, but I trust her and I just... I'm a big trust person, and when I trust somebody... And I also felt like she was better positioned to take the leadership role than I was, so the least I could do was spend my political capital. So I made one or two calls for her to inside government, and then I made one or two calls for her to other advocacy people that I didn't think were being great."*

Social capital, like financial capital, is not distributed equally, and inequities fall along racial lines, especially in the context of the nonprofit and philanthropy environment in NYC. Although the diversity of the organizations in the YES coalition was important to establishing its legitimacy, the leaders of these organizations, who were using their social capital to buttress the initiative, were predominantly white. As one member of the coalition described:

> *"So then you have a bunch of different camps, everybody wants to be the plan. YES got that ticket... [YES was able to take on this role] because they had a bunch of powerful white people that were respected in the nonprofit field. That and they had all the ingredients. [...] They have foundation support, they have a vast network of schools and CBOs that they were connected with. So they could convene a lot of CBOs at once and people would show up."*

Legitimacy and social capital were key levers for supporting the emerging YES initiative, but they were also used by a limited group of people and they presented additional risks to the effort.

2.3.3.2 Navigating legitimacy and representation of youth voice

Legitimacy, in particular the perspective of young people, was so valuable that, in the urgency of the moment, it introduced new challenges. Teens Take Charge youth leaders were participating in calls with lobbyists, directly setting advocacy priorities for the campaign, and simultaneously lending valuable credibility to the initiative by representing and giving voice to the most direct victims of austerity in this case: young people.

And yet the reality that youth leaders were not able to be present within some critical conversations meant that adult allies had to navigate the representation of their priorities without misrepresenting them. As one coalition member shared regarding adult-youth collaboration within the coalition's program design efforts:

> *"I don't think that was perfect. [...] There wasn't enough time... kids were in school. So there was no time to get them in on the actual crafting, it was more of a check-point process. It was more like, 'This is what we've done so far, what do you all think of this?'"*

This interviewee elaborated on the central importance of youth perspective, and the source of this credibility:

> *"The people that we should be focusing on the most to figure out if our ideas are good are the young people. And I loved the way that they became the center... we have to listen to what these people say, because if these young people don't agree with what this is, then it is a dead idea. Having the support of organizations from Teens Take Charge was crucial in getting anything together. You really can't argue with young people. You can't do it. You can't say that this is what the young people want, and then they're like, 'We didn't say that.' You can't argue with that."*

Another adult coalition leader reflected on this dynamic:

> *"I think we were playing offense and defense at the same time with all aspects of of getting to an RFP, so we knew that if we used what youth told us they wanted as a scoring rubric, so to speak, that it would be defensible and would enable us to get sign-on that gave the effort more credibility as we went on."*

In practice, it was difficult to achieve this when youth leaders weren't logistically able to be present as frequently as adult leaders.

> *"With YES, I think there were still tensions around the student role on student voice, and I think Teens Take Charge did a great job of inserting themselves in meaningful ways and pushing back on stuff before it got ahead of where they were comfortable with... And I would just say that was a complicated dynamic that we had to be very careful about throughout."*

> *"The people that we should be focusing on the most to figure out if our ideas are good are the young people. And I loved the way that they became the center."*

Youth leaders were aware of these risks, as one of them noted in retrospect, "Although [our perspective] was received, I don't know if it was bought off or at times it was truly centered." And while members of the coalition pointed to complex dynamics, other interviewees repeatedly affirm their trust in the intentions and expertise of the adult advocates working with youth leaders.

The YES coalition entailed 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. And while this collaboration was broadly characterized by respect and deep valuation of youth perspectives and interests by adult allies, youth leaders had commitments outside of YES coalition activities and so from time to time were represented by adults who were present. While this representation does not indicate any kind of misrepresentation, it does point to the need for increased intentionality around and sensitivity to dynamics of power within intergenerational coalitions.

2.4 Discussion and implications

This analysis informs our findings of five key lessons from this period of formation. Viewing the whole of this period, we can take away insights about the possibilities and challenges of YES's approach to coalition-building, advocacy, and program design. We share these insights so that we might learn from YES as a model, with lessons that can be applied in non-crisis conditions.

2.4.1 Those who are closest to the challenge are closest to the solution

From its earliest meetings, YES intended to be a coalition by and for youth-serving organizations and youth themselves. Since these groups would bear the consequences of compounding crises during summer program implementation, their perspectives were prioritized during the period of formation in the spring. The challenges of prioritizing such perspectives should be clear from our analysis above, along with the possibilities.

YES's process of engaging frontline organizations and youth themselves, and collaborating on key decision points, from target outcomes to program designs, marks a clear difference in process from preparing for typical summer implementations in previous years. The crisis of spring 2020 created opportunities for closer collaboration with those most impacted by policy decisions, more engagement in a shared process among peer organizations, and less reliance on contractual or hierarchical relationships. We identify this change in process as a key takeaway that can stand to influence future work.

> *Since youth and youth-serving organizations would bear the consequences of compounding crises during summer program implementation, their perspectives were prioritized during the coalition's formation in the spring*

2.4.2 Build coalitions that are diverse by design

YES leaders built a coalition of diverse stakeholders from the start, and then worked to establish a process of mutual agreement on strategic decisions throughout and beyond this formative period. YES's program design meetings during the month of April, both the smaller "Design" meetings (9–15 participants) and larger "Advisory" meetings (120+ participants), deliberately included youth-serving organizations of different sizes and different content specialties. Advocacy efforts similarly included diverse perspectives (for example, some meetings included both youth advocates and professional lobbyists). This diversity continued through the evaluation of submissions to the RFP (reviewers included youth-serving organizations, intermediaries, and youth leaders), the final portfolio of organizations who received funding from YES (see Chapter 3), and how the summer's community of practice facilitated learning from peers and from youth (see Chapter 3).

This repeated pattern demonstrates a commitment to having a broad range of stakeholder perspectives intentionally included across key activities in the YES coalition. When viewing this commitment as a design principle of the YES coalition's work, it stands as a model that is applicable to non-crisis initiatives: Diverse representation is possible and beneficial, and can be sustained through each stage of a collaborative effort.

2.4.3 Navigating intergenerational advocacy is important—and complex

Youth leadership was a key element of three of YES's four components: advocacy for restoration, influencing instructional policy, and supporting implementation. In each of these components,

youth participation had a consequential impact on the work of the YES coalition as a whole. At the same time, the important role played by youth leaders came with complex and important challenges (see section 2.3.3.2 above).

The lesson we draw from YES's formation is that youth leadership is an important element in change efforts, and that it comes with a set of responsibilities and challenges. Youth leaders may be "closest to the challenge" and they may be part of diverse teams, as described in the lessons above—and their participation in particular deserves deliberate attention and consideration.

2.4.4 Urgency and technology supported widespread engagement

Our analysis above describes the key factors that shaped the formation of YES in the spring. In drawing lessons from this period, we acknowledge the roles that urgency (created by crisis conditions) and technology (which mediated almost all social interactions during the period) played: Urgency spurred motivation for widespread engagement with YES, and technology simplified the means of engagement with YES. Without such urgency and without low barriers to participation, we expect that an effort like YES would not have seen such widespread engagement (or existed at all).

The lesson we draw from this is not to manufacture urgency or to insist on the use of technology in future work, but instead to point to the importance of collective focus on mutual priorities and the creation of accessible ways for people to engage in addressing them.

The lesson we draw from the YES coalition's response is not to manufacture urgency or to insist on the use of technology in future work, but instead to point to the importance of collective focus on mutual priorities and the creation of accessible ways for people to engage in addressing them.

2.4.5 Collaboration and broad agreement are possible, but not inevitable

With the above lessons in mind, we offer one more in conclusion: Collaboration and broad agreement are possible, but not inevitable. YES's work to spur collaboration and broad agreement, and indeed to generate evidence to support each of the lessons above, relied on existing networks, infrastructure, and resources within the youth development ecosystem in New York City. YES both emerged from and drew on a strong social fabric of organizations—namely Teens Take Charge, United Neighborhood Houses, HERE to HERE, Hive NYC Learning Network, Student Success Network, and ExpandED Schools, along with many others—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 operate and build an infrastructure and ecosystem to support NYC youth in summer 2020.

In this concluding lesson we acknowledge the critical importance of sustaining this kind of infrastructure for the benefit of youth and communities, regardless of the presence of a broader crisis.

3

Interventions and Impacts
of the YES Coalition

3.1 Overview

The YES coalition launched as a rapid response to layering crises introduced by the Covid-19 pandemic. Following its turbulent period of formation, described in Chapter 2, YES supported SYEP Summer Bridge in July and August 2020. Using the benefit of hindsight, this chapter articulates the resultant design of YES and the impacts that it had in four areas: advocating for SYEP restoration, influencing instructional policy, coordinating instructional policy, and supporting the implementation of instructional policy. Put together, these activities represent the core working areas of the YES coalition.[1]

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1 Additional elements of YES's strategy that are not described below include: funding for technology for youth, funding for stipends for undocumented youth, and research and documentation of the effort to share with the field.

While the effort was born within a crisis, and thus had to continually adapt to a context that eluded more traditional and linear modes of planning (see Chapter 2), through reconstruction of activities, we can offer a "retrospective strategy model" of the YES ecosystem.

The following chapter discusses the four main areas of focus and an analysis of their impacts. Although described in separate sections, it should be noted that these core activities were overlapping and mutually reinforcing. The four-part organizing structure presented here is for the sake of clarity; during spring and summer 2020, these elements were running in parallel, sometimes in ways that were overlapping and interdependent.

Viewing the sum of these parts, YES offers both an example of a crisis response effort and a proof-of-concept of how the field might operate in the future. This proof-of-concept demonstrates the possibilities that can emerge from:

+ Collective action and cross-sector collaboration that intentionally weaves together policy advocates, youth leaders, community-based organizations, philanthropic actors, and private industry groups to draw from distributed expertise and resources in the process of engagement in policy advocacy, influence, coordination, and implementation support.
+ Engagement with non-city contracted organizations to support youth development and career exploration goals, and considering such organizations to be "content partners."

TABLE 3.1 **Retrospective analysis of YES's strategy, centered on four core activities**

Interventions	Outputs	Impacts
🟠 **Advocacy for funding restoration** 🔵 **Instructional policy influence** 🟢 **Instructional policy coordination** 🟣 **Instructional policy implementation support**	↑ Policy information communication ↑ Advocacy alignment ↑ Resources to providers	↑ Introduction of Summer Bridge ↑ Alignment of instructional policy goals
🟠 Direct advocacy 🟠 Coordinating advocacy priorities 🟠 Allocating resources to lobbying 🟠 Elevating youth leadership 🟠🔵 Big-tent program design 🟠🔵 Coalition building 🟠🔵🟢🟣 Fundraising 🟠🔵🟢🟣 Coordination + alignment 🟢🟣 Workplace Challenge brokerage 🟣 RFP design 🟣 RFP feedback cycles 🟣 Awarding program funds 🟣 Convenings - practice sharing 🟣 Convenings - networking 🟣 Partnership matchmaking	↑ Policy-aligned supplemental support partners ("content partners") ↑ Professional community ↑ Training + assistance ↑ Partnerships ↑ Youth learning experience ↑ Cash assistance to youth ↓ Professional isolation	↑ Capacity + coordination + resources ↑ Quality youth programs ↑ Organizational social capital ↑ Cross-organizational learning ↑ Ecosystem stabilization ↓ Trauma during crisis

YES created a marketplace that identified, aligned, resourced, and connected these content partners to SYEP providers to satisfy instructional policy requirements with high-quality programming.

+ The existence of professional communities of practice, as YES's decentralized approach to peer-to-peer relationship-building, sensemaking, and professional learning was a critical component of the implementation support it provided.

+ Providing a "proving ground" for pilot instructional models, in this case, broadening approaches to career exploration for youth by supporting a diverse range of sector-linked Project Based Learning experiences as demonstrated by the portfolio of YES content partners.

+ Stabilization provided by community-based coalitions at multiple levels in the face of precarity and uncertainty (in this case, stepping into a vacuum spurred by the combination of a pandemic and the municipal response to it).

With these lessons in mind, YES can be understood not just as a short-term response to acute needs introduced by the pandemic, but as a model for a different approach to engaging the field and supporting youth that can be learned from during future policy deliberations.

Next, we present our analysis of the context, interventions, and findings from YES's four primary lines of activity.

3.2 Advocacy for funding restoration
3.2.1 Context

Starting shortly after the announcement of the SYEP cut on April 7, YES began to advocate to restore funding to the program. This advocacy for restoration took multiple forms: bridging a coalition of diverse stakeholders in advocacy, allocating financial and human resources to a combative lobbying firm and to youth-led advocacy, and elevating youth leadership in strategic decision-making. These coordinated actions exerted public pressure through engagement with news media to report on program cuts; public commendation, or, admonishment, of City Council members based on their support for reversing cuts; and social media campaigns.

Aside from these activities, which were openly geared toward advocacy, simultaneous attempts to influence and coordinate policy and later actions to support program implementation (e.g., fundraising, brokering relationships, publishing an RFP) became forcing mechanisms that raised the visibility and urgency of the SYEP funding restoration effort.

3.2.2 Interventions

TABLE 3.2 Activities and impacts of YES efforts toward funding restoration

Activities	Impacts
● **Advocacy for funding restoration**	↑ introduction of SYEP Summer Bridge program
	↑ 35K youth reached (from 0)
● ⠀⠀⠀Direct advocacy	↑ $$$ youth stipends distributed (from $0)
● ⠀⠀⠀Coordinating advocacy priorities	↓ 40K youth reached (from 75K)
● ⠀⠀⠀Allocating resources to lobbying	↓ $$$ stipends (decreased from 2019 level)
● ⠀⠀⠀Elevating youth leadership	
●● ⠀⠀Big-tent program design	
●● ⠀⠀Coalition building	
●●● ⠀Fundraising	
●●●● Coordination + alignment	

YES's **direct advocacy** efforts included messaging to and dialogue with municipal actors to promote their interest in restoring SYEP. Simultaneous work **coordinated the advocacy priorities** of multiple stakeholders in the field by hosting and attending virtual meetings.

YES **allocated financial and human resources** to engage Tusk Strategies, a lobbying firm, in launching a combative campaign to support restoring SYEP. This firm played a role in setting an advocacy strategy and securing media placements.

Throughout its advocacy, YES funded youth advocacy and repeatedly **elevated youth leadership** in strategy and decision-making by collaborating with the youth-led advocacy group Teens Take Charge. Teens participated in strategy calls with the coalition's lobbying firm and advocated for their own priorities in the slate of target outcomes produced by YES. (It should also be noted that youth participated in other elements of the YES strategy by reviewing proposals to the YES RFP and supporting professional development activities for adult facilitators).

In addition:
+ YES's simultaneous role in influencing and coordinating instructional policy connected the coalition to an expanding number of actors in the field. This increased YES's visibility and the increase in connections throughout the field strengthened its advocacy.
+ As summer implementation approached, YES's fundraising and brokerage activities put them in dialogue with key decision-makers, further supporting their advocacy efforts.

For further description of these interventions, see Chapter 2.

3.2.3 Findings

Instead of a full restoration of the existing scope of the Summer Youth Employment Program, the campaign outcome was the introduction of SYEP Summer Bridge, a program that served fewer than half the youth served in 2019 and that also reduced by half the stipends available to participating youth—a significant reduction of the existing public program in numerous respects. Beyond this, the instructional nature of the program was significantly shifted from more traditional work-based learning to a career exploration model, an outcome that YES was also engaged in, as we explore in the next section.

However, from a policy perspective, full funding restoration was unlikely given the significant barriers presented by the Covid-19 pandemic, the New York City budget, and other factors outlined in Chapter 2. And so the introduction of SYEP Summer Bridge may be considered a qualified success in that the program that ran reflected some 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. While the goal of the restoration effort was well captured in the hashtag used by teen advocates—#SaveSYEP—that group, supported by YES, itself characterized the results of the campaign as a "partial win." As Teens Take Charge noted on its website:

> *"After eliminating all funding for the Summer Youth Employment Program in April, Mayor de Blasio and the City Council reached an agreement to restore 35,000 positions for Summer 2020. This is a significant drop from the 75,000 SYEP slots last summer, but it's better than a complete elimination, which would have been catastrophic."*

Our findings support the interpretation of this outcome as a partial success, given the logistical, political, and budgetary constraints at play within the context of New York City's pandemic crisis. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge the degree of austerity and reduction of public services implicit in this outcome in order to keep a broader perspective on the nature of the outcome that was reached with regards to policy restoration.

This qualified success is due to many factors, and central to it were the advocacy efforts of the YES coalition. However, it is important to note that this outcome is not solely due to YES efforts. While it is fair to characterize YES as playing a leadership role, YES was working within a broader coalition of actors who engaged in the larger campaign around policy restoration, including Teens Take Charge, United Neighborhood Houses, HERE to HERE, and many others (see Chapter 2).

3.3 Instructional policy influence

3.3.1 Context

Advocacy for restoration ran in parallel with a separate thread of efforts to influence the design of instructional policy for the summer. 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. This articulation was intertwined with the restoration effort, since that advocacy, in some respects, relied on there being a viable alternative to the SYEP program design that predated the pandemic and that would likely be impossible due to it. At the same time, while intertwined, YES leaders

aimed to create somewhat of a "firewall" between its advocacy efforts and its work to collaboratively define an alternative instructional vision that drew on youth and practitioner perspectives. For example, a clarification in an April 8 meeting agenda among YES coalition members noted the relationship between collaborative instructional policy design and advocacy for restoration: "This conversation informs and overlaps with but does not focus on advocacy efforts."

YES engaged in the work of policy influence with a unique institutional positionality. It was not part of the City government (e.g., DYCD); it was not a city-contracted intermediary (such as Hats & Ladders or the Youth Development Institute[2]); and it was not a single SYEP provider.[3] Instead, it was a coalition of SYEP providers and adjacent community-based organizations.

This positionality meant that YES did not have official standing as a broker of DYCD policy information; at the same time, as a group of interested parties with formal and informal ties to official sources of policy information, YES was able to act as a venue for sharing emerging policy information, informal collaborative sensemaking around incoming information (rather than formal policy dissemination and enforcement), and organizing to determine shared goals. Meeting notes from YES design meetings as early as mid-April show dialogue from various actors throughout the ecosystem sharing updates and coordinating with others in the field. Some evidence of dialogue between YES stakeholders and municipal actors indicates that the coordination happening within YES was relayed, and that some information was likely shared bi-directionally, with official sources and policymakers.

[2] DYCD contracted with Hats & Ladders to provide an online career exploration curriculum. Youth Development Institute was contracted to provide professional development to SYEP providers.
[3] While the YES coalition itself did not have standing as an SYEP provider, a number of its partner organizations and contributors, including two of its central organizations, ExpandED and Beam Center, were SYEP providers.

3.3.2 Interventions

TABLE 3.3 **Activities and impacts of YES efforts to influence instructional policy**

Activities	Impacts
● **Instructional policy influence**	↑ ecosystem alignment on outcomes
	↑ coordination of the field pre-launch
●● Big-tent program design	
●● Coalition building	
●●●● Fundraising	
●●●● Coordination + alignment	

YES began hosting **program design** meetings in early April to prepare for an uncertain summer, before SYEP was cut and before the emerging initiative was branded "YES." These program design meetings intentionally took a **"big-tent"** approach, deliberately including a group of organizations that was intended to be representative of the youth development and work-based learning field (e.g., including small, medium, and large organizations; organizations with varied programmatic goals and operating models; etc). 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.

As YES played an increasing role in advocacy, policy coordination, and eventually support for policy implementation, it had an increasing presence in the field that supported its effort to influence policy. Activities focused on **fundraising** and **brokering new relationships** in the field, for example, raised YES's profile and positioned YES to push its instructional priorities.

3.3.3 Findings

In seeking to influence the emerging instructional policy of SYEP Summer Bridge, YES convened actors from across the youth development ecosystem to co-design program models that were viable options for the summer of 2020. These designs veered away from traditional models of work-based learning and emphasized career-oriented Project Based Learning, following the precedent set by SYEP policy in 2019 (see Chapter 2).

As with the outcomes of YES's advocacy for restoration, we are not able to assess the degree to which YES's attempts to influence SYEP Summer Bridge instructional policy had a direct impact. Despite this limitation of our evaluative capacity, the results indicate another qualified success. The outcomes that were co-designed by YES stakeholders matched the policy stance published by Teens Take Charge, and matched three out of four of DYCD's programmatic goals for SYEP Summer Bridge, with very close overlap on the fourth.

TABLE 3.4 Comparison of target program outcomes in advocacy efforts and official program outcomes from DYCD

YES outcomes	Teens Take Charge program components (2020a)	DYCD Summer Bridge Program outcomes (2020a)
Connections to professionals	Connections to professionals	Connections to professionals
Career exploration	Career exploration	Career exploration
Skills-building	Skills-building	Skill-building activities
Social emotional learning supports	Social and emotional supports	Community building
Authentic work experiences	Authentic work experiences	

Taken as a whole, YES's efforts to influence instructional policy resulted in the following outcomes:
+ The ecosystem of actors in the summer youth employment space became aligned on target outcomes in the summer of 2020, and
+ Because this effort to influence began in the spring, actors in the YES ecosystem had an extended window of time in which to understand instructional policy priorities before they were officially announced when SYEP Summer Bridge began in July.

This extended period of policy engagement in the spring will be revisited in Section 3.5: Instructional Policy Implementation Support, in light of the way it helped organizations adapt to new policy expectations.

3.4 Instructional policy coordination
3.4.1 Context
In addition to seeking to influence the design of instructional policy, YES actively supported the viability of instructional policy by brokering key relationships and resourcing infrastructure and actors in the field. Specifically, YES's instructional policy coordination helped to make Workplace Challenges (the third component of Summer Bridge instructional policy alongside Hats & Ladders and Project Based Learning) possible by supporting trisector collaboration.

3.4.2 Interventions

TABLE 3.5 Activities and impacts of YES efforts to coordinate the rollout and implementation of instructional policy

Activities

● **Instructional policy coordination**

●●●● Fundraising
●●●● Coordination + alignment
　　●● Workplace Challenge brokerage

Impacts

↑ Trisector collaboration

↑ Private companies and professionals engaged

↑ Youth learning experiences and connections to professionals

Through timely sharing of information around the emergent Summer Bridge instructional policy, YES **supported key relationships and partnerships** that affected the resulting policy infrastructure. This primarily occurred through direct correspondence and meetings hosted by the president and CEO of ExpandED, the central organization of the YES coalition, with key City partners within the technology sector.

YES **funded technical assistance organizations** whose resulting work products were used in official Summer Bridge instructional policy guidance.

3.4.3 Findings

YES played a role in forming relationships between individuals and organizations that coordinated the implementation of SYEP Summer Bridge instructional policy, most clearly evidenced in Workplace Challenges. This official component of DYCD instructional policy was new in SYEP Summer Bridge—there was no direct precedent for it in the previous year's program. YES supported relationships and aligned partners who turned out to be key to the implementation of Workplace Challenges. In particular, YES connected with Tech:NYC, a consortium of technology companies in the city, and linked it to SYEP Summer Bridge. Tech:NYC invested in a full-time staff role for the summer to build tools for technology companies to offer Workplace Challenges. Additionally, YES funded Grant Associates, augmenting funding from DYCD itself, to develop materials to define Workplace Challenges and provide training sessions around the pedagogical model to City agencies as well as to SYEP providers. As a result, a total of 99 tech companies affiliated with Tech:NYC participated in Summer Bridge, representing about 10 percent of all the companies that were involved in 2020. (DYCD reported that over 1,000 companies were involved in Workplace Challenges overall.) YES met with a team at Tech:NYC to support its involvement even while the City was awaiting public funds and a program restoration announcement.

Connections to Tech:NYC began with a philanthropic leader, who was an early advisor and supporter of YES. As this advisor recounts, these relationships mobilized private sector involvement in summer youth activities:

> "[One technology leader] just immediately was like, 'We're gonna figure out this partnership piece, we're gonna get every nonprofit that wants one a tech partner, we're gonna create templates for [Workplace Challenges]...' He got really interested in the Workplace Challenge. [...] Certainly, he mobilized his whole network and [another technology leader] as well in getting both money and actual content and kind of the structure for content into the game."

The result was a trisector collaboration that undergirded official instructional policy. Dr. Traill (ExpandED / YES) connected Tech:NYC, the Center for Youth Employment (CYE), and the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD). By the time SYEP Summer Bridge launched publically, Tech:NYC was interfacing directly with DYCD. Sarah Kashef, a Coro Fellow who worked closely in the implementation of Tech:NYC's partnerships, recounts how the trisector collaboration began:

> "Our first touch point was [Dr. Traill]. So she was sending us a lot of materials, and then we got connected to folks from the Center for Youth Employment and the DYCD...
> [...]
> So [Dr. Traill] at first was the main liaison, but because things were so in flux, we started just directly working with DYCD and then having big check-in calls; of course Saskia was involved."
> — Sarah Kashef (11.5.20)

Following this initial brokerage, Ms. Kashef described how the trisector collaboration operated:

> "We [Tech:NYC] had a list of all our companies. We had their point of contact, how many people they were interested in working with, how many youth they were projected to work with, and so, we wanted to match those numbers. So then, we had a list of all the nonprofits. And then, the idea was to then give it to the City, and then the City would make all of the intros between the nonprofits and the tech companies."
> — Sarah Kashef (11.5.20)

Put together, YES's effort to coordinate instructional policy resulted in a narrow but impactful set of partnerships (via Tech:NYC) that affected participating SYEP Summer Bridge organizations and the youth they served.

3.5 Instructional policy implementation support
3.5.1 Context

By the time SYEP Summer Bridge was announced, SYEP providers had 26 days left before they would begin their programs with youth, and even less time to submit plans and comply with various DYCD policies. This period was a flurry of preparation for implementation, as we will explore further in Chapter 4. In a final set of activities, YES sought to support providers in meeting the requirements of implementation policy.

YES approached this goal within the condensed timeline of the summer by establishing a supporting infrastructure with two innovations:
1. The systematic addition of content partners as a formal element of the youth development and work-based learning ecosystem, and
2. The coordination of content partners as a strategy for decentralized Project Based Learning (PBL) support.

3.5.1.1 Systematic addition of "content partners"
YES created infrastructure to support the role of "content partners": organizations that would work with SYEP providers for technical support, training, curriculum, career panels, and/or virtual work site placements that fulfilled Project Based Learning requirements. Although work site partnerships had existed in previous iterations of SYEP, content partners for the summer of 2020 tended to have a different role given the circumstances of the pandemic and the new focus on PBL. YES engaged in a series of steps to identify such partners, provide them with resources, align their offerings to the needs of SYEP partners during Summer Bridge, and form new partnerships with SYEP partners. In the figure below, we can see how the YES ecosystem was adjacent and supplementary to SYEP Summer Bridge actors, and how content partners were the primary interface with SYEP participants.

FIGURE 3.1 A visual representation of YES's adjacent and supplementary role in SYEP Summer Bridge
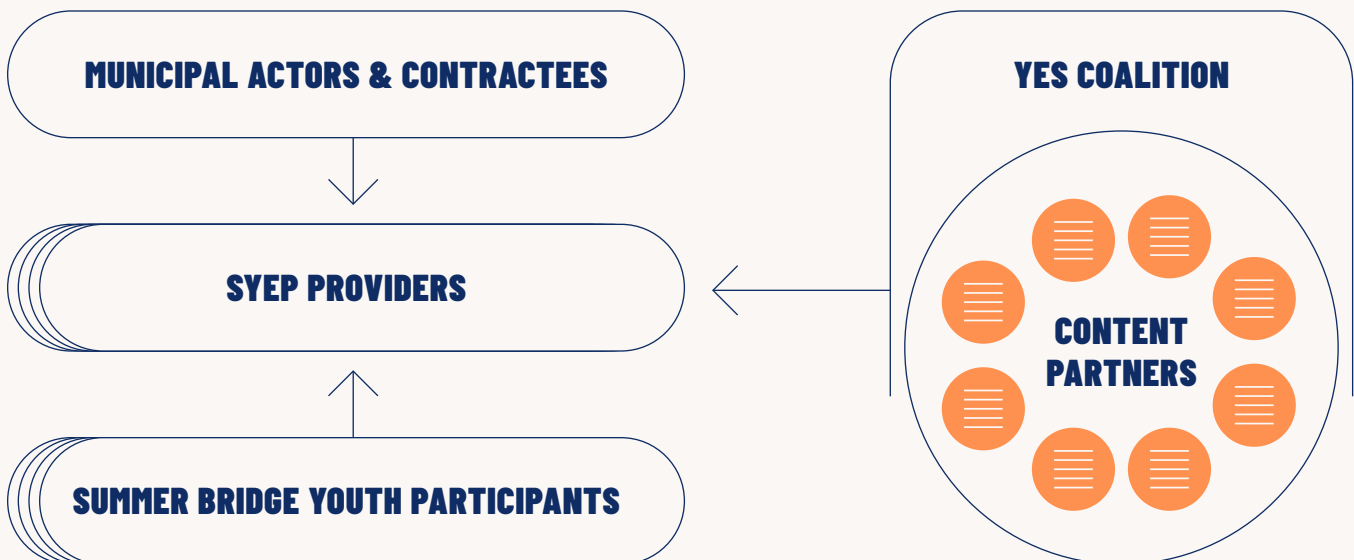
3.5.1.2 Decentralized implementation support for Project Based Learning

A key effect of the introduction of content partners was that YES acted to decentralize implementation support for Project Based Learning. When DYCD introduced PBL in 2019, it was centralized via DYCD policy guidance and a single capacity builder for the field (NYC Department of Youth and Community Development, 2019a). YES took a different approach, creating a community of practice, populated by SYEP providers and content partners from specialized and community-based education organizations, with activities designed to facilitate peer-to-peer learning and collaboration among those in the YES ecosystem.

Key to this decentralized strategy was a diverse portfolio of content partners. Through its RFP process and, in a small number of cases, directly established contracts, YES selected 36 organizations, which included a broad range of content areas and program models.

On the foundation of these two innovations, YES facilitated a series of activities: launching an RFP, distributing funds, brokering new partnerships, supporting interpretation of policy guidance, supporting professional learning, supporting the emotional well-being of professionals in crisis, and more.

YES CONTENT PARTNERS REPRESENTED FIELDS INCLUDING:

Community Organizing & Civic Engagement

Science and the Environment

Financial Literacy

Urban Planning

Engineering

Public Health

Culinary Arts

Career Exploration & Mentoring

Creative Media Production

Tech and Computing

Entrepreneurship

UNMASKEDU

3.5.2 Interventions

TABLE 3.6 Activities and impacts of YES's efforts to support the implementation of instructional policy

Interventions

● Instructional policy implementation support

●●●● Fundraising
●●●● Coordination + alignment
   ●● Workplace Challenge brokerage
    ● RFP design
    ● RFP feedback cycles
    ● Awarding program funds
    ● Convenings - practice sharing
    ● Convenings - networking
    ● Partnership matchmaking

Impacts

↑ content partner "market fit"

↑ social capital development

↑ cross-organizational learning

↑ community development

↑ stability, reliability, clarity

YES's RFP process served multiple functions. The **design of the RFP** was a collaborative activity, created with partner organizations across the YES ecosystem. This collaborative design acted as a forcing mechanism, supporting the coherence and alignment of these organizations as they prepared for summer implementation. Following publication, a wide range of actors, including panels of funders, intermediary organizations, youth-serving organizations of various sizes (including SYEP providers), and youth leaders participated in the **RFP review and feedback process**. The review and feedback process served to further align the expectations of these actors and the applicants.

YES **distributed funds** of over $1M to 36 organizations to support programming directly.

YES's RFP process resulted in the creation of a diverse portfolio of **content partners**. Content partners originally proposed supporting SYEP providers through open curriculum, training, hosting career panels, and serving as virtual work sites for youth. In the end, though, some content partners shifted their offering to focus on career panels and virtual work sites to better accommodate the needs and capacity of SYEP providers.

Partnership matchmaking was a key element of the policy implementation support strategy. By hosting convenings (including two dedicated "speed dating" sessions to support partnership formation) and directly introducing organizations to each other, YES directly facilitated the formation of 55 partnerships.

Convenings proved to be central to the strategy of implementation support intervention. The YES coalition partners hosted multiple convenings in preparation for implementation, and then held weekly practitioner convenings with morning and afternoon sessions throughout the Summer Bridge program.

Communications were sent through **email newsletters** to a list of over 400 subscribers as well as via **direct correspondence**, facilitated in particular by the core leading members of YES.

YES's work to support the implementation of SYEP Summer Bridge policy began in concert with all the other interventions described above. The following visualization represents the key components of this work. Each component is described in further detail below.

FIGURE 3.2 **Visual representation of key activities in YES implementation support**
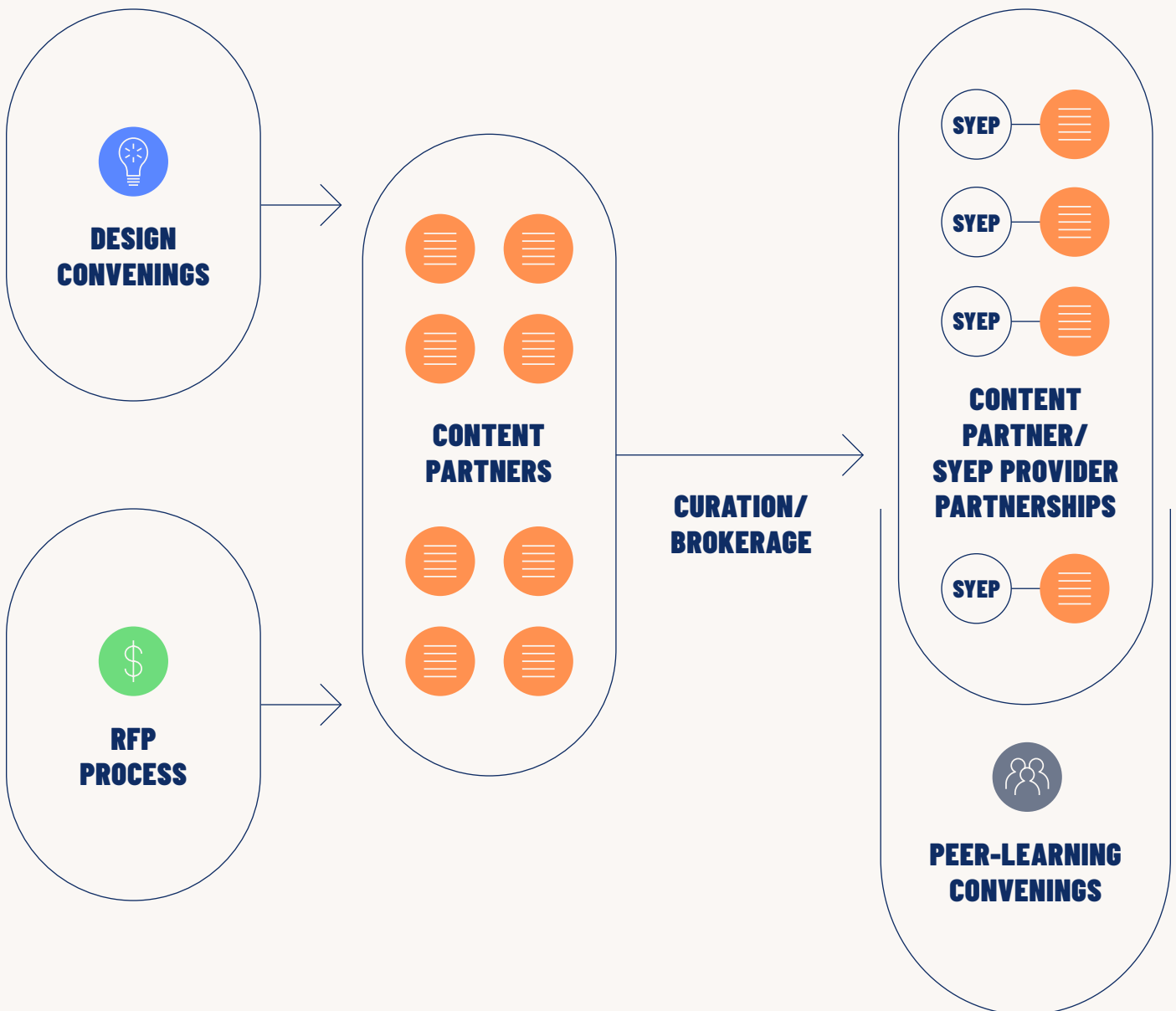
AN ETHOS OF OPEN PARTICIPATION AND COLLABORATION

The YES initiative was not only characterized by the problems it was trying to solve, but also by the way it went about solving them—through coalition building, open participation, and community-based development of solutions. This approach didn't emerge simply in the context of the crisis that New York City and the youth development field were facing during the summer of 2020, but instead drew on a range of local histories and field-level shifts towards these ways of working and organizing.

Many parts of the education sector have evolved in recent years, both in how they structure themselves, and how they get work done. When it comes to structure, there's been an embrace of a wide variety of models of network development, including models of collective impact (Kania & Kramer, 2011) and networked improvement (Bryk et al., 2011), which not only focus on collaboration but also emphasize setting shared goals across large numbers of organizations and even multiple sectors that impact youth development and learning. In terms of process, there's been wide adoption of practices such as community-based participatory design and co-design (Muller & Kuhn, 1993; DiSalvo et al., 2017) that emphasize involving multiple groups of stake-holders in collaborative routines that work to identify problems and iterate solutions together.

In New York City, these trends have come together in much of the work of key partners within the YES coalition and leadership. Student Success Network organizes itself around shared measurement of social and emotional learning and actively utilizes continuous improvement methods with its member organizations. ExpandED, a longstanding intermediary in the out of school sector in the city, cultivates collaborative community development approaches in its work. And Hive NYC Learning Network, through its historical stewardship by the Mozilla Foundation, has been characterized by practices of "working in the open," grounded in values of transparency, mass collaboration, and sharing within communities dedicated to experimentation and collective learning.

Within the YES coalition, these principles were at play across a range of activities. In developing an alternative vision that might ground a restored City program (see Section 3.3), YES created large-scale open contexts where over 100 youth-serving organizations collaborated to develop a prototype and iterate a potential model and core set of outcomes. In implementing a rapid RFP process, YES enlisted review boards of SYEP providers, intermediary organizations, and youth them-selves (see Section 3.5.3). And in providing a peer-led professional learning community during the summer program (see Section 3.5.3.3), it crowdsourced topics and facilitated the development of a structure for sharing practices and providing mutual support. *(continues on the next page)*

We highlight these approaches because they actively aim to enact a different sensibility around how the fields of youth development and work-based learning might operate. Organizational leaders from within large social service organizations we spoke with noted that the initiative felt different—more collaborative, more open, more experimental—compared to the typical ways of working that characterize the field. Making these sorts of practices work across a large scale coalition doesn't happen by accident, but requires care and intentionality. We believe that the work YES accomplished highlighted the value of such practices, and how they might serve the field moving forward.

3.5.3 Findings

3.5.3.1. Outcome: Content partner "market fit"
YES, by systemically adding "content partners" and establishing an RFP process to select and fund those partners, curated a set of organizations that could support the implementation needs of SYEP providers in the context of a shifting instructional policy.

A central outcome of YES's RFP, of course, was the allocation of funds that would support implementation, but the RFP process itself supported a series of emergent outcomes before, during, and after the publication of the RFP that further prepared the YES ecosystem for effective implementation. The creation of the RFP forced YES organizers to articulate their vision of what a successful submission would look like, the process of evaluating submissions socialized a common understanding of what characteristics programs needed in order to work within the context of a restored program model that was still opaque to many actors in the field, and the iterative process of providing feedback to rejected submissions and encouraging resubmissions helped partner organizations in the field to adapt their plans to better meet the demands of the restored Summer Bridge structure. In this way, the RFP process itself helped to achieve the goal of mobilizing, clarifying, and internalizing the emergent Summer Bridge instructional policy across the YES ecosystem.

YES distributed $1,010,272 dollars to content partners in 36 contracts. The resulting pool of available content partners formed a "marketplace" in which SYEP providers could identify new implementation partners. We characterize the pool of available content partners as a "marketplace" because the work of alignment, brokerage, and interaction was largely decentralized: Not all content partners ended up working with SYEP providers, and among those that did, some needed to change their offerings to suit the needs of the SYEP providers. In this way, the SYEP providers and Summer Bridge instructional policy shaped the "demand" of this marketplace, and content partners were the "supply" to meet it. Those content partners that could establish an appropriate fit for the demands of the marketplace established working partnerships to support implementation.

Finally, it was not only the individual qualities of the content partners but the collective diversity of the content partner pool that represented a

"fit" within the larger Summer Bridge program. As noted, the partners within the pool represented a wide range of industries, interest areas, and disciplines, including entrepreneurship, climate and the environment, creative media production, public health, technology and computing, engineering, urban planning, and financial literacy. This widened the range of options youth could choose from and increased the likelihood that students would find an experience that matched their interest. The ability to choose an experience that interested them felt especially important in a year when there was so much uncertainty. One provider said this:

> *"In the beginning, anyone who was enrolled during our first or second lottery, we sent them a catalog of our courses, so we gave them the opportunity to choose what class they wanted to be in. And the fact that we were able to have ours in addition to the YES content, it made our catalog so special. It was just a good variety and it made us feel good to be able to offer it to all our participants and give them some choice. They had no control over SYEP being cancelled, SYEP coming back in a virtual setting and in a smaller capacity, and for us to be able to offer them the class that they want to do for the next five weeks felt good. And I think the YES content partners allowed us to do that."*

3.5.3.2 Outcome: Partnership brokerage and field-level social capital development

Having fostered an ecosystem of content partners that were, in theory, aligned with the needs of SYEP providers, YES organizers needed to concretely and quickly create ways for these actors to discover one another, assess whether they met one another's needs, and form partnerships. Indeed, this was part of the value proposition that YES offered to the content partners it funded and to the SYEP providers it aimed to support. While some of these actors came to the table with preexisting relationships, as we'll share shortly, many did not.

YES designed three primary mechanisms to support partnership development. First, all content partners submitted detailed descriptions of their offerings, which were used to populate a publicly available database on the coalition website circulated to SYEP providers. Second, in mid-July 2020, content partners and SYEP providers were invited to large scale virtual "speed dating" convenings where they could become familiar with the offerings available within the YES ecosystem. Finally, following these convenings, YES facilitated one-on-one email introductions among parties that were interested in partnering. This took two forms: introductions based on interest, signaled by SYEP providers to YES organizers following convenings, and tracking those within the content partner pool who were still looking to find partnerships and subsequently querying for interest among SYEP providers they were familiar with.

While these were the mechanisms that had been formally designed to support partnership formation, evidence also shows that some organizations had been utilizing the broader YES infrastructure to begin this process as early as April. One provider reported that her organization intentionally sent a team of staffers to the large-scale advisory convenings held by YES, which were designed to solicit practitioner voices regarding what a possible restored SYEP program might look like (see section 3.3). As a staffer from this organization reported:

"Our main goal for being in those [advisory] meetings was to meet partners who might need us, so we were listening. [...] We were like, what can we do? Can this be something that helps us make new partnerships that reach more young people? You know, so, like, what is it going to become? You know, wherever there were like those Docs or the Etherpads to fill in ideas, we would, like, I definitely put some comments in there...but really, it was about listening... Knowing that if we were going to be proposing we would need some preexisting relationships. But the main purpose for us was to find those, so we split up, we had three staff who would join those meetings often and, like, go into all the breakouts."

An instance like this highlights that broader convening and coordination efforts are not always utilized solely by those participating in them to engage in the explicit and primary purposes of their designers, and that this can be beneficial to broader shared goals in the long run.

SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES IN PARTNERSHIP BROKERAGE

Evidence suggests that, on the whole, efforts to quickly and effectively create partnerships between YES content partners and SYEP providers were successful. Based on reporting from those who received funds, YES supported a total of 55 partnerships across 42 organizations, including just shy of one third of SYEP providers that participated in Summer Bridge (n=19 out of 59 listed by the NYC Department of Youth and Community Development (2020b, p. 5)). Of these 55 partnerships, 65 percent (n=36) were attributed to utilization of YES brokerage mechanisms. In a time of frantic and intensive work between the introduction of Summer Bridge in early July and its launch for youth weeks later, these efforts represented how a broader coalition and associated infrastructure could do the "heavy lifting" associated with complex organizational processes of partnership seeking and formation.

FIGURE 3.3 Social network map of partnerships between YES content partners and SYEP providers

Legend

— Connection is due to YES
— Partnership is not due to yes OR not sure
● Content partner
● SYEP provider

Children's Arts & Science Workshops, Inc.

Duro Workforce

Family Cook Productions

CAMBA

BronxWorks, Inc

Chinese American Planning Council

Chinatown Manpower Project, Inc.

Catholic Charities Community Services, Archdiocese of NY

PENCIL, Inc.

Henry Street Settlement, Inc.

Sunnyside Community Service, Inc.

BUILD

Teens Take Charge (TheBell)

Pockets Change

Mouse

Mentoring In Medicine

Building Beats

UnmaskEDU, LLC.

Samuel Field YM & YWHA, Inc. DBA Commonpoint Queens

Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation

PENCIL

The Knowledge House

Hellenic American Neighborhood Action Committee

HYPOTHEkids

South Asian Youth Action (SAYA)

United Activities Unlimited

Exalt

Beam Center, Inc.

New Settlement Apartments

Solar One

Dream Yard Project, Inc

Meta Bronx

Phipps Neighborhoods

Tech Kids Unlimited

The Child Center of New York

The Wildlife Conservation Society

WeThrive

Catholic Charities Neighborhood Services, Inc.

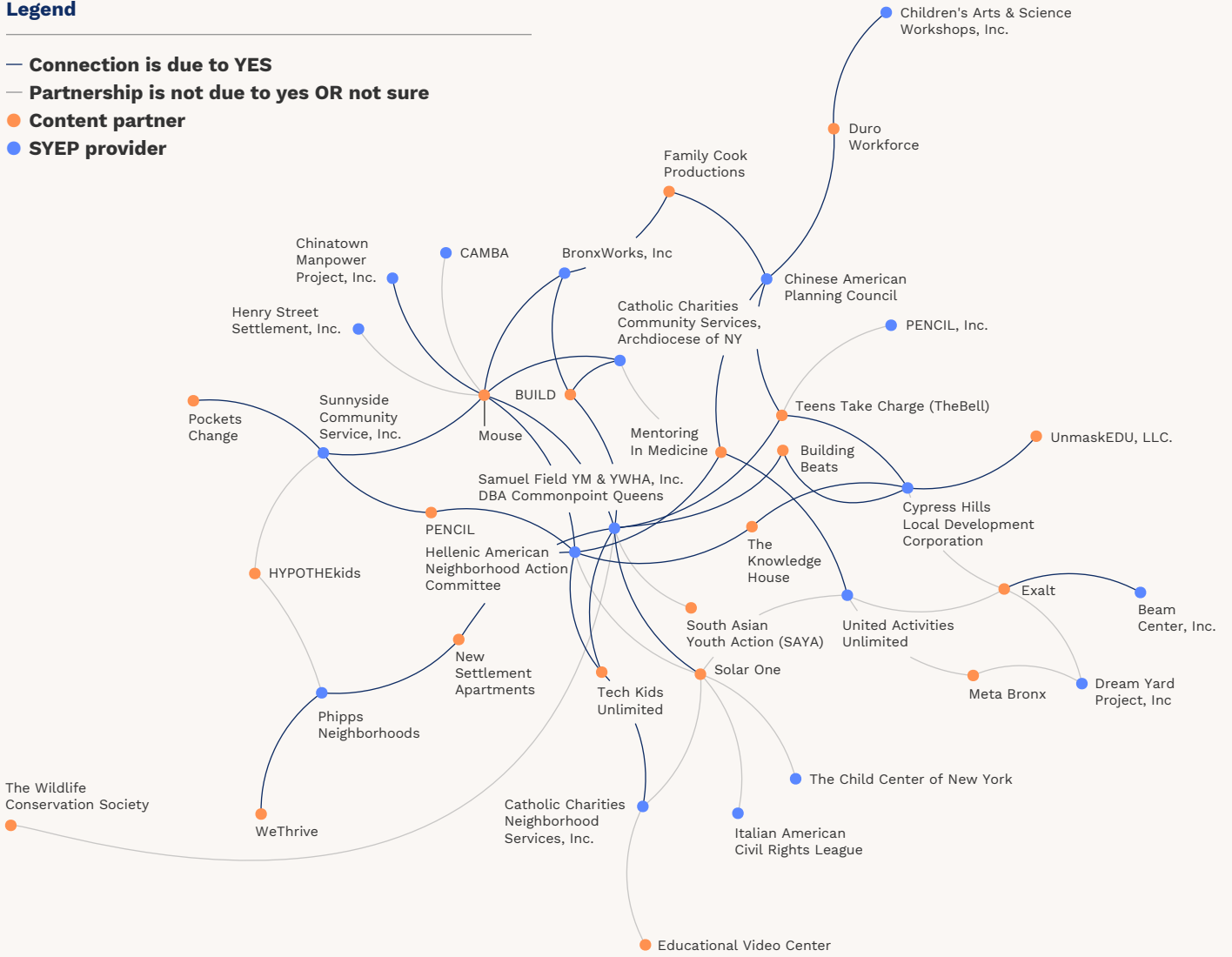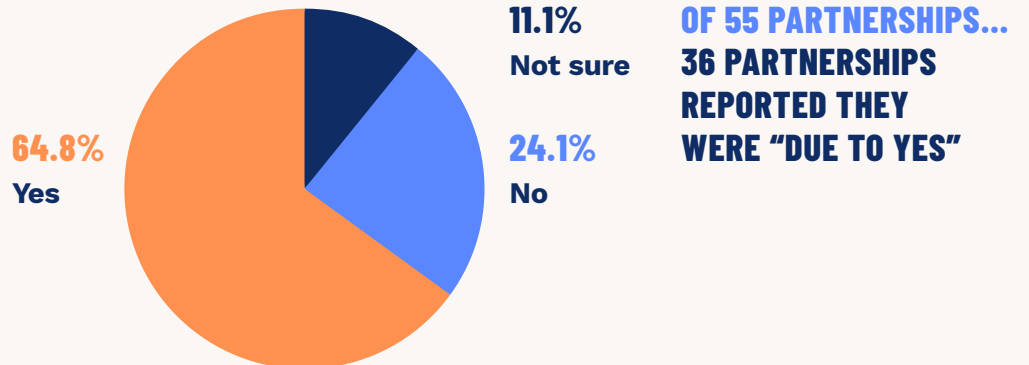Italian American Civil Rights League

Educational Video Center

FIGURE 3.4 YES-supported partnerships where partnership formation was directly attributed to YES brokerage efforts, as opposed to independent partnership formation activities.

64.8% Yes

24.1% No

11.1% Not sure

OF 55 PARTNERSHIPS... 36 PARTNERSHIPS REPORTED THEY WERE "DUE TO YES"

However, these efforts were not successful in all cases, and we identified a number of tensions within our data.

TENSION: *Reaching SYEP providers*

The first of these tensions related to effectively reaching SYEP providers. YES facilitators did not have direct access to a full list and contact information for providers participating in Summer Bridge, and instead had to rely on pieced-together knowledge from within the coalition leadership. While the organizers were well positioned in terms of their social capital within the field, and as such had a robust list, it was still incomplete. Relatedly, due to the fast-paced nature of the weeks following the intro-duction of Summer Bridge, many SYEP providers were under a strain in terms of planning, and at least one event related to the broader program launch—a required training for providers related to the Hats & Ladders career exploration platform that formed a central, required component of Summer Bridge—conflicted with the primary "speed dating" convening scheduled by YES organizers. This resulted in a low attendance of SYEP providers at the planned event, and the need for YES organizers to create an additional, follow-up event. Despite these challenges, the reality that the YES ecosystem included partner-ships with approximately one third of providers that SYEP reported as participating in Summer Bridge can be seen as a positive outcome in terms of its reach into the provider pool.

TENSION: *"Marketing" offerings*

While it was a somewhat minor tension, it is worth noting that the rapid coordination required to effectively broker partnerships among dozens of organizations within a short timeline put some content partners in a position that some felt was challenging: having to "pitch" their offerings in a market-like context. While most of the YES content partners we spoke with about the "speed dating" mechanism for partnership brokerage either reported on it positively or did not have any particular issues with it, some noted that it felt either unexpected or somewhat uncomfortable.

One partner noted, with some humor, that the process "was literally a pitch... It reminded me of, like Shark Tank, or something." He also shared that his efforts within the events, which involved SYEP providers choosing to go into specific breakout rooms to learn about content partner offerings, did not pan out in terms of attracting interest and securing partnerships, and that he felt somewhat at a loss in terms of how to frame his organization's particular offerings within this "pitch" setting. Another partner expressed that they would have preferred to have been informed earlier that they would be required to go through a marketing process. Speaking on behalf of an organization that serves a specific subset of students—those with special needs—they reported that it was challenging to find an SYEP provider that felt they would be able to identify young people who were a best fit for their program. Ultimately, more directed outreach and introductions made by YES organizers did result in partnerships for the organization, but it seemed that the more "market-like" context of the larger matchmaking events was one that they felt less well suited to.

It's important to emphasize that multiple SYEP providers we spoke with found this process positive, and, critically, efficient within the context of the time constraints they were operating under during that pre-launch period. One provider who attended the event shared a perspective representative of this view:

> "I think the speed dating event was very, very beneficial and helpful. I was in most of it throughout the day, and even though it was a pretty long day, we got to meet a lot of the YES partners. I think we realized right away that there is a good potential here. And the classes that they offered, and the facilitation, every-thing was already fleshed out. So by the time we got to the speed dating event and I got to speak with a lot of the YES partners, they already gave us a background on what it is they want to offer to the participants. They showed the class, the schedule. A lot of it was already organized, which made it so much easier for us to make the decision to partner."

More broadly, however, it's worth noting that the crisis context perhaps forced participants to engage in an explicitly transactional process even within intentional contexts facilitated by an intermediary that in other circumstances could have happened more organically. In more ideal circumstances, those participating in professional ecologies like those associated with SYEP should have more frequent and more extended opportunities to interact, come to know one another's needs and competencies, and develop trust over time so that when opportunities and needs for partnership present themselves, they can quickly take advantage of those more robust relationships. Indeed, the example offered of the

organization that used the YES advisory convenings in April as an opportunity to begin the process of partnership development far ahead of the summer points to the ways in which having broader contexts where relationships can be formed can serve long term goals, even ones that haven't yet been identified.

TENSION: *Contracted timeline limiting uptake of planned content partner offerings*

Another tension in the partnership formation process related to two intertwined assumptions made by the YES leadership early in their design process, specifically as they awarded contracts to content partners. First, YES leadership had assumed that the restored SYEP program, in whatever form it was going to take, would occur earlier than its ultimate announcement date just three weeks prior to the launch of the program for students. As such, a number of the awards made to content partners, specifically those related to provision of technical assistance, training, and curriculum, contained a related assumption that SYEP providers would be in a position to take advantage of these offerings. These offerings were distinct from virtual work site placements in that they required time for SYEP provider staff to participate in trainings via the partner or for the provider to familiarize and train its staff internally with a new curriculum. However, the reality that SYEP providers had to set up their offerings in the three weeks between the announcement of Summer Bridge and its launch meant that taking advantage of such modes of partnership was challenging.

While some content partners with these kinds of offerings were successful in finding partnerships—in particular those with more "plug and play"

curricula that operated in online learning management systems or were otherwise scaffolded by technology—others were not. In at least one case, a content partner that had been funded by YES to provide a curriculum and training model, seeing how the timeline was unfolding and how that would impact the viability of their model, quickly reorganized its offerings to SYEP providers to provide virtual work site placements in its Project Based Learning model. However, a small number of content partners that offered training or curricula, as opposed to virtual work site placements, did end up without formal partnerships with SYEP providers.

It is important to note that this phenomenon should not be taken to mean that such models do not represent impactful forms of partnership between specialized education organizations and SYEP providers. Indeed, the creation of effective work-based learning, youth development, and career exploration curricula and associated capacity building for youth workers is a critical leverage point for a program at the scale of SYEP. This case instead highlights the implications of budgetary cuts and the late and only partial restoration of public funds, a decision and ensuing municipal process that unquestionably negatively impacted the viability of partnerships supportive of capacity building for high quality youth programming. With additional time, the approach that YES took could result in more impactful partnerships that integrate deeper capacity building and cross-organizational information flows.

And while it is important to bear in mind what kinds of tensions existed around supporting partnership formation, in order to improve on

such efforts in the future, the data we collected, on the whole, points to these specific efforts on the part of the YES initiative being successful. The work done to effectively broker partnerships addressed a clear precondition for the possibility that YES's supplemental supports would support SYEP providers, and, in turn, young people. An exchange between a member of our research team and two staffers at an SYEP provider characterizes this perspective well:

"Interviewer: Were there any other partnerships outside of YES content partners that you put in place to support implementation of the [Summer Bridge] program?

Staffer 1: I don't think so.

Staffer 2: Not really. [...] This year I think I was really like... We were able to connect through YES, and that was really helpful. We tried reaching out to some groups and it wasn't... It was a lot of hit or miss. [...] I think if we had more time, and if we had April, May and June to do it, we would have had some [other] partnerships. [...] I think the thing was, we were really under the gun to just make something happen now, and I think that that was really why YES was very instrumental for us.[...] I think that if YES did anything, it might be able to revolutionize and innovate the SYEP world, because I do think SYEP misses the mark sometimes on partnerships. I think there's multiple ways that the city could leverage partnerships that would benefit all providers, and I think that they don't do it because they're just kind of used to trying to run the program."

DEVELOPMENT OF FIELD-LEVEL SOCIAL CAPITAL

While it was not a central focus of the YES initiative, the emphasis on cross-organizational interaction and specifically, partnerships, meant that YES had the potential to impact the field in the long term in terms of cultivating relationships that might last beyond the focal period of the summer of 2020—strengthening overall social capital within the city's ecosystem of youth-serving organizations.

Data do indeed point to YES having a strong positive impact on social capital within the field. As noted previously, a majority of the partnerships supported through its funding were attributed directly to its brokerage efforts. But beyond this, all but one of these 55 partnerships (98 percent) reported that they would either "probably" or "definitely" continue beyond the summer, and additional data from those within the ecosystem evidenced new partnerships going into the fall of 2020 even among those that hadn't directly partnered during the summer.

Interviews with some YES-funded content partners indicated that this more long-term social capital development was indeed part of the value proposition of participating in the initiative. As one put it, "That's one of the things we're going to walk away with that's gonna be so helpful next year if the Summer Youth Employment Program is restored. [...] So far, so good with these agencies." The same partner additionally reported that she participated in the "speed dating" events explicitly with that in mind. She had already secured partnerships with SYEP providers for Summer Bridge implementation before these events, but attended regardless, with the goal of forming additional relationships that might prove beneficial down the line. As she put it:

> "*We go to everything, but we really didn't need to 'cause we had already made a relationship with [a number of providers]. [...] Everybody's connected now, by participating and yes, being on these calls together.*"

FIGURE 3.5 Percentage of partnerships supported by YES that participating organizations reported would "definitely" or "probably" continue past the summer of 2020.

66.7% Definitely yes

1.9% Probably not

31.5% Probably yes
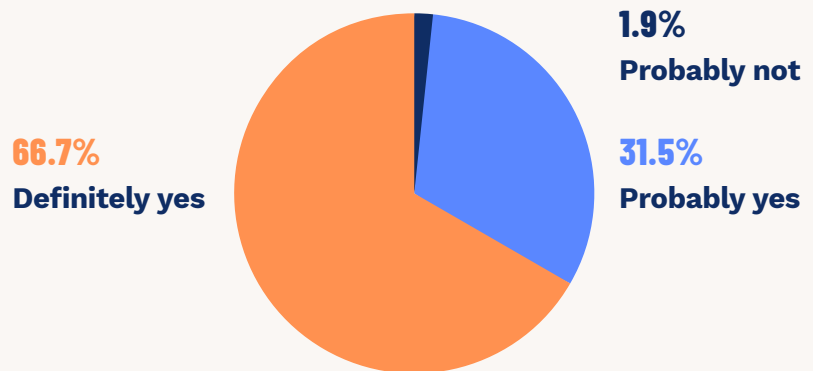
OF 55 PARTNERSHIPS...
54 REPORTED THE PARTNERSHIP WOULD "DEFINITELY" OR "PROBABLY" CONTINUE

3.5.3.3 Outcome: Cross-organizational learning and community development

With partnerships in place, an additional priority for YES was ensuring that the youth they served were having positive social and educational experiences during Summer Bridge. And while perhaps its primary leverage point for doing so within the context of its supplemental policy implementation supports was the identification and funding of what it deemed to be effective and high quality youth-serving organizations, the organizers also planned for continual support for cross-organizational learning and community development during summer implementation.

The central mechanism YES employed for promoting cross-organizational learning and community development was a series of virtual convenings focused on peer learning that was held twice weekly during the period of program implementation in July and August 2020. Spanning six weeks, this included 12 convenings, a morning and afternoon session each week, aiming to create multiple opportunities to accommodate varied schedules.[4]

STRUCTURING "PEER-LED LEARNING" AS OPPOSED TO "PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT"

In line with the broader participatory ethos that guided YES, the approach the coalition took to creating learning contexts within the ecosystem focused less on "top down" professional development, and more on co-developing and co-facilitating a shared space characterized by peer-based offerings around effective practice, collective troubleshooting, and mutual professional support. From the outset, YES facilitators framed the convenings as a space in which to support each other as a professional learning community during the pandemic.

Focus of peer-learning convenings. YES facilitators utilized both their formative understandings of the likely challenges that partners and providers would face during implementation and participatory methods at the launch of the convenings to solicit perspectives from members of the ecosystem. Aligned with this purpose, at an early convening, facilitators invited participants to pool together responses to the following two questions: What do I want to learn? What can I share about and offer the community?

Moderators synthesized more than 60 participant responses of what they wanted to learn into general topic themes, such as "virtual program facilitation," "youth support and relationship building," "working with partners," and "promoting racial justice in my program." Examples of what participants were willing to offer the community ranged from technical expertise to lesson planning based on socio-emotional learning (SEL) to resources for families during remote learning and the pandemic. *(continues on the next page)*

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[4] YES held four additional convenings earlier in the summer, two orientation sessions and two "speed-dating" sessions (see 3.5.3) for content partners and SYEP providers. We do not include these here as they were not focused on cross-organizational learning.

Beyond these topics, YES facilitators often aimed to create sessions that directly addressed issues germane to the particular policy context of SYEP Summer Bridge. For instance, in the week prior to program launch, sessions had members of the ecosystem share their approaches to building a program schedule that was aligned with the broader Summer Bridge structure. In another early session, facilitators invited representatives from Hats & Ladders, the online career exploration platform that was part of the Summer Bridge program, to troubleshoot and field questions. Other particular new elements of the instructional policy, including how to structure and facilitate Workplace Challenges, were also focal points in the convenings.

Structure of peer-learning convenings. YES facilitators drew on the collective pool of topics to invite members of the community to give whole-group presentations on a topic that they indicated they were willing to share about and that others indicated they wanted to learn more about. Additionally, facilitators were able to select multiple focal topics for simultaneous break-out rooms that educators could self-select into to discuss a topic of interest to them. In addition to coordinating presentations and discussions, facilitators worked to ensure adherence to agreed upon discussion norms (such as making sure everyone has a chance to speak) and/or to take notes on a shared document so that participants who missed a given breakout room could learn from what was discussed.

As an example, the August 12 convening featured a presentation from an SYEP provider about "how educators are facilitating Workplace Challenges" that included a question and answer session, and was followed by break-out rooms on topics such as "strategies for virtual facilitation and relationship building," "meeting youth where they are—socially/emotionally" and "planning for Workplace Challenges."

A few variations to this typical convening structure were used opportunistically to further support community building and to position participants to share and learn from each other's expertise. One variation included a structured "consultancy" protocol in which a program volunteered to share a dilemma around how to support youth as they faced hardships and distractions while also maintaining program accountability, and then participants broke out into small group discussions to generate insights and advice for how to navigate the dilemma. Another variation included an invitation to youth participating in Summer Bridge to lead an icebreaker and reflection activity with the community, a multi-week project that YES facilitators and researchers collaborated with the youth on as their Workplace Challenge.

Peer-learning convening participation. The convenings more often attracted supervisor-level staff, and averaged approximately 30 attendees, including three to six YES facilitators or otherwise affiliated individuals. While overall participation levels roughly tracked with the number of organizations directly supported by YES, there were, perhaps, better opportunities to mobilize participation from a broader set of stakeholders within the ecosystem. For instance, content partners reported that YES funds supported over 150 staff salaries during the summer, meaning that there was a large pool of potential constituents that might have benefited from these offerings. However, as with all other elements of the summer, such opportunities for cross-organizational learning and community participation were mediated by the crisis context of the broader Summer Bridge program's rollout, one that often meant long hours and last minute preparation by staffers within youth-serving organizations. As a result, it is not particularly unexpected that optional opportunities for professional learning were perhaps not seen as a top-level priority for front-line staffers.

Experience of and perspectives on peer-learning convenings. While our methodological approach did not comprehensively evaluate the perspectives around and value of the peer-learning structures across all those who participated, based on observations of the convenings and interviews with community members, our data points to both general positive orientations toward these structures and to examples community members shared about actively bringing lessons back 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 and noting that it had been especially helpful during the stressful context of the summer.

Some SYEP providers, in particular, saw the value of the convenings as a remedy to what they saw as existing norms within the field that ran counter to the ethos of opening sharing. One put it this way:

"I thought overall it was great that people were contributing ideas, and it got away from that competitive environment. [...] At times people don't really want to share trade secrets. We all treat SYEP like we've got some trade secrets, right? If [a colleague] works in an org, has a way of doing stuff, he doesn't necessarily want to give it up to me because it's the way they do their program effectively, right? And I don't think it's anything other than we are not encouraged to share, so when you don't feel that, I'm not probably likely to call you if you were in another org, and say, 'Hey, I'm doing this really cool thing, and if you do it, you'll be as effective at doing it, or we found it to be effective.' I think that gets lost in there because we don't evaluate together, we don't communicate together, and I think that that was the benefit YES gave us a little bit, was, to really think through problems together and collectively answer them."

Other providers shared similar sentiments around a somewhat competitive environment within the provider community, and the utility of having spaces for sharing about effective practice. As another provider shared:

"I think that previously, providers had been... Not pinned against each other, but it hasn't really been very collaborative... [...] I really do think that it's more of how you can work as a community. I think that community is one of the values that I hold closest, and you started seeing that, because once things got real, it was like 'Oh, we have to bond together. We have to do this.' Or, 'There is no time for mishaps.' Or, 'We all have to be in this.'"

Both content partners and providers shared about the value they found in hearing about diverse program models, micro-level pedagogical approaches, and considerations around reaching youth with particular needs. As one content partner put it:

"A lot of those discussions [focused on] all these little things that I definitely thought I had thought about enough, but definitely had not thought about enough. I was thinking about digital equity, but I was not thinking about, I guess, identity equity or identity protection initially, and that is something that the YES group really brought to my attention. And I think, without that kind of supportive environment, we may not have as quickly and efficiently come to that, and I think that was a really important thing. I think speed was a really important thing, this summer, to be able to make effective decisions very fast. [...] And so I think that was a huge asset in the YES group, was that you weren't the only one trying to make the decision, there was a group of other folks working super-fast, and each with their own strengths and knowledge, and to be able to quickly share like, 'Oh, here's what we're doing and here's why. Maybe that helps you,' was invaluable."

As is often the case, not all YES stakeholders we spoke with found equal value in the convenings. Some felt that their programs were running smoothly, and expressed that they could offer perspectives and advice during the meetings, but were not bringing insights back to their organizations from them. Others shared that particular specialized interests they had, such as how to work with court-involved youth, while welcomed in discussion in the convenings by facilitators, did not end up generating insights due to lack relevant and timely connection to others in the community.

While the YES organizers had more explicitly envisioned the convening structures as centrally oriented toward cross-organizational learning and capacity building, in observations and interviews a consistent theme emerged around the value the convenings held for community members as a source of emotional support and community, and in providing a sense of "being in it together" within a stressful context of program implementation. As one content partner put it:

"And I think being connected to YES and the Hive made me feel a little bit less just like I was screaming into the void [...] It was really great to be connected to a much larger group of folks who were coming from different perspectives."

Just as organizations were prioritizing healthy social emotional learning (SEL) for youth, the sense of community described in interviews indicated that the educators who were working with them received similar benefits:

"In several of the breakouts, there's that sense like, oh, 'cause people are complaining a little bit, but I think the community of people in there are the kind that are wanting to be a support and wanting to empathize, and let's say, 'Yeah, that, just be patient with your facilitators, be patient with your goals, DYCD is going to be more flexible than they seem.' You know? Yeah, I think that was a super important part of those YES convenings, which is just that group, 'Hey, we're all in the same boat. We're gonna figure this out,' element, the community aspect."

We can see further evidence that YES not only acted as a source of information, but also provided a sense of community during a period of personal and professional volatility, in how one SYEP provider reflected on her participation:

"And at times [YES was] giving us the information of what was truly happening. So it was definitely a resource in those beginning months... I mean throughout the whole programming, but truly a sense of community in such a difficult time for us all when we didn't know whether we had jobs ourselves, where we didn't know if we should be planning for things."[5]

It is important to note that while these convenings did have clear value, it is likely that both the crisis working conditions for participating educators and the time-limited nature of the offerings impacted the depth of engagement and overall impact in terms of cross-organizational learning. Peer-learning communities of these kinds benefit from long-term engagement over time, where greater degrees of trust and more robust shared language can be more deeply established. Additionally, longer timescales allow for cycles of improvement within a community, with greater opportunities for insights to be incorporated across multiple program cycles and the results shared back. Indeed, many ecosystem stakeholders we spoke with expressed a desire for continued engagement within these kinds of communal structures beyond the crisis moment that the summer 2020 convenings were implemented within.

3.5.3.4 Reach of YES-funded supplemental partnerships

In the context of outcomes related to identification of partners and the subsequent formation of and support for those partnerships, it is worth noting the extent of the reach that these partnerships achieved.

YES distributed over $1 million to its portfolio of organizations in support of summer implementation. The majority of this funding went to content partners and SYEP providers to support 153 staff salaries and train 127 educators. Across all of these actors, the YES coalition supported over 11,500 learning experiences for youth.[6]

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[5] The respondent here is referring to convening structures enacted more broadly, not just during but prior to the Summer Bridge implementation period.

[6] As the YES initiative did not track unique identifiers across participating youth, it is not possible to determine the exact number of youth who were directly served.

OVERVIEW OF KEY METRICS ASSOCIATED WITH THE REACH OF YES SUPPLEMENTAL PARTNERSHIPS

$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

→
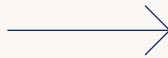
5,166
via SYEP providers

2,329
via career panels

1,777
via curriculum partnerships

2,298
via virtual work site placements

FIGURE 3.6 YES-supported awardees where partners reported that partnerships actively supported reaching youth outcomes.

3.7%
Presented challenges

74.1%
Actively supported

22.2%
Did not impact
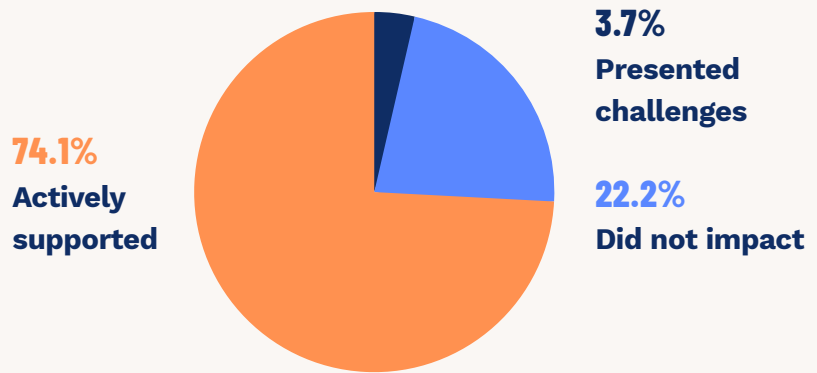
OF 55 PARTNERSHIPS...
41 REPORTED THE PARTNERSHIP "ACTIVELY SUPPORTED MY ORGANIZATION" TO REACH KEY YOUTH OUTCOMES

While we offer a more detailed picture of the partnership-based programs enacted within the YES ecosystem in Chapters 5 and 6, the research effort did not aim to directly evaluate the degree to which these programs achieved learning outcomes for students. However, a majority of these partnerships (74 percent) reported that the partnership positively impacted their ability to reach focal youth outcomes.

3.6 Discussion and implications

Taken as a whole, the value proposition and outcomes of YES's interventions offer lessons that extend beyond crisis response. The following insights take the view that YES can be a model for engaging and supporting youth, community, and workforce development ecosystems more broadly.

3.6.1 Spurring change through open participation, collective action, and trisector collaboration

The YES coalition took a collective approach with youth organizations, youth leaders, and, to a lesser extent, with municipal actors. This approach,

critically, was not simply about acting together, but about utilizing open participation and design routines that drew on YES leaders' values around collaborative community development. These included the history of "working in the open" that guided Hive NYC Learning Network, ExpandED's approaches to convening and collaboration as a citywide afterschool intermediary organization, and Student Success Network's approach to practitioner-led solution design. Beginning with advocacy work and continuing through policy influence, coordination, and implementation support, coalition members collaboratively designed infrastructure for diverse youth organizations to use to share information and develop partnerships. This peer-to-peer collaboration was not only a necessary component of organizing for advocacy, but proved valuable in bringing about each of the implementation outcomes described above. Similarly, YES supported effective trisector collaboration in which it was able to connect and resource private sector actors and municipal actors in order to

coordinate new policy infrastructure in the form of Workplace Challenges. Although we cannot measure the degree to which YES influenced instructional policy, its outcomes reflected general alignment among diverse voices in the field and ultimately the Summer Bridge instructional policy focus was aligned with the community's vision. In each of these cases, YES's collective orientation created common ground during a summer of volatility.

The collective action approach modeled by YES paid dividends despite short timelines and unpredictable circumstances; a similar model in future years could do the same.

3.6.2 Systematically identifying and supporting content partners in the ecosystem

A key innovation of YES was the systematic identification, resourcing, and matchmaking of content partners in the summer youth development experience. While SYEP providers had historically worked with partners as work sites, and some providers had also worked with partners in content-specific roles (e.g., technical assistance or curriculum), what stands out as distinct in YES's case is the formalization of the role of content partners and an infrastructure to support them. The creation of this role did not happen at the direction of DYCD policy and its provision—supported philanthropically—came at no cost to SYEP providers. YES identified funds, created an RFP process to identify high quality partners, and facilitated the establishment of new partnerships between SYEP providers and content partners through virtual convenings, interest forms, and individual relationship

brokerage. The creation, resourcing, alignment, and matchmaking of this new role directly supported youth-serving providers and, in fact, supported youth directly, with over 11,000 youth experiences coming from YES-funded content partners and partnerships.

Once again, the impact of YES's intervention not only softened the edges of the 2020 crisis; it also points to a model that includes both content partners and a more formal infrastructure around these actors as a promising direction for improving summer youth employment programs broadly.

3.6.3 Decentralizing professional learning

Aside from YES's intervention, capacity building for providers in the context of SYEP had typically occurred through a centralized process that engaged a single capacity-building organization to serve all providers. When intervening in 2020, YES decentralized this approach and cultivated a community of practice. The peer-to-peer support that was visible in online convenings, mass mailings that highlighted emerging models, and direct communications resulted in supporting implementation through policy sensemaking, social and emotional support among peers, and professional development on best practices. Partnerships brokered through YES further provided capacity to organizations directly.

While this mutual support was valuable in a time of crisis, it also signals a viable opportunity moving forward. Opportunities for shared problem-solving and collective learning were valued by participants, and in a non-crisis context could be tailored to improve outcomes further.

3.6.4 Demonstrating diverse approaches to Project Based Learning

PBL was introduced to SYEP instructional policy in 2019, and shifted to a virtual model in 2020. Especially in light of how new PBL experiences were to SYEP providers (in both years, given the circumstances), YES's diverse portfolio of content partners injected capacity and experience into this instructional component. The result was that YES's portfolio of content partners modeled a diverse range of ways to engage youth in career-oriented PBL—both in terms of content areas and facilitation strategies—while in direct partnership with SYEP providers.

The implication is that content partners can be valuable resources for the field as it increases its capacity to lead PBL experiences with youth. The youth-serving organizations that partnered with SYEP providers in 2020 offered a wide range of lessons (see Chapters 5 and 6) that can continue to benefit the field in future years.

3.6.5 Stabilizing the field

In addition to the implications described above, our findings point to a fifth implication of YES's interventions: The YES coalition and associated ecosystem had a stabilizing effect on the field during a turbulent time. The nature of this stabilization evolved over the course of the spring and summer. First YES provided a conduit of information and relationships during design meetings and coordinating advocacy efforts; this

stabilization had the effect of extending the window of time that organizations had to work on adapting to remote programming, via the clarity and commitments of the RFP published five weeks before the announcement of SYEP Summer Bridge. Finally, stabilization was achieved through the emergent community of practice of organizations that attended YES convenings throughout the summer implementation. Without any official guidance or commitment of resources, from the SYEP cut in April until the announcement of SYEP Summer Bridge on July 1, SYEP providers were limited in their ability to adapt or prepare for the implementation that began at the end of July. YES intervened directly during this period and created infrastructure and some measure of stability, in addition to its impact on the four parts of its value proposition discussed above. Although YES was by no means a panacea to the many challenges of this period, this contribution was perceived as sorely needed and valuable during a time that was characterized by instability.

The implication of this finding is that intermediaries can play important roles in stabilizing organizational ecosystems. YES emerged in response to a crisis context; however, its core functions—connecting stakeholders, disseminating information, advocating for shared priorities, influencing and coordinating policy, and supporting professionals and front-line implementation—are valuable in any setting.

4

Organizational Leadership in the Context of Summer 2020

4.1 Overview

The spring of 2020 was a time of instability, crisis, and ultimately adaptation for leaders of youth-serving organizations. After the onset of the Covid-19 crisis in March, providers were forced to migrate their programs to virtual models. Just weeks later, on April 7, Mayor Bill de Blasio announced a complete cut to the City's Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP). Providers received a letter informing them that they had 24 hours to shut down their programs and that no expenses incurred after the next 24 hours would be recognized by the city. In many cases, left with slashed budgets, providers were forced to immediately lay off or furlough staff while also navigating a new remote reality.

The result was drastically under-resourced and under-capacity organizations with no idea if, when, or how SYEP would be restored. Despite these challenges, providers and partners proved their adaptiveness, resilience, and, above all, deep commitment to serving students and families.

In this chapter we provide a view of how spring and early summer was experienced by organizational leaders within youth-serving organizations, including those who were SYEP providers themselves, and partners such as curricular providers and Project Based Learning sites (in contrast to Chapter 2, where we explored this timeline from the perspective of the YES coalition and its formation). We primarily draw data from 35 interviews we conducted with organizational leaders and supervisors who shared their experiences as they attempted to navigate an uncertain landscape. We supplement these accounts with data from a citywide survey we conducted of leaders within youth-serving organizations (n=88) regarding their experiences during the spring and summer of 2020.[1]

While this chapter focuses primarily on the experiences of organizational leaders, it is written with knowledge of and deep appreciation for everyone—including Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) staff, City Hall staff, funders, program providers and facilitators, partners, young people, advocates, intermediaries, and others—who navigated innumerable challenges and demonstrated unwavering commitment to creating high-quality opportunities for youth.

4.2 Spring 2020
4.2.1 Funding crisis

The news of the SYEP cut was delivered abruptly and, according to some providers, in a way that made it difficult to manage. Staff received an email on April 7 notifying them that "planning for this summer's program should be immediately discontinued and any expenditures after Wednesday, April 8, 2020, will not be reimbursed." The email was sent directly to staff who implement SYEP programming—not to program and organizational leadership—understandably causing confusion and panic about job security. One provider reported:

> *"So the first thing that happened was that SYEP was having provider meetings when COVID hit and then they just cancelled them with no explanation. Our program coordinator—not myself, and not my SYEP director, and not my ED—received an email saying, 'SYEP had been cut.' We got radio silence and then we got an email saying, 'your funding's been cut.' That was the first information we had received."*

What ensued was effectively a retroactive budget cut: Providers had 24 hours to halt programs, and expenses beyond those 24 hours would not be reimbursed. Many organization leaders were left with no choice but to lay off or furlough staff: 52 percent (n=45) of youth development organizations we surveyed (n=87) reported laying off or furloughing staff in response to the circumstances of the spring/summer. And that number tells only part of the story: One organization leader reported not taking a salary from April through July to keep staffing intact.

[1] Details about interview protocols and the survey instrument and responses are included in Appendix A.

A staffing crisis for SYEP providers was the result. Short-staffed from the outset, providers were left to navigate the coming months without certainty of funding, with greatly reduced capacity, and without the knowledge and expertise of program staff who had been furloughed or laid off.

Another effect of the funding cut was that some providers chose to seek alternative funding for summer programming rather than wait for restoration. One provider reported designing and funding its own program, one that mirrored SYEP:

> *"We designed and funded our own program because we thought SYEP would be cut. We came up with the name "Summer Alternative Program." Basically, it's a virtual program that has to do with career readiness where individuals would also get a stipend."*

4.2.2 An information vacuum

After the SYEP cut was announced, providers were left with little information about if, when, or how SYEP would be restored, and what to do in the meantime. The focus on serving students and families remained, and the question became, with no guarantee of SYEP restoration, how would programs provide critical supports, and paychecks, to young people?

Staff turned to each other, both at YES convenings and other forums, for any word-of-mouth updates. With coordination from the emerging YES coalition, organizational leaders and practitioners pulled together and stepped up to fill an information and support vacuum. One provider noted the power and leadership that became apparent in the spring of 2020:

> *"I felt really proud to see how quickly New York City organized, how quickly New York City influenced policy. I just think that it just speaks to how powerful the CBO network is. I would love for us to do that more often, as aggressively as it was done. DYCD said, 'No, this isn't happening,' and, literally the next week, the whole coalition came together. It was really cool just to watch how directors of programming were leading in this type of space."*

Another provider noted that being connected to a larger community of providers made them feel "a little bit less like I was screaming into the void" during a time when information was hard to come by, the new reality of working remotely was only just setting in, and there were many more questions than answers. One organizational leader noted an all-hands-on-deck, team mentality:

> *"This summer, there is no judgment, no complaints. We might be frustrated, but we're not going to take it out on anybody. Everybody is doing the best they can, and that's how they will treat them. We're grateful everyone has stepped into this quicksand and managed to not sink."*

> *"I felt really proud to see how quickly New York City organized, how quickly New York City influenced policy. I just think that it just speaks to how powerful the CBO network is."*

It is worth noting that this context—the budgetary process and opaque communication—is not entirely unusual in the context of the City's summer youth programs. A report from MDRC in 2017 noted that "Because New York City generally

reaches budget agreements in June, SYEP's final funding commitment is often not known until weeks before the program begins, affecting the providers' ability to plan services" (Valentine et al., 2017, p. 14). However, 2020 was unique in the extremity and gravity of the cut, and the resulting need (and lack of) communication and directives.

4.2.3 Migration to virtual programming

Due to Covid-19, organizations were already adapting to virtual work and programming when the SYEP cut was announced. For organizations whose models traditionally rely heavily on face-to-face programming and in-person engagement, this required a large degree of innovation and restructuring. One provider put it this way:

> "*I gave everyone a box and I was just like, 'Pack your stuff up; we have to just work from home.' And I don't think any of us truly knew what it meant, we never had that luxury of working from home, it's always been a lot of face-to-face with participants and staff. It really was a new venture for us, and I think that's true for a lot of different nonprofits whose work is very much hands-on, our work is very much the human service sector.*"

One organization described shifting its signature nutritional program into an online model where students cooked recipes while on Zoom together. Another reported pivoting its entrepreneurship-focused program to one where students did every aspect of pitching, manufacturing, and selling their products online.

In some cases, SYEP providers already had plans in motion for virtual summer programming that were shut down when the cancellation was announced:

> "*We had a plan for our curriculum, an idea of potentially taking the curriculum virtual prior to all this. What really dead stopped those plans, in all honesty, was the fact that DYCD probably preemptively shut SYEP down, and pretty much closed out our contract, stopped it and literally told us like, 'Nothing's going to happen now.' And so even the idea of not letting the funding go through to the end June... Everything got shut down, and so those plans were definitely shelved.*"

Another organization described what was essentially an "R and D process": running three cohorts of a virtual program throughout the spring, refining its model and troubleshooting challenges—like virtual recruitment and engagement—along the way. What resulted was what its staff considered a solid program, with tested practices implemented virtually, that was ready to go for the summer.

The migration to virtual programming, which, for some organizations, meant a complete redesign, combined with the funding cuts, required organizational leaders to do more with less: It required them to develop and test a new model with reduced capacity. Overall, what we observed across our interviews was an ecosystem of organizations that, even in the absence of funding, dedicated themselves to preparing for the summer so that they stood ready to deliver programming if and when funding were to be restored.

FIGURE 4.1 Organizational shifts during the spring and summer of 2020 reported by youth development and work-based learning educators and supervisors (n=87)

Laid off or furloughed staff
- Not at all: 36
- To small degree: 13
- To a medium degree: 19
- To a large degree: 13
- N/A or not sure: 6

Hired new staff or contractors
- Not at all: 29
- To small degree: 27
- To a medium degree: 23
- To a large degree: 2
- N/A or not sure: 6

Changed the roles or certain staff members
- Not at all: 9
- To small degree: 27
- To a medium degree: 29
- To a large degree: 17
- N/A or not sure: 5

Developed/adopted new technology
- Not at all: 4
- To small degree: 8
- To a medium degree: 17
- To a large degree: 54
- N/A or not sure: 4

Developed/adopted new curriculum
- Not at all: 1
- To small degree: 6
- To a medium degree: 27
- To a large degree: 49
- N/A or not sure: 4

Changed our youth engagement and facilitation strategies
- Not at all: 1
- To small degree: 4
- To a medium degree: 26
- To a large degree: 55
- N/A or not sure: 1

Trained new staff on new youth engagement and facilitation strategies
- Not at all: 3
- To small degree: 15
- To a medium degree: 27
- To a large degree: 40
- N/A or not sure: 2

Changed our program sequence/cadence
- Not at all: 1
- To small degree: 12
- To a medium degree: 33
- To a large degree: 36
- N/A or not sure: 5

Changed an existing scope of work to meet shifts that occured during the course of the summer
- Not at all: 2
- To small degree: 10
- To a medium degree: 19
- To a large degree: 55
- N/A or not sure: 1

Legend:
- Not at all
- To small degree
- To a medium degree
- To a large degree
- N/A or not sure

4.3 Restoration and policy rollout

Funding was ultimately restored in a new programmatic model called Summer Bridge on July 1, with 35,000 slots (down from an originally projected 75,000 slots) and a $1000 stipend for older youth. This announcement came just 26 days before the program was slated to begin on July 27. The slow restoration of funding led to myriad challenges for organizational leaders, who were left to scramble to hire, prepare, and train staff; enroll students; develop curricula; and form partnerships. However, data suggest that with the benefit of hindsight, providers and partners overwhelmingly had a positive outlook on how their organization responded to the crisis: 94 percent (n=83) of our survey respondents believed their organization was able to adapt to the uncertainty and new challenges that arose during planning and implementation of their summer programs.

4.3.1 Prelaunch scramble

The new program model and requirements, in the context of an extremely tight turnaround, led to staff feeling as if they were "building the plane while flying it, too." Providers reported feeling like they were building an entirely new program from scratch, with only days in which to understand what was required and translate it into programming for students.

> *"So normally what we're planning and preparing for three to four months ahead of the SYEP program launch date—we only had two and a half weeks, so you can see how a lot of our work and time was really condensed. And someone mentioned this to me, it kind of just felt like building a plane while flying it."*

> *"Normally we're planning and preparing for three to four months ahead of the SYEP program launch— we only had two and a half weeks.... It felt like building a plane while flying it."*

Another provider pointed out the seemingly overwhelming number of tasks that needed to be done in the 26 days between the announcement of funding restoration and the program start date:

> *"Last summer, we only had 700 participants in Project Based Learning. We now had 1,500 participants in virtual Project Based Learning, so with the short turnaround time, hiring facilitators, hiring the appropriate administrative staff to assist us with enrollment, and checking documentation, and kind of training everyone and getting them up to speed, was really difficult to do within a few weeks."*

Even once funding was restored and providers had the go-ahead to hire staff, there were still challenges with rebuilding their teams. One provider noted that hiring staff back after laying them off earlier in the spring proved difficult, as many moved on to other opportunities, believing that funding would not be restored. This had negative downstream effects, including lack of preparation and training time for facilitators.

Communication, or lack thereof, continued to be a challenge for providers and their partners alike. Often, information was delayed, difficult to interpret, and inaccessible to many stakeholders involved, leading to a lack of coordination, confusion about what was required, and exclusion of students and their families.

Interviewees reported that the method through which requirements were communicated was not consistent or transparent. According to providers, directives were often not written in a central, accessible place—often directives were only given verbally—making it difficult to relay requirements to other stakeholders (staff, partners, students, and families). Providers and their partners yearned for clear, written communication in a predictable and stable location that all could access.

Information access around the new City program was especially difficult for partners who could not attend DYCD trainings and did not have a direct line to DYCD as SYEP providers did. The result was immense pressure and an increased workload on teams, who had to react quickly to information coming down the pipeline, often resulting in large shifts to programming. One partner said:

> *"Because of the constant changing coming down from DYCD every week, I had SYEP providers sharing with me screenshots of slides they were getting from DYCD, saying, 'Hey, DYCD changed it again; now there's this Workplace Challenge that no one knew about until a week before the program starts. Can you change your whole curriculum again?' Really, it was a lot."*

Organizations also had to manage the effects of murky and inaccessible information on students and families, who were left wondering how to sign up and what the changes in the program (and, critically, the shift from hourly wages to a stipend) meant for them. This made for a more difficult recruitment process:

> *"With recruiting, we now had to also explain to families why the program was not the same anymore, and that's a lot. That's a bigger deal than most people understand, because you do have to talk to families about, they're no longer getting an hour for hour wage, and that the program now is also online. Many families are asking, 'Well, what does that look like?' And you don't even know, because DYCD has not determined yet what that was going to be, other than, 'There'll be a platform we're going to have you use, and just get the kids to sign up, because the numbers are important.'"*

4.3.2 Adaptation to new instructional requirements

Woven together under crisis conditions, various policy elements and requirements were sometimes experienced by providers as conflicting with one another, with challenges around coherent implementation.

Some providers were unsure how to interpret requirements, and this lack of confidence sometimes resulted in watered down implementation, and less impactful student learning experiences. Specifically, with the addition of Hats & Ladders and Workplace Challenges, two new elements that had associated requirements (see Appendix B for more information), providers and partners had to interpret guidelines and develop and implement curricula in just weeks, or days in some cases. As one provider put it, "it was like building a whole new program from scratch." Some partners described the difficulty of dealing with the newness of Workplace Challenges, as well as the tight turnaround:

"We found out about that five days before the program started, we found out about that Workplace Challenge. And I only found out about it because, again, an SYEP partner sent me the curriculum that DYCD gave them."

Hats & Ladders, the online career exploration platform that was an element of Summer Bridge, brought its own set of challenges for organization leaders, who needed to support staff who were being flooded with student outreach about problems related to technical glitches or questions regarding requirements. Often, staff did not have the information or training themselves to answer those questions, which brought on frustration and feelings of helplessness.

Again, the feelings of overwhelm and stress trickled down from organizational leaders and directors, to facilitators, to students.

"It was overwhelming in terms of just the number of pieces we had to put back in order for there to be some sort of sense of order and organization and clarity for both my team and the students. Yeah, 'cause I definitely was impatient with some of the students that came out of it."

The new instructional requirements, combined with the rapid hiring timeline, led to challenges around adequately preparing facilitators to deliver curricula, many of which were only just developed, or were being developed in real time.

According to some providers, the scramble associated with the summer of 2020 highlighted the gaps in staff training that had existed long before the pandemic. In particular, one provider spoke about the acute need for intangibles that many staff do not have coaching around, but desperately needed:

"How can you expect people to be ready for this if they've never had great accountability and problem-solving training and being resourceful? Now you've put them in a situation where those are the most important traits they need to have and they're not equipped. I don't blame any of them."

Organizational leaders prioritized staff support and focused on transparency, even over elements they had no control over. One provider reported increasing staff check-ins from twice per week to daily to ensure that staff were receiving the nearly constantly evolving and changing information. Another provider described ramping up team-wide communication about the collective progress and adaptation that was happening within the organization, as well as challenges they were seeing, in the midst of a stressful and uncertain environment.

Despite the myriad implementation challenges, some providers recognized the new instructional guidelines as an opportunity to innovate and tailor programs to what they saw students actually wanting and needing. One provider noted that the Project Based Learning guidelines allowed for a class about college access:

> *"I know college access is not really a course that's allowed to be taught in traditional SYEP, whereas this year it was able to actually offer some really amazing programing and specifically place 11th and 12th graders into a class about college access, and it's been very well received. So I think it speaks volumes to the importance of diversity and flexibility within this program because it does allow for us to really cater to what the students need."*

Workplace Challenges also offered additional opportunities for youth choice: Some providers created systems for young people to choose their own Workplace Challenge based on their interests. We see this as a positive shift: in the past, the scale of the City program has often made it challenging to effectively link youth to work-based learning opportunities that match their interests (Gonzalez-Rivera, 2016).

Other providers took advantage of the new Workplace Challenge requirement to design projects that met the moment in the context of Covid-19 and racial injustice, with a number that included opportunities for young people to contribute to and collaborate with the educators and organizations that were serving them. Some

sample challenges included youth evaluating their SYEP provider's efforts to incorporate racial equity into their work, working to build a provider's online presence (which was increasingly important during Covid-19), and even supporting SYEP-linked educators as they reflected on their experiences implementing Summer Bridge. Another organization described engaging the New York City Public Advocate in their Workplace Challenge:

> *"No one really had a sense of what a Workplace Challenge was and how it looked. So when one of our partners reached out to us with DYCD documents of a specific description of what that was, that's when we were able to get a little better sense of what we might need to do, and we were able to deploy that Workplace Challenge, which was really amazing. The youth were able to present to the Public Advocate about their campaigns and the research, the way that they would execute them and what way the Public Advocate could help them."*

4.3.3 Role of partnerships

Once funding was partially restored and Summer Bridge was introduced, providers were in desperate need of an infusion of capacity. After the layoffs and furloughs that many providers experienced in the spring, providers were left with a seemingly endless list of tasks to do and few staff to execute them. This deep capacity need, combined with the new instructional model that introduced Workplace Challenges and deepened the focus on Project Based Learning, created a strong imperative for partnerships.

One provider described their increased reliance on partners this year:

"With the quick launch of SYEP, the number one thing is, we've had to definitely seek out partners to support the work because, one, the turnaround's been real quick, and two, we're dealing with two ends of it. It's not just the training side. We're also dealing with the logistical side of enrollment, support to young adults and families right now as they're navigating this new online version. And then also trying to manage 77 virtual employees (that's what we call the students or interns), who will have varying levels of education, skill sets, time commitments, and circumstances. So we're trying to rely a lot more on partners."

"With the quick launch of SYEP, the number one thing is, we've had to definitely seek out partners to support the work."

The focus on Project Based Learning sometimes proved difficult for those providers who have historically placed youth at work sites. One narrated how Project Based Learning is not the expertise or experience of some SYEP providers:

"And the other piece was that some SYEP providers were never project-based providers. They were workforce providers. So they had cultivated over the years many amazing work sites, but had never done this type of work. I really felt for people that were trying to pull this together in three weeks and didn't already have this set of curriculum that they could draw from."

Content partners proved critical in filling capacity gaps experienced by providers. While providers were busy navigating the complexities of the summer, content partners could focus on developing or adapting curricula and programs.

As noted in Chapter 3, throughout the spring and summer, YES had created infrastructure to support the role of content partners: organizations that would work with SYEP providers to offer technical support, training, curriculum, career panels, and/or virtual work site or PBL placements that fulfilled Workplace Challenge and PBL requirements. Although similar partnerships had existed between providers and other organizations who subcontracted with providers in the past, YES formalized the content partner role and provided infrastructure and support to recruit, fund, and match those partners.

Content partners proved critical in filling capacity gaps experienced by providers. While providers were busy navigating the complexities of the summer—including recruiting students, hiring staff, and managing contracts with DYCD—content partners could focus on developing or adapting curricula for PBL. Additionally, their offerings broadened the range of experiences providers were able to offer students, covering a range of industries and opportunities from tech to music to food to the environment, among other areas.

Content partners, also had to engage in substantial adaptation. One partner, who was planning a train-the-trainer model (providing training to providers to facilitate their curriculum), had to shift away from this model to a co-facilitation model to best support the providers they were working with:

> *"I had a come-to-Jesus conversation with the SYEP provider. And she just poured her heart out to me, because she could tell that I was not judging anything. And I learned about how they all had to fire everybody, the 8th of April. And it was so horrific, what they were going through. And I said to my colleague, 'The training is never gonna happen.'"*

As always, there are challenges presented by partnerships. Time to plan and coordinate was crucial, yet was not always possible given the short time frame and flurry of activity. In some cases, limited planning time contributed to a lack of coordination between partners and providers. In other cases, unclear information about requirements contributed to confusion around who was responsible for (or had authority over) what. One partner put it this way:

> *"We were able to work with <one provider> to directly ask any questions that we had in regards to everything that was going on, but there was a lot of confusion initially when we had to figure out hours, Hats & Ladders, Workplace Challenges, and PBL hours and putting all that together. We were getting mixed information from different people, from our provider and then from YES... It seemed like things were changing every single day and we weren't on the same page, and it was making us very uncomfortable. We definitely felt like we were shooting in the dark."*

4.4 Discussion and implications
4.4.1 Timing is key

Rushed timelines—from lack of advanced notice of cancellation of SYEP to partial restoration only weeks before program launch—led to a wide range of obstacles for program leaders, including halted plans, under-resourced teams, limited training for facilitators, enrollment challenges, hastily developed curricula, and challenges in coordinating partnerships. While our data shows many providers and their partners who managed their best under trying circumstances, there were many impediments to effective programming that resulted from the policy rollout timeline, which was linked to budgetary processes at the municipal level, and, at the core, the initial, sweeping, full cut to SYEP funding.

It's imperative that in future years, available slots and program requirements be confirmed earlier in the year to prevent such an initial scramble and reduce the negative downstream effects on program staff, students, and families.

4.4.2 Communication and transparency matters

The lack of clear, transparent, accessible information during the transition to Summer Bridge posed challenges for providers, partners, families, and students alike. It necessitated a degree of adaptation from organizational leaders that should not have been needed. Leaders spent substantial amounts of time searching for and interpreting information that could have been spent hiring, training, and supporting their teams in adapting to new program requirements and the requirements around remote program models. This signals a clear opportunity to strengthen support for organizational leaders and their teams moving forward by creating transparent, accessible, and timely lines of communication between DYCD and SYEP providers, partners, students, and families.

4.4.3 Providers are experts in their own experiences—and should be treated as such

Across the organizational leaders we interviewed, we saw resourcefulness, the determination to provide strong experiences for young people, and the innovation potential that exists within the nonprofit provider and CBO partner ecosystem in New York City. Organizational leaders and their teams weathered curveball after curveball and delivered programming that, despite the challenges, contained many promising approaches that future iterations of SYEP could benefit from (as discussed in detail in Chapters 5 and 6). Providers should be seen as partners, not simply vendors, of DYCD and other City agencies in designing goals and requirements within the program.

5

Levers for Impact in Design of Remote Work–Based Learning Models

5.1 Overview

In this chapter, we explore a range of case examples to learn how various program design choices enabled, or constrained, facilitators and youth as they strove to create supportive youth development and work-based learning environments during the pandemic in the summer of 2020.

Imagine that you have just a few weeks to design and launch a fully remote work-based learning and career exploration program, your organization's capacity has been hit hard by funding cuts, and the youth you're meant to serve have been experiencing what might be the hardest year of their lives.

This was the situation program leaders and facilitators found themselves in when funding was partially restored for New York City's Summer Youth Employment Program and the fully-remote Summer Bridge program was introduced. Leaders made program design decisions within various constraints. In Chapter 4: Organizational Leadership in the Context of Summer 2020, we explain the funding crisis, information vacuum, new instructional requirements, tight timeline, and other factors that impacted on-the-ground results. But the program leaders connected with YES were not facing the challenge alone. In Chapter 3, we explain the support YES offered, including funding curriculum creation and brokering partnerships that would support implementation.

This chapter explores more deeply the nitty-gritty choices that program leaders make and how these choices play out in the context of remote work-based learning programs. Based on research conducted with organizations supported by or connected to the YES coalition, we worked to uncover how program models' structural elements—their curriculum creation, size, and allocation of time to synchronous instruction—differed.[1] After selecting programs with substantial structural differences, we analyzed more in-depth

data we'd collected—interviews with program leaders and facilitators, focus groups with participants, and remote program site visits. Through that process, we uncovered additional contrasts among the focal cases, including how program models used technology, incorporated support for facilitators, and elevated youth voice and choice.

> *This chapter explores more deeply the nitty-gritty choices that program leaders make and how these choices play out in the context of remote work-based learning programs.*

We offer a view into six different programs to explore considerations, tensions, and opportunities connected to six aspects of remote program models: (1) curriculum; (2) facilitator capacity, expertise, and support; (3) program scale; (4) the role of technology; (5) synchronous and asynchronous engagement structures; and, finally, (6) youth agency.

Based on our analysis of six cases, we offer a set of key levers for program leaders, designers, and policy makers to consider in future work.

[1] This chapter uses pseudonyms for organizations' and individuals' names to ensure confidentiality.

KEY LEVERS FOR REMOTE WORK-BASED LEARNING PROGRAM DESIGN

Based on our analysis of six cases, we offer a set of key levers for program leaders, designers, and policy makers to consider in future work around work-based learning models.

Curriculum

curriculum creation versus curriculum selection

Program scale

youth-to-facilitator ratio

Synchronous and asynchronous engagement structures

allocating synchronous and asynchronous learning time

asynchronous learning activities

synchronous learning activities

Role of technology

software use

youth safety in virtual spaces

Youth agency

participant choice of program

youth agency in tasks and projects

Facilitator capacity, expertise, and support

facilitator familiarity with curriculum

facilitator professional experience

facilitator identities and lived experience

Youth and workforce development programs nationally had to pivot to remote models due to the conditions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. This chapter builds on the work of various field-leading organizations that, following the shift to remote learning, quickly established guidance and recommendations for what such programming might look like and include. In a fall 2020 report focused on redesigning training programs, Jobs for the Future emphasized the importance of keeping equity at the forefront, maintaining flexibility, critically considering the role of technology, and effectively resourcing and supporting program staff, among other considerations (Bennett et al., 2020). In early summer 2020, HERE to HERE quickly developed a framework for how to establish high-quality virtual internships, focusing on the importance of effectively resourcing students, establishing connections with professionals, rooting activities in student interests, and providing relevant experiences that lead to takeaways that open up future opportunities (2020). And Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions, in its *Digital*

Youth Summer Employment Toolkit, which was first released in June 2020 and followed by an update in December 2020, highlighted practices used by programs across the country to navigate through the pivot to virtual work-based learning (Miles et al., 2020).

Drawing on this work, we aim to extend and deepen the conversation around remote work-based learning by providing detailed accounts of what these approaches look like in practice. We observed program leaders, facilitators, and youth who demonstrated adaptability, resilience, and creativity during a global pandemic. They had to rethink work-based learning (Kobes et al., 2018) and career readiness experiences (NYC Center for Youth Employment, 2019) from the ground up, with traditional activities like internships, work site placements, and job shadows unavailable or unfeasible. They created programs that fostered connection, self-expression, and industry-specific skills, while promoting career exposure, engagement, and exploration in new ways.

We offer recommendations for implementing high-quality youth programming, whether remote or in-person; avenues deserving of a research agenda; and policy changes that could facilitate the conditions that would support these decisions. As policy makers wrangle with questions about how to continue supporting summer options (Goldstein & Taylor, 2021), many of which will still need to be remote, we see opportunities for the youth development and work-based learning fields to heed the lessons of 2020.

We offer recommendations for implementing high-quality youth programming, whether remote or in-person; avenues deserving of a research agenda; and policy changes that could facilitate the conditions that would support these decisions.

5.2 Case examples
5.2.1 Case example 1: STAR Youth Services
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, received individual support, and were given more choice in their projects.

STAR Youth Services program leaders knew they had only a few weeks to put a program together. "It felt crazy," Lizzie Boyle laughs. "We had a divide and conquer, I would say, strategy." She thought about her team members' strengths and divided them into small work groups. Some focused solely on enrolling the program's 450 young people. Some focused on writing a curriculum—"pulling all the best" in Lizzie's words—from the organization's own curricula, plus external sources including the Project Based Learning (PBL) curriculum developed by the municipal partner Youth Development Institute (2020), while making sure they were meeting all the policy requirements.

By the early days of summer, STAR had a five-week PBL curriculum. Its staff could then build out and run a week-long facilitator training for its 30 facilitators. Its facilitators were from the same communities as program participants, often alums of earlier iterations of the program.

STAR leaders wanted to prioritize community and relationship-building in response to the social isolation of the pandemic. Program Coordinator Nelly Williams described striving for "a space for shared experiences, for shared joy." So, they kept the program mostly synchronous–two-hour sessions, held four days a week.

> *STAR leaders wanted to prioritize community and relationship-building in response to the social isolation of the pandemic. Program Coordinator Nelly Williams described striving for "a space for shared experiences, for shared joy."*

And program leaders **gave youth choice** in the theme their projects would explore: Covid recovery, media literacy, environmental justice, or social justice through the arts. Even within themes, youth chose the direction. For example, within Covid recovery, one group of youth focused on how to talk to their families and build better family relationships, while another focused on public health messaging.

STAR leaders also prioritized spending their City-provided funds on facilitators' salaries to achieve a **low youth per facilitator ratio**—15 to one—and raised external funds for other needs.

The low ratio combined with having cohorts of 30 youth with two facilitators allowed for **more youth choice** in their work groups and tasks. The two facilitators could split groups up into "safe and supervised" Zoom breakout rooms. The low ratio also allowed for **individualized support**: The program held office hours for youth to work through tech challenges with facilitators, or feelings of depression with social workers. Any absent youth would receive calls or texts.

5.2.2 Case Example 2: Pathway Priorities
A social service organization enrolled a large number of youth, and placed them in large groups. Its facilitators learned program curricula—provided through an external partnership—on their own. Youth were not able to engage in the small group work required by the curriculum's experiential learning model, and some found it difficult to take the Workplace Challenge seriously.

Pathway Priorities enrolled 1,500 youth in just two weeks. "And that made my whole summer," Diana Lopez, the program director, recalls. Diana identified 30 facilitators quickly. Facilitators were mostly college students or recent college graduates; many were alums of the organization's program. Her **cohorts would be large**—groups of 60 to 80 participants with two facilitators in each group.

> *Pathway Priorities enrolled 1,500 youth in just two weeks. "And that made my whole summer," Diana Lopez, the program director, recalls.*

With staffing in place and youth enrolled, she needed to identify Project Based Learning experiences, looking externally to leverage partnerships. "I went with the content partners that were able to service the largest communities, pretty much," she says.

Two co-facilitators received the curriculum they'd be facilitating a week before launch. Stephanie Cruz and Sahar Nuri **learned the curriculum on their own**. They read the rubric, lesson plans, and assignments. "We went along with the participants," Stephanie says. "We were both discovering the website [curriculum] together."

InspirEd, an external content partner, had created the curriculum Stephanie and Sahar were facilitating. For the first three weeks, young people mostly worked independently on InspirEd's website, learning their clients' Covid-related challenges by watching videos and submitting assignments. For the last two weeks, small groups of four to six youth were meant to form business teams and collaborate on a **Workplace Challenge**.[2] They were to use a human-centered design process to ideate, prototype, test, and pitch a solution to the challenge of helping people thrive during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Nia James, InspirEd's director, explains the intention behind the emphasis on teamwork. "Hands-on, it's getting young people to collaborate and discuss and argue, learn how to be in conflict with each other," she says.

But Pathway Priorities **didn't have enough facilitators to create small groups**, and as a result its business teams had 25 to 30 youth. Nia explained that this resulted in some difficulties: "And in any team, if you have 15 people trying to do anything, it's hard."

Some young people found it **difficult to take the Workplace Challenge seriously** because they didn't get to meet with clients or present their solutions back to them. Sahar recalled participants expressing, "I'm learning something, but I don't feel like my project is validated because at the end of the day we're just presenting it to each other."

"I know it's a crazy idea because there are so many people in this program, but that would have been helpful for them to at least get a visit from a client," Sahar said.

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[2] For more on the requirements and implementation of Workplace Challenges, see Appendix B: SYEP Summer Bridge 2020 Program Overview.

5.2.3 Case Example 3: Finance You

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

Adola Sani is a **former finance professional**. As a young Black woman, she wasn't exposed to personal finance, investing, and entrepreneurship. She founded the organization Finance You to train youth of color to build wealth.

"So both the connections to professionals and career exploration have been simple to facilitate, however, capacity is difficult," Adola said. Adola's capacity difficulties were understandable. Her program had the **highest youth per facilitator ratio** in our study: 90 to one.

Adola facilitated one-hour whole-group synchronous lessons three days a week. These focused on skill-building (e.g., making a budget, investing money, paying for college) and sharing an assignment which would be due by the end of a day.

> *Although the overall group was large, participants spent the majority of each day interacting in small groups. "A lot of the assignments involved group work, so that's how I met new people," Isabel Mencia, a program participant, explained.*

Although the overall group was large, participants spent the majority of each day interacting in small groups. "A lot of the assignments involved group work, so that's how I met new people," Isabel Mencia, a program participant, explained. "But a lot of the group work involved sharing your work or **interacting with students of other groups**."

Adola expected participants to log into Slack promptly each day. One discussion channel was reserved for participant questions, which were often answered by their peers. Youth created their own private group chats to work on projects. **The workplace-messaging app created opportunities for peer-to-peer problem solving, communication, and collaboration**.

Adola did wish she could offer youth some of the mentorship that workplaces provide through manager direct report check-ins. The benefit would be that "we can talk more candidly about your needs," she explained. "That's been hard to facilitate because of the sheer number of students we're working with."

Adola wanted to normalize that, when it came to the world of work, adults don't always know what they want to do, must overcome obstacles, and often take winding paths in their careers. So she recruited guest speakers from her professional network to share their stories during weekly career panels that she called "Brunch and Learns."

During one, an actor spoke about his journey to figuring out his career interests. He overcame a childhood stutter and shyness. He still feels nervous energy on camera, but channels that energy into his work. His answers to facilitator and participant questions helped to make clear for students the social-emotional development behind his success.

Program participant Isabel said that hearing from professionals—actors, investors—was "not something I experienced a lot in high school."

"I never met an actor; I never took an acting class," Isabel reflected. "But just hearing how he got started with acting and just his experience of being an actor, it's like, wow, you can truly do anything you want in this world if you just put your mind to it."

5.2.4 Case Example 4: Youth Audio
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 portfolios that doubled as avenues for self-expression.

"I was a full-time DJ and music producer and now I'm a part-time producer and have not been DJing at all," Mel Fletcher said. Mel upped her work at youth development program Youth Audio during the pandemic. During the summer, she facilitated a music production and music industry career exploration curriculum.

CityAccess, a large community-based organization, asked young people to rank their preferred Project Based Learning experience.

The organization then placed two groups of **15 youth each** in Youth Audio's program. "I chose this program as soon as I got the email, mainly just because I am so focused on art and music and all, and like this whole world that I wanted to make," participant Jamal McNeil recalled. "If I was gonna be doing one thing for the most part for five weeks, I wanted to make sure that I would really be invested in it."

> *"I chose this program as soon as I got the email, mainly just because I am so focused on art and music and all, and like this whole world that I wanted to make," participant Jamal McNeil recalled. "If I was gonna be doing one thing for the most part for five weeks, I wanted to make sure that I would really be invested in it."*

Jamal **got to choose from a wide range of Project Based Learning opportunities** because CityAccess partnered with nine YES content partners[3], including Youth Audio. "For us to be able to offer them the class that they want to do for the next five weeks felt good," CityAccess Program Director Lina Abramov said. "And I think the YES content providers allowed us to do that."

Mel wrote the curriculum that she facilitated herself. Her sense of ownership of the curriculum meant she was able to **shift program activities and structure based on youth feedback**. For instance, youth weren't participating out loud. "Oh yeah, no, they don't like the mics," Mel laughed. In one of their daily feedback forms, a participant wrote, "We don't collaborate with each other enough."

So Mel added a ritual warm-up. Youth would be randomly **assigned to breakout rooms and collaborate** without her being present. "I think that helps some with the camaraderie," Mel explained. "There's a few students that were super engaged and I tried to target them to get the other ones in. They brought in the other students, I think by hyping them up."

The group built up a unique dynamic of communicating with each other almost entirely through the **Zoom chat** feature. For instance, Kiara asked Mel to share a track she produced. As the track played, the chat erupted with praise and suggestions:

> From Mamadou to Everyone: (10:45 AM): *ooooh*
>
> From Jamal to Everyone: (10:45 AM): *this is fire*
>
> From Elijah to Everyone: (10:45 AM): *ooop as you shoulddddd pop offff*
>
> From Chloe to Everyone: (10:45 AM): *I like the flute*
>
> From Kiara to Everyone: (10:45 AM): *I want to lower the vocal a little though*
>
> From Mamadou to Everyone: (10:46 AM) *i wonder if the flute is too strong? in comparison to the other elements. of course just a suggestion, great job!*
>
> From Kiara to Everyone: (10:48 AM): *thx*

Mel's assignments added up to an authentic industry project. Youth created tracks, sample packs (groups of eight to ten tracks), cover art, electronic press kits, and personal websites—all essential components of a musician's digital portfolio. The projects also created space and freedom for self-expression. Some teens escaped

the restraints of being stuck at home by creating tropical mixes or alien sounds. Others tackled the trauma of the pandemic head on.

"There's at least a few students that themed their sample packs about the quarantine and being stuck at home," Mel said. "So they sampled objects around their house, or that reminded them of their time at home during the pandemic."

5.2.5 Case Example 5: Teen Engineer
A team of facilitators with various levels of professional experience delivered an engineering curriculum. Facilitators with industry experience ran workshops and supported less experienced teaching assistants (TAs). TAs facilitated projects with small groups of participants.

"'We're putting this program together in two weeks and we want to know if you'd be willing to hop on,'" Gabriela Hernandez recalled a staff member at Teen Engineer asking her. "And I said, 'I'm definitely on board.'"

Teen Engineer staff created a Project Based Learning curriculum focused on bioengineering design. Participants completed a Workplace Challenge: Teams of participants developed concepts for new medical devices. One team visualized an "electro turbine powered blood plaque remover" to treat a real disease: atherosclerosis.

A team of **facilitators with various levels of experience** delivered the program curricula. **Teen Engineer staff**, who were graduates of engineering programs with industry experience, taught engineering concepts in one-hour

workshops with all 46 participants every weekday. **Teaching assistants (TAs)** like Gabriela facilitated team projects and the Workplace Challenge—prototyping a solution to a real bio-medical problem—with **small groups of four to five youth**. TAs were current college students who were alums of other Teen Engineer programs.

Mark Rossi, a staff member with professional biomedicalical engineering experience, acted as **Head TA**. He would drop into virtual rooms to support the less-experienced TAs. "He jumps in from time to time, and he does offer more of an insight because he's more well-adjusted to engineering," Gabriela recalled. "It reflects on any STEM field, where we work a lot in groups and bounce off ideas, and that allows for more fruitful outcomes."

Running workshops remotely was challenging. "One of the hardest parts was **not really having any real-time feedback**," said Sofia Jansen, Teen Engineer staff member and lead instructor of the workshops. "If I'm talking to basically a group of blank screens with my TA's faces, that's really hard to know and to judge how well information is hitting."

> *"One of the hardest parts was not really having any real-time feedback," said Sofia Jansen, Teen Engineer staff member and lead instructor of the workshops. "If I'm talking to basically a group of blank screens with my TA's faces, that's really hard to know and to judge how well information is hitting."*

TA Gabriela felt that participants had missed out on the learning that comes from physically building a prototype together. "The most different right off the bat, is that we're not able to work with them hands-on," she said. "And engineering, I think, people often think math and science, but really it's putting things to the test, figuring what works, what doesn't work."

5.2.6 Case Example 6: Tech Possible

A tech program 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 while encouraging teamwork.

"I think that the small cohort model and basically making unique learning needs the norm, as opposed to the exception, is something that students definitely seem to feel, or at least report feeling," said Ally Childers, program manager at Tech Possible. During the summer, the program taught young people with disabilities to code while developing their career readiness skills. Participants made their own websites and created resumes.

Tech Possible had the **lowest youth-per-facilitator ratio** in our study: 13 youth to six facilitators, nearly two to one. The program staff were **specially trained special needs educators with expertise as creative technologists**. The staff created their own curriculum and a corresponding class website with all participant resources.

During a typical program session, the staff would **distribute Zoom tasks**. One instructor would demonstrate a task via screen share. Another facilitator would be, in Ally's words, a "second set of eyes." They'd monitor the Zoom chat and the participant videos to see if participants nodded or gave a thumb's up.

Simultaneously, the facilitator team had a private **"side channel" on Slack** to share what they were observing in the Zoom "room"—for instance, a participant struggling or not having had a chance to speak in a while—and then decide on pivots to better support participants.

According to Ally, the pivots would involve a facilitator going into a Zoom breakout room with a participant or a group of participants learning at a different pace while the main instructor continued the lesson. "And it just kind of normalizes the idea that it's **ridiculous to expect that everyone will learn a new skill at the same pace**, especially if it's being taught over a computer screen," Ally shared.

"And it just kind of normalizes the idea that it's ridiculous to expect that everyone will learn a new skill at the same pace, especially if it's being taught over a computer screen," Ally, a program facilitator shared.

The high "staff saturation," as Ally called it, required balancing support with encouraging autonomy. The staff would open three breakout rooms, and cycle small groups of participants through the rooms to work together on a task. "A couple of the other students would say like, 'Oh, I see now. I see what I have to do, 'cause I watched my classmate go through it.'" Ally reflected. "So that was both efficient and I think good because the students were not just learning from staff, they were **learning from each other**."

Ultimately, Tech Possible's Executive Director Leah Hoffman felt that Summer Bridge's **focus on Project Based Learning was a better fit** for her program than the previous SYEP model of in-person work site placements. Leah explained, "All of the virtual programs were going to be framed as more of a learning experience, so we thought that would be a better thing for us."
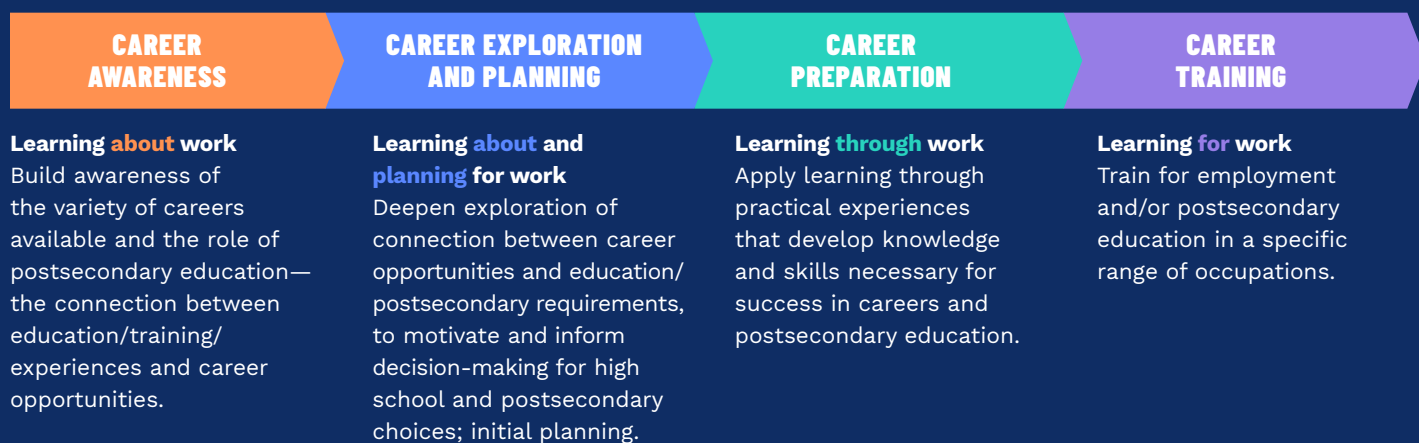
WHAT "COUNTS" AS WORK-BASED LEARNING?

It is important to consider how the youth experiences that programs offered fit into the larger context of work-based learning. The Covid-19 pandemic meant that traditional workplace experiences, such as classic internships or apprenticeships, were not seen to be viable at the scale of New York City's SYEP program. Therefore, the Summer Bridge model offered other types of opportunities, ones that our analysis showed can still be quite impactful, and indeed worth considering outside the pandemic context.

To help contextualize the nature of the programs offered here, it's useful to consider them through the lens of New York City's Career Readiness Framework, developed by the NYC Center for Youth Employment (CYE) (2019). Rather than seeing direct work placements as the only way to conceptualize experiences that promote career readiness, CYE's framework considers a broader range of learning opportunities within this domain, including career awareness, career exploration and planning, career preparation, and career training. Figure 5.1, below, explores the distinctions between these approaches. *(continues on the next page)*

FIGURE 5.1 NYC Center for Youth Employment Career Readiness Framework overview

CAREER AWARENESS	CAREER EXPLORATION AND PLANNING	CAREER PREPARATION	CAREER TRAINING
Learning about work Build awareness of the variety of careers available and the role of postsecondary education— the connection between education/training/ experiences and career opportunities.	**Learning about and planning for work** Deepen exploration of connection between career opportunities and education/ postsecondary requirements, to motivate and inform decision-making for high school and postsecondary choices; initial planning.	**Learning through work** Apply learning through practical experiences that develop knowledge and skills necessary for success in careers and postsecondary education.	**Learning for work** Train for employment and/or postsecondary education in a specific range of occupations.

5 LEVERS FOR IMPACT IN DESIGN OF REMOTE WORK-BASED LEARNING MODELS

In considering the case examples, it's worth situating where and how these programs, and various elements within them, align with different parts of the CYE framework:

CAREER AWARENESS

Finance You's "Brunch and Learns"—facilitated guest question and answer (Q&A) sessions and career panels—provided **career awareness**. They introduced young people to new industries, while revealing how individuals develop social-emotional skills as they navigate career choices and obstacles.

CAREER PREPARATION

Teen Engineer's Workplace Challenge focused on designing a new medical device to treat a real disease. Workplace Challenges like this one advance **career preparation** through practical experiences that develop career knowledge and skills, and build participants' professional networks by connecting them with professionals in a particular industry.

CAREER TRAINING

Youth Audio's Project Based Learning provided youth with knowledge about the music industry along with skills and a portfolio specific to that industry. These types of Project Based Learning programs exemplify **career training** through increasing young people's knowledge of a field they are interested in while building both technical and employability skills.

While youth were not placed at traditional work sites or in traditional jobs, all of these experiences, and many others that occured within the YES ecosystem and in the broader Summer Bridge 2020 model, provided valuable support, knowledge, and skills that advance economic opportunity, address developmental needs, and are key elements of pathways to equitable futures.

5.3 Key levers and questions for program leaders and policy makers

Designing a remote work-based learning program presents leaders and policy makers with a range of decisions. In this section, we highlight key levers—not "silver bullets" or "best practices," but levers of quality that can be configured in different ways. We also offer questions for program leaders and policy makers to aid in configuring these levers with intentionality.

Our case examples highlight some opportunities, and illustrate some potential benefits of remote learning. They also raise some challenges for program designers to address, with the support of policy makers.

5.3.1

CURRICULUM

5.3.1.1

KEY LEVER: CURRICULUM CREATION VERSUS CURRICULUM SELECTION

The programs we profile took three avenues to creating or selecting a work-based learning curriculum: creating their own, partnering with organizations that offered experienced facilitators and an existing curricular model, and having their own staff implement a partner's curriculum.

One program provider, STAR, assigned staff to create a Project Based Learning curriculum, pulling from its existing curriculum and external sources. Entrepreneurship, arts, science, and tech organizations—Finance You, Youth Audio, Teen Engineer, and Tech Possible—quickly adapted their existing curricula to fit Summer Bridge requirements and offered experienced facilitators to program providers like CityAccess. Another provider we profile, Pathway Priorities, had its own staff implement an entrepreneurship organization's curriculum.

LESSONS LEARNED

Advanced planning time and outside funding allowed program providers to write curricula in-house. Entrepreneurship, science, tech, and arts organizations that 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 required additional planning time to investigate curriculum requirements, like facilitated small group activities, and to prepare staff for a new model.

QUESTIONS FOR PROGRAM LEADERS

? Who writes the program curriculum?
+ Do organization staff or facilitators themselves create it?
+ Does an external partner create it? If so, what are the requirements for successful implementation? Does the external partner provide facilitators?

QUESTIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS

? How can policies and funding support organizations in developing effective virtual curriculum to meet the emerging needs of youth?

How can policies and funding support partnerships between program providers and content partners—youth organizations that offer curricula and facilitators experienced with that curricula?

5.3.2

FACILITATOR CAPACITY, EXPERTISE, AND SUPPORT

5.3.2.1

KEY LEVER: FACILITATOR FAMILIARITY WITH CURRICULUM

Two of our case examples feature staff facilitating curricula for the first time. STAR staff created and led a week-long training for their 30 facilitators before program launch. Two Pathway Priorities facilitators received the curriculum they would implement about a week before program launch and learned it on their own, using written materials and an accompanying website.

Facilitators at three organizations— Finance You, Youth Audio, and Tech Possible—wrote and delivered their own curricula. When the musician who wrote Youth Audio's curricula received critical feedback from program participants, she was able to successfully adapt. When Tech Possible's facilitators noticed participants racing ahead or falling behind, they would split into separate groups and teach at a different pace.

Some facilitators at STAR, Pathway Priorities, and Teen Engineer were alums of their organizations' programs. At Teen Engineer, alums were able to quickly adapt to facilitating a virtual version of an engineering design project they had experienced in person.

LESSONS LEARNED

Facilitators who have experience with the program—either because they wrote the curriculum themselves, delivered the curriculum previously, or previously engaged in it as participants—may more easily adapt activities to fit participant needs and program requirements. New facilitators may benefit from high-touch training before program launch.

Some facilitators received curricular materials shortly before the program launch and learned it on their own, alongside participants. These facilitators may benefit from additional support and coaching.

QUESTIONS FOR PROGRAM LEADERS

? How familiar are facilitators with the program curriculum? How much ownership do they feel over it?

+ Do organization staff or facilitators themselves create it?
+ Do the facilitators learn the program curriculum on their own—by watching video tutorials, reading facilitator guides, or exploring materials like lessons plans, rubrics, and program digital platforms?
+ Do the facilitators receive higher-touch training about the curriculum (i.e. facilitated workshop or session)?
+ Have the facilitators delivered the content before?
+ Are the facilitators program alums— have they experienced the curriculum as participants?
+ Do the facilitators write the curriculum themselves?

QUESTIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS

? Does policy rollout ensure that program providers have sufficient planning time and funding to provide high-touch training for facilitators?

How can policies and funding support partnerships between program providers and partner organizations that provide experienced facilitators?

5.3.2

FACILITATOR CAPACITY, EXPERTISE, AND SUPPORT

5.3.2.2

KEY LEVER: FACILITATOR PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Finance You, Teen Engineer, and Youth Audio facilitators were professionals or had professional experience in particular industries, like finance, engineering, or arts. These facilitators were able to design authentic industry projects, give examples from their own experience, and pull from their professional networks to invite guest speakers. Pathway Priorities' two facilitators had less professional experience. They found that some participants struggled to take the project seriously.

STAR and Teen Engineer used teams of facilitators with varying degrees and types of professional experience. Facilitators with professional experience could provide special-ized support, like Teen Engineer's "Head TA" answering participant questions, or STAR's social workers providing one-on-one check-ins. Facilitators who were near peers and/or program alums led group projects and activities.

Tech Possible facilitators were youth development professionals—after school leaders, counselors, and social workers. They had specialized training in working with youth with special needs, which allowed them to recognize participants' needs and offer individualized support.

LESSONS LEARNED

Facilitators with professional experience in a particular industry are best positioned to facilitate activities and projects that are authentic to that industry. They do this by designing projects that add up to an industry portfolio, by answering questions from their own experience, and by bringing in guest speakers from that industry.

Facilitators who are near peers to participants and/or recent program alums can be most effective when they are part of a team that includes facilitators with more professional experience.

For some participant populations, facilitators with specific expertise in learning differences or other special needs may be most successful.

QUESTIONS FOR PROGRAM LEADERS

? What professional experiences do facilitators have?

+ Are they near peers of participants—college students or recent graduates?
+ Are they industry professionals (such as engineers, musicians, entrepreneurs, or filmmakers)?
+ Are they education professionals (such as youth workers, after school leaders, or teachers)?
+ Are they social service professionals (such as counselors or social workers)?

If there is a team of facilitators with different professional experiences, how do they interact and support each other? Do they take on specialized roles?

QUESTIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS

? How can policy makers support the recruitment and hiring process for programs to hire more experienced professionals? Can they leverage their own networks as a resource to help expand the recruitment pool?

How can policy makers develop resources or technical assistance to support training of various industry professionals to become facilitators?

5.3.2

FACILITATOR CAPACITY, EXPERTISE, AND SUPPORT

5.3.2.3

KEY LEVER: FACILITATOR IDENTITIES AND LIVED EXPERIENCES

STAR, Pathway Priorities, and Teen Engineer hired alums of their programs as facilitators. These facilitators were closer in age to participants, and tended to share one or more identities, like race or ethnicity, or lived experiences, like growing up in the same neighborhood, with participants.

Finance You's founder is a Black woman and entrepreneur. She started the organization to train young people of color to build wealth. She drew from her own network when inviting guests.

LESSONS LEARNED

Facilitators who were program alums tended to be closer in age to participants, to share one or more identities with them, and to have some lived experiences in common. If they were facilitating a program they had experienced as a participant, they had less trouble learning it and adapting it to the remote context.

Facilitators who share lived experiences with participants can tailor programming to fit their needs. One facilitator, a Black woman, didn't get exposure to financial careers when she was young. That experience drove her to design a program to train young people of color to build wealth.

QUESTIONS FOR PROGRAM LEADERS

? Do facilitators share lived experiences with participants? Can they use those experiences to tailor programming to young people's needs?

Do facilitators share an identity or identities with participants?

QUESTIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS

? How can policies support and promote program designers, leaders, and facilitators who share lived experiences and identities with participants?

How can career programming better meet the needs and reflect the experiences of young people of color?

5.3.3

PROGRAM SCALE

5.3.3.1

KEY LEVER: YOUTH-TO-FACILITATOR RATIO

STAR leaders used City funds primarily to hire facilitators, achieving a 15-to-1 youth-to-facilitator ratio. They were able to prioritize community-building and individualized support around tech and mental health challenges. STAR, Pathway Priorities, and Teen Engineer quickly hired alums of their own programs—often college students—as facilitators. At Teen Engineer, these staff facilitated a Workplace Challenge focused on designing a new medical device.

Finance You and Youth Audio, programs with 90-to-1 and 15-to-1 youth-to-facilitator ratios respectively, assigned youth to complete projects in small groups without the facilitator present.

Although the programs had very different youth-to-facilitator ratios, their facilitators were able to foster peer-to-peer collaboration and connections. Despite her successes, Finance You's facilitator regretted that she couldn't check in regularly with individual participants.

Some complex team projects—like Workplace Challenges focused on designing solutions for real-world problems—may not be successful without enough facilitators. Pathway Priorities had one facilitator for every 40 participants. They could not create and facilitate the small business teams required to implement a design thinking Workplace Challenge—a key part of the curriculum they were implementing. Teen Engineer was able to hire less experienced facilitators to lead a workplace challenge with small groups of four to five youth.

Tech Possible's low youth-to facilitator ratio—almost two-to-one—meant youth with disabilities got individualized support and instruction tailored to their pace.

LESSONS LEARNED

Low participant-to-facilitator ratios encourage individualized support, relationship–building, and allow for facilitated team projects. Completing independent small group projects without facilitators present can foster active participation and peer connections, even with a high youth–to facilitator ratio.

High participant-to-facilitator ratios make facilitated small group teamwork—particularly complex Workplace Challenges—difficult or impossible. Youth also miss out on mentorship opportunities.

QUESTIONS FOR PROGRAM LEADERS

? + How many youth will be enrolled?
+ Are youth placed in smaller cohorts with one facilitator? Or larger cohorts with one or more facilitators (i.e. 15 youth with one facilitator or 30 youth with two facilitators)?
+ How many facilitators can be hired, reassigned from other roles, or sourced from partners?
+ Can the curricula or program model be successfully implemented with the number of facilitators available?

QUESTIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS

? How do we ensure that providers have sufficient funding and planning time to:
+ Implement small group team projects like Workplace Challenges?
+ Provide mentorship opportunities and individualized support to students?

5.3.4

ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY

5.3.4.1

KEY LEVER: SOFTWARE USE

All the programs we profile used videoconferencing for synchronous meetings. Participants were hesitant, or sometimes unable, to use the mic and video in video-conferences. Teen Engineer facilitators leading workshops would be talking to blank screens, without knowing how or if youth were receiving the information. Tech Possible facilitators used various cues to see if youth were following along. Even if video wasn't on, they looked for thumbs up emojis or other cues.

Some facilitators found alternatives to video and audio communication. Youth Audio participants communicated almost exclusively via the Zoom chat. They used chat to answer facilitator questions, collaborate with each other in breakout rooms, and give feedback during project showcases. Finance You participants logged into Slack each program day. They used it to problem solve, ask questions, and to collaborate on small group projects.

Most programs used productivity software like Google Docs and Slides to do group tasks and projects. Some taught youth to use specialized industry software and web apps. For instance, Youth Audio taught youth to use a range of specialized software and web apps, including Soundtrap and Bandcamp.

LESSONS LEARNED

Most programs relied on Google Drive, Docs, and Slides for live collaboration and used Zoom videoconferencing software to host synchronous meetings. Facilitators found that participants were hesitant or unable to use the mic and video. Some successfully fostered engagement in the Zoom chat. One used the messaging app Slack for group work, and found that participants began using it to answer each other's questions.

Facilitators can help youth develop marketable skills by teaching them to use industry-specific software and web apps and then having them complete tasks and projects using them.

QUESTIONS FOR PROGRAM DESIGNERS

? How do participants communicate
and collaborate?
+ Do they use videoconferencing
software like Zoom? If yes, do they
use mic, video, or chat? Do they use
breakout rooms?
+ Do they use messaging applications
like Slack, GroupMe, or WhatsApp?
What topics are discussed? How is a
culture of asynchronous communication
developed?
+ Do they use productivity software, like
Google Docs, Slides, and Jamboard?

Do participants learn to use specialized
industry software like PhotoShop,
Canva, Adobe Premiere, Soundtrap,
Bandcamp, etc.?

Do facilitators use collaboration
technology to monitor or track
participation? For instance, do they
require participants to:
+ Turn on their cameras on Zoom,
+ Make edits to Google Slides, or
+ Sign in to Slack at certain times?

QUESTIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS

? How can organizations access apps that
require licenses at lower rates?

How can all youth get reliable Internet
access and a computer?

5.3.4

ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY

5.3.4.2

KEY LEVER: YOUTH SAFETY IN VIRTUAL SPACES

STAR and Pathway Priorities discouraged or disallowed youth to meet in breakout rooms without an adult to ensure safety, while Finance You and Youth Audio encouraged youth to work together on tasks or projects without the facilitator present.

LESSONS LEARNED

Some programs, citing safety concerns, discouraged practices that others used to promote connections. For instance, some disallowed breakout rooms unless an adult was present, while other programs used youth-only breakout rooms to encourage peer-to-peer connections. Engagement with youth, parents, and guardians about what makes young people feel safe or unsafe in virtual spaces may be helpful.

QUESTIONS FOR PROGRAM LEADERS

? What practices and policies exist to ensure youth safety?

How do those policies impact collaboration and agency?

Do youth report feeling safe?

QUESTIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS

? What guidance exists to ensure youth safety?

5.3.5

STRUCTURING SYNCHRONOUS AND ASYNCHRONOUS ENGAGEMENT

5.3.5.1

KEY LEVER: ALLOCATING SYNCHRONOUS AND ASYNCHRONOUS LEARNING TIME

Several organizations allocated a majority of youth time to synchronous learning:[4] STAR allocated two hours, four days a week, for 40 hours total; Teen Engineer allocated one-hour lectures each weekday and twice-weekly two-hour small group meetings, for 45 hours total; and Tech Possible allocated 2.5 hours, three days a week, for 37.5 hours total.

Youth in these programs spent more time in facilitated activities, receiving support from instructors.

Youth Audio split its Project Based Learning and Workplace Challenge hours about evenly between synchronous and asynchronous time: synchronous learning hours made up from 1.5 to three hours a week, three days a week, for 33 hours total. Youth in this program received a blend of facilitated learning and intensive independent work.

Two organizations that we profile offered less synchronous time: Pathway Priorities, in partnership with InspirEd, offered two hours, twice a week, for 20 hours total; and Finance You offered one hour, four times a week, for 20 hours total. Youth in these programs completed more assignments independently—Pathway Priorities' participants on InspirEd's website, and Finance You participants with peers in small groups.

LESSONS LEARNED

Organizations varied widely in the relative amount of time they allocated to synchronous and asynchronous learning. More synchronous learning time allows for more intensive support from facilitators, while more asynchronous learning time allows more time to be spent applying knowledge and skills independent of facilitators.

Some participant needs—such as needs for mentoring and individualized support—demand synchronous instruction. But facilitated synchronous learning is resource-intensive, particularly if the program model requires low youth-to-facilitator ratios. Some programs had to create large youth cohorts, hire facilitators with less experience, partner with external organizations that provided facilitators, and/or raise additional funds outside of their City contract to offer more synchronous hours.

[4] This breakdown excludes asynchronous hours within the broader Summer Bridge program that youth were required to dedicate to independent work on the career exploration app Hats & Ladders. See Appendix B: 2021 SYEP Components for a breakdown of hours requirements for Summer Bridge.

QUESTIONS FOR PROGRAM LEADERS

? How much time do participants spend learning in scheduled meetings with facilitators and/or peers?

How much time do participants spend learning on their own?

What is the sequence of asynchronous and synchronous activities? Do participants spend most of their time on asynchronous learning platforms at first, or in synchronous activities with a facilitator at first?

QUESTIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS

? Should there be a required, minimum amount of time allocated to synchronous learning?

How might funding levels influence the number of synchronous hours that are possible or the number of youth per facilitator?

How do program requirements influence the sequencing of asynchronous and synchronous activities?

5.3.5

STRUCTURING SYNCHRONOUS AND ASYNCHRONOUS ENGAGEMENT

5.3.5.2

KEY LEVER: SYNCHRONOUS LEARNING ACTIVITIES

STAR and Tech Possible used synchronous meetings to teach skills and facilitate group projects. These organizations' use of multiple facilitators allowed them to supervise breakout rooms and provide individualized support. Youth Audio's facilitator demonstrated skills and asked participants to showcase work during whole-group synchronous sessions. She used breakout rooms to encourage independent collaboration in small groups.

Teen Engineer devoted a portion of its synchronous meetings to whole-group skill-building workshops, and a portion to facilitated team projects in small groups. Facilitators struggled to get real-time feedback on whether youth were engaging during whole group sessions.

Finance You participants briefly met with their facilitator as a whole group to learn skills, listen to and ask questions of industry guests, and get instructions for assignments. Pathway Priorities' participants met with facilitators in larger groups to complete their Workplace Challenge. Because of their high youth-to-facilitator ratios, these organizations' facilitators could not lead small group projects.

LESSONS LEARNED

Keep large whole-group synchronous sessions relatively brief. Use them to orient groups to project goals, deliver tutorials on skills, explain assignments, and showcase participant work. Prioritize interactive small group or team activities that allow participants to practice skills and build relationships during synchronous time.

With sufficient resources, facilitators can supervise, facilitate, or visit small groups. Where resources were scarce, some facilitators opt to have small groups work independently.

QUESTIONS FOR PROGRAM DESIGNERS

? What is the balance of whole group and breakout group time during synchronous sessions?

What do youth do at synchronous sessions?
+ Listen to or ask questions as the facilitator explains assignments?
+ Listen to or ask questions of guests on a career panel or a guest speaker?
+ Listen to lecture-style knowledge or skill-share when a facilitator is the primary person speaking?
+ Follow along on their own devices as a facilitator demonstrates a task?
+ Participate in workshop-style knowledge or skill-building discussions and activities?
+ Showcase their projects or accomplishments?
+ Work on assignments independently or in small groups without facilitators present?
+ Work on assignments independently or in small groups while the facilitator visits groups or individuals to support?
+ Check in with the facilitator one-on-one during office hours?

QUESTIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS

? How might funding levels influence the ability of programs to facilitate small group work?

5.3.5

STRUCTURING SYNCHRONOUS AND ASYNCHRONOUS ENGAGEMENT

5.3.5.3

KEY LEVER: ASYNCHRONOUS LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Teen Engineer participants worked extensively on team projects in synchronous meetings with their TA and then did independent research and work on the projects asynchronously. In contrast, Finance You participants gathered synchronously with the facilitator briefly to learn skills and get project instructions, but then collaborated in groups without the facilitator present. Groups had to work on projects during a designated time frame and complete them by the end of the day.

Youth Audio participants completed a series of assignments asynchronously that added up to a digital portfolio—a personal website featuring music they produced. Pathway Priorities' participants did assignments on their curriculum provider's websites asynchronously. These activities gave youth knowledge they would need for their Workplace Challenge, but youth wished they could actually interact with clients.

Tech Possible participants spent less time on asynchronous assignments than participants in our other case example programs, but did complete a resume on their own.

LESSONS LEARNED

Use asynchronous learning to give youth extended time to put into practice skills they had learned synchronously. Asynchronous projects, such as a personal website, resume, media project, or independent research focused on a real-world challenge, can be a meaningful addition to youth portfolios.

Utilize collaborative projects that youth complete asynchronously to give participants the opportunity to develop teamwork skills and build connections with their peers even while working remotely.

Solo self-directed activities submitted via a digital platform feature less interpersonal interaction. Too much time spent on these activities can leave youth disengaged or wishing for more connection.

Facilitators can create a hybrid between synchronous and asynchronous learning by structuring independent work time within the context of "live" meetings—designating a time frame for youth to work on assignments and a deadline for completion. If all youth are working independently during a designated time, the facilitator can visit groups or individuals to offer support, provide feedback, and motivate youth.

QUESTIONS FOR PROGRAM LEADERS

? What do young people do
asynchronously—on their own schedule?
+ Self-directed activities submitted on
  a digital learning platform
+ Work on individual assignments
  (readings, writing, tasks, projects)
+ Work with each other in teams without
  a facilitator present

Are asynchronous tasks and projects
solo endeavours? Or do they require
team or group work?

If projects require group work, do groups
have to interact with other groups?

Do tasks and projects add up to an
authentic industry portfolio or capstone
project that can be used to demonstrate
participants' skills?

QUESTIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS

? Do funding levels lead to providers
relying mainly on asynchronous learning
activities? How can these activities be
structured to foster peer connections?

5.3.6
YOUTH AGENCY

5.3.6.1
KEY LEVER: PARTICIPANT CHOICE OF PROGRAM

Entrepreneurship, arts, science, and tech organizations like Finance You, Youth Audio, Teen Engineer, and Tech Possible might not have been eligible as work sites in past iterations of NYC's SYEP programs. Their programs offered opportunities for younger and older youth to engage in disciplines like music production and bioengineering design. Tech Possible found Project Based Learning, with its emphasis on skill building, a better fit for the needs of its participants than the work site placement.

Provider CityAccess asked youth to rank program options, including Youth Audio's music production program. A participant reported choosing Youth Audio based on his passion for art and music. The provider was able to offer youth a wide range of options by partnering with nine YES content partners.

LESSONS LEARNED

A range of youth organizations were able to quickly adapt curricula to fit the requirements of remote Project Based Learning and Workplace Challenges. These organizations offered youth experiences in industries as different as music production and biomedical engineering, while fostering connections with industry professionals and peers. Some focused on meeting the needs of specific youth populations, like youth with disabilities. Partnering with these youth organizations allowed providers to offer youth more choices that matched their developmental needs and emerging interests.

Continuing to offer Project Based Learning opportunities for older youth, along with fostering partnerships between providers and curriculum partners, will increase the options available to young people.

QUESTIONS FOR PROGRAM LEADERS

? How does the program learn youth interests? What tools might be available to facilitate this process?

Do youth have the opportunity to choose a program based on their interests? Does the program match their interests?

Do youth have access to a program that fits their needs?

How can organizations partner to offer more choices for youth?

QUESTIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS

? How can all youth have access to a program or work site that matches their interests and needs?

What supports do program providers need to offer a wide selection of opportunities to participants?

How do requirements limit or increase the number of options available to youth?

How can partnerships be supported that increase the number of options available to youth?

5.3.6
YOUTH AGENCY

5.3.6.2
KEY LEVER: YOUTH AGENCY IN TASKS AND PROJECTS

Youth in some of our case examples chose the topic and direction of their projects. STAR youth were able to choose among topics of urgent national interest—like Covid recovery, media literacy, and environmental justice—for their Project Based Learning experience during the summer of 2020. Within those broad topics, they chose the focus of their project. Youth Audio participants used their projects—creating a website to feature music they produced—as avenues for self-expression. Some focused on being stuck at home, while others focused on music as an escape, with tropical mixes or alien sounds. Youth also received the option to showcase their projects during synchronous sessions.

Finance You participants had flexibility in how to do their projects, as they completed projects on their own time in small groups. They answered each other's questions and collaborated via the messaging app Slack.

LESSONS LEARNED

Project Based Learning facilitators can give youth choice in both the "what" and the "how" of their project to boost engagement and create a better fit with participant interests and needs.

+ Programs can set themes for Project Based Learning, like Covid relief or industry focus areas like music production, and encourage youth to choose their specific focus within those broad themes.
+ Programs might give youth choice in the times they would meet with their peers, what format or media they will use for their project, and whether they will showcase their work.

Facilitators can foster agency by encouraging peer-to-peer problem solving and collaboration, along with independent work.

QUESTIONS FOR PROGRAM LEADERS

? Do participants choose the content or direction of their project?

Do participants choose how they complete the project? Do they choose their project's time frame, or choose whether to work in groups or independently?

QUESTIONS FOR PROGRAM LEADERS

? How do program requirements promote or discourage youth agency?

5.4 Conclusion

Looking at the ways in which program designers made a range of decisions around staffing, curriculum, technology, scale and youth agency affirms the importance of paying careful attention to these areas. Critically, 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, Pathway Priorities solved the challenges of having a short time frame and needing to offer robust Project Based Learning experiences for the large numbers of youth it served by leveraging an external partnership that provided a technology-enabled curricular platform that less experienced facilitators could "plug into." But the large youth-to-facilitator ratio combined with a decision that youth shouldn't be in breakout rooms without adults due to safety concerns meant that there were fewer opportunities for in-depth collaboration between youth.

Finance You 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 it 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 and how such models structure synchronous and asynchronous time and usage of technology. Finally, these findings also reaffirm the reality that the broader structures in which program designs operate—the ability for organizations to leverage partnerships from within the larger ecosystem, policy contexts with their own associated requirements, and the ability to find and hire high capacity staff all have profound implications that often determine what program configurations and structures are and are not possible.

6

Humanizing Pedagogy for Equitable Futures

6.1 Overview

What does it look like to provide social and emotional supports to youth within the broader context of the Covid-19 pandemic? Drawing on the voices and insights of youth participants and educators involved in work-based learning programs in New York City during the summer of 2020, this chapter provides a series of briefs that highlight the pedagogies youth workers drew on to be more fully human with the youth they served. These pedagogical strategies provided youth with social and emotional supports that acknowledged both their present realities as they coped with the pandemic, and their future lives as they prepared to pursue professional opportunities.

The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, with its ensuing shifts to remote learning and stay-at-home orders, disrupted youth's sense of connection, purpose, stability, and control. Research on youth experience during the Covid-19 pandemic highlights the realities that many youth have experienced, such as greater levels of loneliness, depression, anxiety, and helplessness (Goodwin Simon Strategic Research, 2020). These stark realities of the pandemic have raised urgent questions for educators.

Several reports have offered recommendations for providing youth with social and emotional supports that directly address these realities. The *Coping with COVID-19 Student-to-Student Survey* (Kentucky Student Voice Team et al., 2020, p. 3), for example, recommended that educators "encourage social connection within and outside the regular curriculum and build a positive school climate and space for students to process." The *To Lockdown and Back* (Day et al., 2020, p. 81) report suggested that educators "facilitate young people to create and oversee peer support and self-help forums with regard to coping and thriving during lockdown, such as study groups, wellbeing support, and service-user forums."

Other educators (Simmons, 2021) have advocated for integrating social and emotional supports with an antiracist approach, arguing that social and emotional supports "that fail to address our sociopolitical reality and combat racial and social injustice will not prepare our young people for the world they will inherit—one fraught with hate, misunderstanding, and bigotry." This chapter offers educators specific pedagogical practices that put the above and similar recommendations into action.

Educators we spoke with during this study used a variety of pedagogical practices to provide youth with social and emotional supports around coping with the pandemic. These included helping youth regain a sense of connection, purpose, stability, and control; helping youth process the impact of the pandemic in a safe space for vulnerable sharing; and helping youth become hopeful about their futures. The specific pedagogical strategies detailed in this report are applicable to many contexts: work-readiness programs and formal K–12 classrooms, remote learning and in-person learning, during a pandemic and after.

Additionally, this chapter features pedagogical strategies that provide youth with social and emotional supports within the context of career-oriented learning, highlighting practices that help youth make connections to professionals, navigate institutional challenges, and explore career options. Educators in our study identified, for example, that youth may feel intimidated to engage in professional networking, unsure of how to deal with workplace discrimination, embarrassed to reach out for help, and stressed out about major life transitions and not "having it all figured out." Helping youth cope with such fears and anxieties in a supportive way can prepare them to develop their professional identities and pursue their aspirations when it comes to the world of work.

The practices and strategies developed by the educators we observed during the summer of 2020, taken together, answer the following question: **What pedagogical approaches did youth-serving organizations use to address youth's social and emotional needs around remote work-based learning during the pandemic?**

We explore what this looked like within the context of the YES coalition's work to support New York City's Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP). Teens Take Charge (TTC), a group of youth leaders and activists that played a central role in the coalition, elevated social and emotional supports as one of five key program components in the plan they advocated for SYEP (Teens Take Charge, 2020). As envisioned by TTC, programs that center social and emotional supports "meet young people where they are, taking into account the effects of grief/pandemic."

Yet, the ways in which youth-serving programs worked to meet young people where they are were complicated by the realities of the pandemic and its disproportionate impacts. Due to constrained policy information flows and short timelines, many youth-serving programs had to scramble at the last minute to transition their programs from in-person to online, find staff who could facilitate the online program, and enroll youth, with whom they often had no previous connection, to participate in their remote work programs (see Chapter 4). Further, many youth struggled to attend programs consistently as they balanced multiple time commitments and experienced technology access issues.

How, then, were facilitators able to "meet young people where they are" within these constraints? Importantly, are there exemplary cases of facilitators providing social and emotional supports, and what do such cases imply for pedagogical practices more broadly?

An analysis of interviews with program directors, facilitators, and youth focus groups; observations conducted during site visits; program documentation (curriculum, reports, youth final projects); and recorded professional convenings revealed seven interrelated areas where programs actively developed social and emotional supports for and with youth:
+ Building Community
+ Holding Space for Vulnerable Sharing
+ Revitalizing Hope
+ Developing Networking Skills
+ Unpacking Workplace Discrimination
+ Encouraging Help-Seeking Behavior
+ Orienting Toward Change

This chapter presents a series of briefs around each of these areas, highlighting within each the specific pedagogical strategies that educators enacted. Each pedagogical strategy is grounded in examples of what the approach looked and sounded like in action along with reflective quotes from program leaders and youth. All program and individual names used throughout the chapter are pseudonyms, and some quotes have been slightly edited for clarity.

Building community

offer informal spaces to hang out

generate lively interactions

develop a group identity

Orienting toward change

normalize uncertainty

research the changing work landscape

provide mentors to ease transitions

Encouraging help seeking behavior

streamline help requests

create peer-to-peer support channels

use supportive messaging

HUMANIZING PEDAGOGY FOR EQUITABLE FUTURES

Holding space for vulnerable sharing

connect youth with adults they identify with

gently push youth outside their comfort zones

allow youth to creatively express themselves

Revitalizing hope

showcase youth-led efforts to create better futures

have youth contribute to the well-being of their communities

show youth the potential you see in them

Developing networking skills

create peer-networking groups

provide step-by-step networking advice

invite professionals to see youth at their best

Unpacking workplace discrimination

have youth research workplace discrimination

invite professionals to share their experiences

teach youth how to self-advocate in the workplace

6.2

BUILDING COMMUNITY
WHAT'S THE ISSUE?

Like adults, young people found that their lives were upended by the global pandemic. As one youth put it, "I feel like this pandemic really changed everybody's lives, and it's still changing each day." Cut off from school, peers, and everyday routines, these changes disrupted youth's sense of connection and purpose.

Many programs identified the importance of building community as a way to help youth regain a sense of connection and purpose. Yet, they acknowledged many challenges to building community within the context of short-term remote programming, such as limited opportunities for informal and organic interactions and the necessity of bonding over screens.

Three pedagogical strategies that programs used to build community are featured here:
+ **offer informal spaces to hang out**
+ **generate lively interactions**
+ **develop a group identity**

When programs did not prioritize building community, youth were left feeling that their experiences of work-based learning were simply an extension of online school or a transactional way to get paid for completing busywork. As one youth pointed out, "If we want to work in teams, and kind of bond with each other, and have to create a product, I feel it would be a great idea if we actually knew each other and actually talk to each other, and work even more in sync with each other."

YOUTH

" *It was hard in the summer, especially with Covid and my parents losing their jobs, so while being in the SYEP Summer Bridge program, it helped me not be worried too much about my situation and also how to adjust to quarantine life and how to be more involved despite being in my home, while also helping me think about my future.*

YOUTH

" *It was a good learning experience, rather than sitting at home all day doing nothing or being depressed 'cause online schooling right now is just ridiculous. So just having something that you can put all your heart into. Such an experience was really, really amazing for me, and it was very helpful in getting to know all these different types of people.*

QUESTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

? What steps is your program taking to help youth:
+ Hang out in dedicated informal spaces?
+ Enjoy lively group interactions?
+ Develop a sense of group identity?

6.2
BUILDING COMMUNITY

6.2.1
OFFER INFORMAL SPACES TO HANG OUT

What did we see?

In an effort to recreate spaces where adults and youth could hang out and get to know each other, programs offered optional times and spaces for youth to freely drop in.

These informal spaces ranged from Sunday brunches to "Lunch Time Fun Time," where youth gathered to play games such as Fibbage or Uno while chitchatting and occasionally talking about work issues.

Other programs pursued an asynchronous approach, teaching youth how to use social technology platforms such as GroupMe, Slack, and Discord, where they could create their own channels to converse freely about work and non-work matters.

These informal spaces allowed youth to build connections and feel more comfortable opening up about their personal lives.

PROGRAM DIRECTOR

I had a group of young women I was working with, and we were on Zoom, kind of talking about how we were all dealing with the pandemic, and you know, people were like, it's hard, not really talking, and then I was on my phone, I was just on House Party, and then one of the girls was there too. And I clicked on and I was on a thirty-minute conversation with her just that quick, and she was telling me about how her mom lost her job and just how difficult that was. Funny thing was, three of the girls met us there, so we just had that discussion that we didn't have on Zoom, because it felt like a less formal platform.

PROGRAM DIRECTOR

There were GroupMe messages, every day throughout the day, connecting with them and sharing things. I know some of us shared pictures of when we were in high school so they could connect with us in that way. ... A lot of interactions that were not necessarily based on work tasks, but were getting to know you type of things.

6.2

BUILDING COMMUNITY

6.2.2

GENERATE LIVELY INTERACTIONS

What did we see?

When youth saw facilitators consistently bring energy and warmth to group meetings and activities, youth appreciated the effort and grew more comfortable. In turn, as youth became more comfortable, they brought their own energy into the mix, and facilitators and youth could play off each other.

A program director from Empathy Unbound described the energy feedback loop that occurred during a "Trivia Tuesday" activity:

> *"I put the girls in groups, and I'll ask a question. First one to respond with the right answer gets a point. And they were getting hyped. I started getting hyped. The language for me was like, 'Yo,' 'cause I was just excited 'cause they were excited, and they were really putting forth the effort."*

In addition to bringing their own energy, facilitators worked to position youth as a source of energy. For example, one program invited youth to lead their favorite games and activities in small peer groups. Another program identified high energy youth and asked them to drum up excitement and engagement among their peers.

YOUTH

" *[Adola] had very good energy and it was just nice to see her in the morning when she had our daily meetings. Sometimes she would play music and ask about our weekends, and even though it was all remote, I can tell she did try to foster a community and just welcome us. ... I got more comfortable as...I got to see her human side.*

FACILITATOR

" *There's a few students that were super engaged and I tried to target them to get the other ones in. They brought in the other students, I think by hyping them up. ... This cohort has been feeding off each other in a positive way.*

6.2
BUILDING COMMUNITY

6.2.3
DEVELOP A GROUP IDENTITY

What did we see?
One program, Empathy Unbound, mailed youth matching program t-shirts, which they wore at their final project presentations before a large Zoom audience.

During an ice-breaker activity, youth wrote down their "personal superpowers" (such as their smile, their mind, their desire to support others) on a piece of paper. After explaining the superpower they chose, they held up the piece of paper to their cameras for a group photo.

In addition to this group cohesion, youth were positioned as a peer-to-peer network of mutual accountability, as signified by the phrase, "sister's keeper." As their sister's keepers, they were encouraged to check in on and support each other daily.

For youth, this role and responsibility of having a sisterhood entailed reaching out to peers who were late to meetings, filling them in on anything they missed, and making sure everyone was on the same page.

YOUTH

> I would definitely say that phrase, my sister's keeper, I really took that to heart, 'cause now I'm always checking up on people, asking them if they're okay, and we also got a shirt from there, and now I be walking outside with the shirt and I just be saying to people like, 'Yeah, I'm your keeper, you know what I'm saying. I got you.'

6.3

HOLDING SPACE FOR VULNERABLE SHARING
WHAT'S THE ISSUE?

Many programs in our study recognized a need to provide safe spaces where youth could openly talk about, make sense of, and directly process the pandemic as well as the racial injustice that were at the heart of their experiences in the summer of 2020.

Yet, creating a safe space in a remote work-based learning program was not straightforward or simple for those without counselors or social workers on staff. Programs had to thoughtfully use pedagogical strategies to create a space in which youth could connect to adults in ways that made them feel heard, cared for, respected, and ultimately safe enough to open up and share their private emotions and struggles.

Three pedagogical strategies that programs used to hold space for vulnerable sharing are featured here:
+ **connect youth with adults they identify with**
+ **gently push youth outside their comfort zones**
+ **allow youth to creatively express themselves in ways they are comfortable with**

YOUTH

" *It felt good talking about [the pandemic] 'cause once you keep talking about it, you understand more about the situation and you accept the situation, what you can do to change it. It felt good talking to people who understood what's going on, what's happening, and it relieved some of the stress that I was having.*

PROGRAM DIRECTOR

" *We are in a global pandemic, we are experiencing waves of social injustice, and the reaction towards that in real time, and these are things and topics that impact us and impact our youth, specifically.*

QUESTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

? What steps is your program taking to help youth:
+ Connect with adults they identify with?
+ Step outside their comfort zones?
+ Creatively express themselves?

6.3
HOLDING SPACE FOR VULNERABLE SHARING

6.3.1
CONNECT YOUTH WITH ADULTS THEY IDENTIFY WITH

What did we see?

Empathy Unbound intentionally provided the Black female youth that they served with many opportunities to connect to women of color. Structured opportunities for these connections happened at a three-day feminist conference, through ongoing mentorship from local college students and alums, through a series of guest speakers, and through weekly interactions with the program directors themselves.

As one example, during a question and answer session with a doctor who specialized in women's health and women's care, the youth unmuted their mics and asked questions such as "How do you show empathy to patients when something is wrong?" and "As young women, what should we do to take care of ourselves?" As the vulnerable sharing continued, youth asked increasingly personal questions around issues of reproductive health.

By connecting youth to young adults and to adults who reflect their intersectional identities, youth were able to have open and honest conversations about personal issues. Another organization, STAR Youth Services, took a similar approach to supporting youth by bringing together "facilitator staff who are from our community, are alums of SYEP, are alums of our programs, are bilingual. And so, providing a diverse set of staff created a sense of community and safety" which allowed for frequent conversations where youth opened up "about feelings of depression or family stress."

PROGRAM DIRECTOR

When I was their age, the high school students, I didn't really see people that looked like me, and … outside of my mom and aunties, I wasn't able to identify with another woman of color or a Black woman that was successful. And to be in this safe environment where they can talk, we can talk about our culture, we can talk about what does it mean to be a woman of color in a workplace?

YOUTH

The one that really caught my eye was when we had that feminist three-day program, and we was talking about a lot of things that Black successful women do. And their experiences and their steps on how they got to where they was. It wasn't always like it was all good, they sometimes talked about the bad things that happened to them, the challenges that they went through to get to where they are now. And it kind of related to me because we do go through the same things that they went through, and it showed how they pushed through their challenges.

6.3
HOLDING SPACE FOR VULNERABLE SHARING

6.3.2
GENTLY PUSH YOUTH OUTSIDE THEIR COMFORT ZONES

What did we see?
To gently push youth outside their comfort zones and to take risks, directors of Empathy Unbound modelled, encouraged, and acknowledged moments of vulnerable sharing.

Program directors modeled vulnerable sharing by creating a video that laid open and bare to youth their own private emotions and personality quirks around facilitating Zoom calls. Additionally, during ice breakers such as "if you really knew me, you'd know...," they shared their inner lives and personality traits.

As youth participated in these ice breakers, they were able to "practice sharing in a low-stakes situation, where there's not really a right or wrong answer," as a director put it. Building on this practice, program directors encouraged and coached youth to reach out to program guest speakers with questions of personal interest to them.

In the moments when youth stepped outside their comfort zones and took risks to genuinely connect with one another and the adults they were meeting, program directors worked to publicly affirm, celebrate, and acknowledge them. These acknowledgements occured in the moment ("When she asked the questions, mad, happy emojis and high-fives went her way") and in a weekly newsletter section titled "Shine a Light On" that "gives a shout out to the SYEP interns who have gone above and beyond the call of duty." As one director described this practice, "We acknowledge the students when they show up. We acknowledge them if they're struggling, but they still show up."

YOUTH

> " My comfort level was at a zero to one. I just didn't want to talk to nobody. I was like a clam... But as I kept on talking to them and they started really pushing me to talk, I just became more and more confident, and it reached to a level nine to ten between that. So I was able to be more comfortable with them and talk about personal experiences and things that I wasn't really comfortable in sharing. I was able to share it with them because they made me have that comfortable ability to share with them.

PROGRAM DIRECTOR

> " When we had guest speakers, some of the young ladies... Just coaching them through the Zoom chat... I would drop her a note and say, 'I know you got a question.' And she would say, 'No, I don't.' I'm like, 'Yes, you do.' And she was like, 'Well, what should I ask?' 'Well, what do you want to ask?' And so, being able to have that dialogue and then to gently push them and know that you're in a safe place.

6.3
HOLDING SPACE FOR VULNERABLE SHARING

6.3.3
ALLOW YOUTH TO CREATIVELY EXPRESS THEMSELVES IN WAYS THEY ARE COMFORTABLE WITH

What did we see?
In the program Empathy Unbound, youth launched their virtual public presentation of their final project with a moment of vulnerable sharing. They played a series of original TikToks that they had each made to convey the stressors of their everyday lives during remote learning. The play-acted scenes in the short TikTok videos, complete with voice-overs, images, and emojis, showed youth struggling to manage distractions, frantically rushing to charge devices, and restlessly oversleeping for Zoom meetings.

These videos conveyed youths' feelings of anxiety, frustration, and, in some cases, depression. Program youth took it upon themselves to create, edit, and include these videos in their final project presentation. These videos speak to the importance of allowing youth to communicate their emotional lives and personal struggles in a way that they are already familiar and comfortable with.

Similarly, STAR Youth Services reported how youth creatively expressed their experiences of the impact of the pandemic and social issues: "One participant created a video, expressing the dire ways in which Covid-19 has affected his family and urging people to take the virus seriously. Another participant developed a poem that was posted on the group's website, which expressed a powerful and insightful perspective on different social issues." The program reflected that, "This kind of vulnerability developed in the groups cultivated many sophisticated conversations and a supportive space for participants to feel heard and recognized."

YOUTH

66 *When I do TikToks, I feel more goofy. I just feel like I can just show my whole self. So me doing that… it made me bring out my true self. … People probably thought that I was just quiet or I'm just chill, but I'm actually really goofy and quirky.*

PROGRAM DIRECTOR

66 *[Youth's presentation of the TikTok videos] speaks to the power of creating space, because we didn't ask them to share that. That's just something that they all wanted to express. It's a testament to the practice of being human with them, and then letting them know that we're gonna hold the space for it.*

6.4

REVITALIZING HOPE
WHAT'S THE ISSUE?

Many programs in our study identified a need to provide opportunities for youth to regain a sense of hope about the future: the future of the world, of their local communities, and their own personal trajectories. This need for hope has been underscored by national surveys and reports emerging in the wake of the pandemic that evidence a major decrease in youth's confidence in their future career goals and college aspirations.

Creating a sense of hope within a remote work-based learning program, however, can be challenging. Positioning youth as contributors to creating better futures was difficult when screen interactions replaced physical work sites in youth's communities. As one SYEP provider put it, "A lot of businesses need the help right now. These participants and these interns are an asset every summer. They're an asset to the community," and "That's where it's been challenging, because even though the space is virtual right now, they want to find a way to make their way into the community."

Three pedagogical strategies that programs used to revitalize hope are featured here:
+ **showcase youth-led efforts to create better futures**
+ **have youth contribute to the well-being of their communities**
+ **show youth the potential you see in them**

PROGRAM DIRECTOR

❝ *As a social organization, we were very focused on the trauma of the isolation, the loss, economic and relative family loss, and the pain of the racial injustice happening across the country, so I think we were really thinking about that as an opportunity to break through that isolation and build community and heal and have young people have joy and hope again. And we thought they could do it through projects that they worked together and saw themselves as contributors and active participants and making a difference and start to feel a hopefulness about the future, post-pandemic.*

QUESTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

? What steps is your program taking to help youth:
+ Be inspired by youth-led efforts to create better futures?
+ Contribute to the well-being of their communities?
+ See the potential that you see in them?

6.4

REVITALIZING HOPE

6.4.1

SHOWCASE YOUTH-LED EFFORTS TO CREATE BETTER FUTURES

What did we see?

In one program in the study, facilitators organized a panel comprised of five youth who started their own organizations to advocate for climate justice. They shared their stories of how they became interested in the movement for climate change, and the steps they took to create their own organizations.

When the youth panel was asked, "What do you think others can learn from youth organizers, youth activists?" they positioned the youth in the audience as powerful agents of change: "Youth can do what adults can do, that we deserve a voice at the table, that we know our stuff, and that we deeply care about our future."

The panelists emphasized that youth are visionaries, work well collectively, and are focused on empowering their communities, and pointed out that, historically, youth have been at the forefront of movements for civil rights and protesting the Vietnam War.

When asked, "What do you find motivates you and keeps you going in spite of literally everything that's happening, especially in 2020?" youth shared hopeful messages by pointing to their optimistic beliefs ("A better world is possible... and worth fighting for"), specific actions ("When you strike, when you do emails, when you are talking to your friends, when you act based on the things you know, you become hopeful"), and collective visions ("It's about building community, I conceptualize climate change as the fight against systemic racism, and that's something I can't personally give up").

Hearing youth share stories and outlooks about working to create a better future inspired youth in the audience to not only imagine a better future for their communities, but to see themselves pursuing work that contributes to it.

YOUTH

> ❝ One thing that inspired me was how important it is to care for the community.

YOUTH

> ❝ Seeing how other people were impacted by things such as pollution and extreme heat inspired me to do what I can to fix these issues.

PROGRAM DIRECTOR

> ❝ We were excited to show youth that they can build careers in civic engagement and activism.

6.4
REVITALIZING HOPE

6.4.2
HAVE YOUTH CONTRIBUTE TO THE WELL-BEING OF THEIR COMMUNITIES

What did we see?
In one program, youth created public outreach campaigns to address issues impacting their communities, such as health care in low-income communities, mental health in New York City schools, and school reopening plans. They formally presented their campaigns to the New York City Public Advocate, an elected official, with specific asks for next steps.

In this same program, youth were paired with immigrant-owned local businesses to help them design and launch social media platforms to advance their businesses. As one SYEP provider described, "The youth were able to provide real value to our businesses and local economy during the pandemic, when creative online strategies could be the difference between shutting down and adapting."

Similarly, youth in other programs conducted interviews with community members to learn about their needs and developed an outreach plan to address their community's well-being. In Empathy Unbound, for example, youth created a self-care-focused business for parents dealing with the stress of the pandemic. They designed a self-care package, solicited feedback from parents, and gave a professional pitch. At the end of the summer, their idea won an out-of-program competition and received funding to be implemented during the school year.

YOUTH

" *Here is our ask: Will the Office of the Public Advocate tweet out in support of creating a counselor-to-student ratio in all NYC public schools of 1:65?*

PROGRAM DIRECTOR

" *Over 500 students created prototypes around how to best support their community's mental and physical health in the midst of Covid-19.*

YOUTH

" *[We created] a care package for parents that are going through a lot of stress within remote learning. Basically to soothe their minds and just give them a sense of peace and motivation, something to look forward to, because it's not only students that are stressed out all the time, it's parents that are stressed too.*

6.4
REVITALIZING HOPE

6.4.3
SHOW YOUTH THE POTENTIAL YOU SEE IN THEM

What did we see?

One program in the study, Youth Audio, provided youth with digital music making software that allowed them to explore and develop their talents. Workshop facilitator Mel Fletcher warmly affirmed youth's potential as they shared their sample tracks. One youth interested in filmmaking described the impact this program had on him: "This program made me change my mindset from focusing on one area or aspect of creativity, to being able to branch out to multiple things. And I maybe don't have to necessarily excel at music production to be able to say that I can create music or sound design. I think that this program did a good job of showing me that."

In Finance You, program director Adola Sani gave youth financial literacy skills that helped them to see themselves as investors. As participant Isabel Mencia put it, "She taught us how to invest, and where to start in the stock market, how to start, what websites to use, how to research a stock, how to get one." Seeing herself as a potential investor, Isabel began researching foreign exchange markets, and enrolled in a class on Skillshare that allowed her to practice investing in foreign exchange markets with fake money. As Isabel put it, Finance You made investing "accessible and feasible. It's like, you can invest, you can do anything."

Programs also helped youth see their potential by having them meet people in successful leadership positions that reflected their intersectional identities. This approach allowed youth to readily imagine their future selves taking up leadership roles. As one program director put it, "A lot of the feedback we received was about how we were showcasing women and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color on our panels—it was uplifting to see how impactful that representation is for youth, to see themselves reflected."

YOUTH

" I think one of the best parts was when it all came together and we had the [film] screening, that people were like, "Wow, you made this in five weeks?" And it gave me joy because other people liked something that we worked really hard on.

YOUTH

" We was meeting successful women that was doing things like entrepreneurship... or owning their own businesses. ... Made you have a push on saying that you can do whatever you wanted to do.

6.5

DEVELOPING NETWORKING SKILLS
WHAT'S THE ISSUE?

The practice of networking—reaching out to more expert others through cold contacts or mingling at professional events—is a common way for newcomers to a field to connect with professionals.These connections can lead to invaluable mentoring experiences and acts of brokering that advance youth's careers (Ching et al., 2018).

Yet when this type of networking feels more instrumental than organic, and is directed towards professional goals rather than personal goals, it can leave people feeling "dirty" (Casciaro et al., 2014). Additionally, youth may feel insecure and too intimidated to reach out to professionals.

Although the common approach of assigning one-on-one formal mentors can sidestep youth's insecurities, research has found that this approach does not necessarily empower youth or lead to lasting connections. A promising alternative approach directly trains youth to develop skills that help them to identify mentors they relate to and proactively pursue multiple connections (Schwartz & Rhodes, 2016).

Three pedagogical strategies that programs used to develop networking skills are featured here:
+ **create peer-networking groups**
+ **provide step-by-step advice**
+ **invite professionals to see youth at their best**

PROGRAM GUEST SPEAKER

> *Traditionally, when you hear about networking, it's about meeting people who are a level above you and trying to impress them and get them to help you, but that in my career has not been how it's been helpful. It's been about getting to know peers and building real relationships with them, and building a community around what I'm interested in and figuring out how we can help each other.*

PROGRAM DIRECTOR

> *When we think about [a] professional network, we don't think about it just transactionally, and I really want to make sure that we're fostering that community within the students. So that students, their first foray into building a professional network is each other.*

QUESTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

? What steps is your program taking to help youth:
+ Practice networking with their peers?
+ Demystify networking at each step of the process?
+ Invite professionals to see them at their best?

6.5
DEVELOPING NETWORKING SKILLS

6.5.1
CREATE PEER-NETWORKING GROUPS

What did we see?
One program in our study, Collective Storytelling, had twenty youth form two video documentary production teams, taking on specific roles such as animator, producer, and actor.

The program structured collaboration in two main ways: Each team consistently worked together to produce a video documentary of their own design, and youth also met with their equivalent roles across groups so they could learn from each other.

As youth worked in production teams, they learned about each others' strengths and talents across their respective roles. They bonded, quickly sharing Instagram handles, agreeing to meet up in-person after the pandemic ends, and shared that they were keeping each other in mind as potential collaborators on future projects.

Additionally, as youth met with individuals who played a corresponding role on the other team, they were able to learn from each other, sharing their best strategies and approaches to performing their role.

Creating opportunities for this kind of "lateral" networking—done with peers—supported youth to make personable, yet professional connections with one another. It also provided an opportunity for youth to practice their networking skills and become more confident in reaching out to professionals in the future.

YOUTH

❝ *I only really have connection with people I've worked with, let's say 'Jeff' is an actor … and he's really talented, and 'Marissa' is a theatre kid, that's things I want to keep, remember, because me, myself, I want to be a director, screen-writer so I definitely need to remember those names when I get big."*

So that really helped, and just the experience itself, it's like now I know what to look for, how it's done, so maybe in the future, if I get to do this again, I can even make more connections with people that I've seen [who] do a lot of film and documentary production.

6.5
DEVELOPING NETWORKING SKILLS

6.5.2
PROVIDE STEP-BY-STEP NETWORKING ADVICE

What did we see?

In the program Bold Futures, a panel of guest speakers provided specific advice for how to reach out to professionals, how to cope with rejection, and how to stay in touch with professionals who are responsive.

Advice for reaching out included "Spend many hours looking at people's profiles on LinkedIn, what their career pathways have looked like," and "Use warm messaging such as 'I'm a junior or senior at college; I'm looking for some career advice.' Not explicitly saying 'I'm looking for a job.' That way you can build a network."

Speakers also shared advice for coping with rejection: "Don't be afraid of someone rejecting you by ghosting your well-crafted email. That's okay." They noted that, if, out of "ten cold emails, only one responds, you have one person you didn't before."

Speakers shared advice for next steps as well: "Try to make it not a one-time transaction ... six months later, 'just wanted to update you, this is where I'm at,' or 'If you see that person got a promotion... 'hey, I noticed this, where are you now?'" One noted, "people love to talk about themselves," and observed that even if "people are busy, they appreciate the attempt to cultivate the relationship."

A program director affirmed, "Once people have that little bit of investment in you, they love to hear that you graduated college or you landed an internship. Update them about something that went well." A panelist pointed out that eventually this long-term relationship building can naturally lead up to a specific ask.

YOUTH

"I remember one of the speakers explicitly said that you can reach out to anyone in the field and just be like, "Hey, I'm a college student. I like what you do and I wanna learn more." And people are apparently very nice to that and are willing to help, which is not something I thought of and not something I've been told before, and it's not something I've done, so I think it was a nice reminder to just, sometimes you need to just go for it, because if you don't try, you'll never know what happens.

My networking skills, I will say, have improved. [It was] a combination of the assignments we had to do and networking with other students in the program, plus some advice that some of the speakers gave. It's just motivating me to network, even though it might be a little scary or awkward.

6.5

DEVELOPING NETWORKING SKILLS

6.5.3

INVITE PROFESSIONALS TO SEE YOUTH AT THEIR BEST

What did we see?

Empathy Unbound hosted a final project presentation, inviting the various guest speakers, mentors, and adults that the youth had interacted with up to that point. The event was an intimate space in which the program directors introduced the youth by bragging about their work and growth over the summer, which was then evidenced in youths' presentations. The youth were able to develop their relationships with professionals further through an extended question and answer session where they were invited to talk about what motivated the project, what they liked about the process of working on it, and what their future dreams and ambitions are.

In a larger program, youth coordinated and led a virtual "Day of Action," where they showcased their work to an audience of over 1,200 attendees. One cohort of youth acted as a logistical team and were responsible for "creating the Zoom, editing the video submissions, and hosting the whole virtual event, including emceeing, [and] live transitions." Another cohort of youth served as the outreach team: "They contacted all of our [Workplace Challenge] partners and guest speakers to invite them, reached out to each cohort to inform them of the event, and created flyers and social media content to spread the word."

YOUTH

" *When we made the video, I actually sent it to my [video journalism] teacher, and she was very proud. That was pretty cool.*

PROGRAM DIRECTOR

" *If you invite people to come see you at your best, they will show up!*

PROGRAM DIRECTOR

" *We turned to our young people to host this event. Two cohorts worked collaboratively to put the event together, at which it was only youth voices that were elevated, while adults took a back seat to listen, learn, and celebrate their efforts.*

6.6
UNPACKING WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION
WHAT'S THE ISSUE?

Workplaces vary when it comes to identity safety for youth who are subject to marginalizing forces such as racism, sexism, and ableism (Santo et al., 2020). Workplace discrimination takes many forms, from inequitable hiring and promotion practices, to harassment, to a lack of accommodations. Yet, not all work-based learning programs make workplace discrimination transparent or help youth anticipate how they may be impacted by it in a given industry (Vossoughi, 2017).

Research shows that youth who are critically aware of how discrimination plays out within the workplace in relation to their own identities experience positive outcomes, including increases in the clarity of their vocational goals (Diemer & Blustein, 2006), their desire to pursue educational pathways aligned with those vocational goals (McWhirter & McWhirter, 2015; Olle & Fouad, 2015), and their occupational attainment and job earnings (Diemer, 2009; Diemer et al., 2010).

Three pedagogical strategies that programs used to unpack workplace discrimination are featured here:
+ **have youth research workplace discrimination**
+ **invite professionals to share their experiences with workplace discrimination**
+ **teach youth how to self-advocate in the workplace**

PROGRAM DIRECTOR

" *As he pursued various jobs, he also began to experience workplace discrimination, and became reflective on the ways he passes or does not pass as certain identities, and how this, in turn, impacted the discrimination he was facing.*

And so, I was able to then think about what do I think that our students are gonna need, going into the professional world, that maybe is not as intuitive to think about when we're hopeful about our future careers.

QUESTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

? What steps is your program taking to help youth:
+ Research workplace discrimination?
+ Learn how professionals have experienced and navigated workplace discrimination?
+ Understand how to self-advocate in the workplace?

6.6
UNPACKING WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION

6.6.1
HAVE YOUTH RESEARCH WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION

What did we see?
In the program Bold Futures, youth pursued a progressive sequence of research steps to unpack the relationship between their own identities and workplace discrimination.

In the first research step, youth reflected on their own intersectional identities, focusing on who they are, how they show up, what they carry outwardly, and what they pass for. In the second step, youth surveyed issues around access, representation, and identity safety in the professional fields they were interested in. In the final research step, youth connected their own identity work to workplace discrimination issues, to better anticipate whether a given field may be a hostile work environment for them based on their intersectional identities.

At each step of the process, youth engaged in extended discussions about their research around their own positionality in relation to issues of diversity and inclusion in various workplaces. This research culminated in a project in which youth created public service announcements to address workplace discrimination.

PROGRAM DIRECTOR

" *The first thing we did was identity work: Who are you, how do you show up, what do you carry that you outwardly show versus what you pass?*

We...had them do individual research about diversity and inclusion within the field that they're the most interested in, and then to take that a step further...how do we see discrimination in those fields?

The last step is, knowing what you know about your identity and thinking about how you might be in that workspace, what are some possible pitfalls with your specific identity and people around you who maybe are equally or more vulnerable than you? What are some things that are going wrong? What are some things that are trying to be fixed and what are some things that are going right? And how do we grow to protect our most vulnerable population at any given time in these fields?

6.6

UNPACKING WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION

6.6.2

INVITE PROFESSIONALS TO SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES WITH WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION

What did we see?
Bold Futures hosted a career panel that reflected youth's intersectional identities and invited panelists to share their personal experiences navigating hostile workplace environments.

The panelists spoke to explicit and implicit acts of discrimination they faced in the workplace, and explained issues around gatekeeping and retention at a historical and systemic level.

One female panelist who traveled often for work shared that she was asked by a colleague, "Who's going to take care of your baby when you travel?"

Another panelist explained that in the field of law, the "people who are most likely to leave those jobs are people of color and women," and that this process "continues to filter such that the ones that are left over, that are getting invested in, are not as diverse as the class they started with." She then laid out how this issue of retention gets whitewashed at multiple levels. "[The] issue is the buck gets passed around." If you, "point out there aren't enough black partners..they'll say law schools aren't passing enough good candidates." Then, she noted, law schools pass the buck to universities, claiming that they are "not sending us high caliber women or people or color."

Finally, panelists shared an array of strategies for navigating workplace discrimination, such as seeking resources and mentors, organizing in solidarity, and breaking the silence.

YOUTH

" *Chat: Do you ever encounter microaggressions or any other type of discrimination in your workplace? And how do you deal with it?*

Chat: How has your ethnicity impacted your career?

Chat: How do your company mission and your values align? How do your values influence your everyday work?

PROGRAM DIRECTOR

" *So when we got to the panel, they were able to ask some of the questions that had been jogged by that research and thinking not only about what the pitfall is in general, but if I'm looking to be in this field, I can now ask you an authentic question of: What's gonna happen to me? What has happened to you? How can I see myself in this work? What do we need to be aware of? And how can we make it better?*

6.6

UNPACKING WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION

6.6.3

TEACH YOUTH HOW TO SELF-ADVOCATE IN THE WORKPLACE

What did we see?

Tech Possible, a program in our study that serves youth with disabilities, provided a two-hour session to develop youth's self-advocacy skills in the workplace. The session covered workers' legal rights under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504).

Throughout the session, youth learned about the legal precedents that provided protections for workers with disabilities, as well as their options around disclosing a disability to their employer. They were given specific advice for when and how to disclose if they so choose: "Do it after you are hired and all legal contracts are signed," and "Do it in private with your boss."

Accommodations were framed as "specific changes that remove barriers and provide people with equal access," rather than as "unfair advantages." Specific types of reasonable accommodations in the workplace were given, such as frequent breaks, specific monitors, keyboards, and desk configurations, as well as levels of lighting and noise.

Youth were prompted throughout to make connections to accommodations they had received in school, and to imagine accommodations that they felt would help them succeed in the workplace.

PROGRAM DIRECTOR

> *The thing about self-advocacy was really eye-opening. We talked about the ADA… Students don't talk to you and say, "Hey, I have a disability." They completely shy away from it, they don't wanna talk about it at all. And so having them understand what their rights are under the law, I think was helpful.*

I also ask them if they have any accommodations in school and some of them will say, 'Yeah, I get time and a half for tests,' and I'm like, 'Well, that's an accommodation.' Or, 'Someone reads me the test aloud.' 'That's an accommodation, great, that means that on your IEP, someone, maybe you, or your parent, or your teacher has advocated for you so you can get those important things which will help you succeed.'

6.7

ENCOURAGING HELP-SEEKING BEHAVIOR
WHAT'S THE ISSUE?

Becoming lost or stuck is a natural part of the learning process, especially for youth who are simultaneously learning work-readiness skills, remote learning technologies, and professional norms. Help-seeking behaviors allow youth to mobilize social supports and institutional resources to resolve these issues and move forward. Yet, help-seeking behavior is highly stratified by class (Calarco, 2011), and associated with negative emotions for many youth (Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

Youth and young adults from nondominant backgrounds, for example, may experience discomfort with using email to formulate a request for help (Berardi, 2013), distrust in the process of receiving help from adults who do not share similar personal experiences (Garraway & Pistrang, 2010), and fear of being rebuffed or stigmatized for requesting help (Colletta, 1987).

Three pedagogical strategies that programs used to encourage help-seeking behavior are featured here:
+ **streamline help requests**
+ **create peer-to-peer support channels**
+ **use supportive non-punitive messaging**

YOUTH

" *I need to push myself to communicate more. I don't know why, but for some reason I feel like in person, it's not okay to talk because they're gonna judge you.*

PROGRAM DIRECTOR

" *We've noticed in our program that a lot of students seem nervous to ask for help, or nervous to say that they're behind, or nervous to say 'You know, I can't come', or nervous to let us know kind of what's going on, and my presumption about that is, maybe they've experienced sort of punitive responses or put down responses to that.*

Probably every learner has had an experience where they were ... like, 'I don't know what's going on and I have to say something, but I'm so scared that everyone's gonna laugh at me.'

QUESTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

? What steps is your program taking to help youth:
+ Submit help requests in a simple and streamlined way?
+ Create peer-to-peer support channels?
+ Feel supported, not punished, for requesting help?

6.7
ENCOURAGING HELP-SEEKING BEHAVIOR

6.7.1
STREAMLINE HELP REQUESTS

What did we see?
One program in our study used Google Forms to systematize and simplify the process by which youth asked for help. The program set up general forms that youth could fill out and submit to address specific issues that youth were commonly facing around stipend payments and technology glitches.

These Google Forms were streamlined to include a few yes/no questions and a space to upload screenshots. This created a simple youth-to-adult communication process for youth, who could then reach out for assistance without having to craft a professional email from scratch and figure out which staff member to send the email to.

These Google Forms also conveyed an underlying supportive message to youth: These issues are commonly experienced, you are not alone in facing them, and you do not need to feel embarrassed for requesting help. The program director articulated this underlying message: "We know these are problems; don't be scared in letting us know."

The program reported that the Google Forms were widely used by youth, and allowed adults to individually follow up with and respond to issues that youth were facing.

PROGRAM DIRECTOR

> One way we decided to go about it is sending Google Forms with questions, so we would send separate ones. If you felt like you weren't paid justly, why? So we would create a Google Form and allow them to respond and tell us why they should have been paid fully.
>
> We felt it was an easier way of communication, because when we asked them, and when we brought these situations to them, and said, 'We're aware of these problems, now you use this general form, you don't have to email us, just click yes, yes, and upload the picture.' I think it was a little bit easier for them because they didn't feel the pressure of writing a professional email—there's a bunch of us—they didn't know who to email, and we kind of did the work for them.

6.7
ENCOURAGING HELP-SEEKING BEHAVIOR

6.7.2
CREATE PEER-TO-PEER SUPPORT CHANNELS

What did we see?
One program supported youth's help-seeking behavior by extending their synchronous work sessions by an extra half hour and using that time and space as a forum for youth to provide each other with peer-to-peer assistance around issues such as workload management and troubleshooting technology. Youth participation was informal and optional.

In these forums for peer support, youth had frank discussions as they shared specific strategies around topics such as how to keep up with the SYEP workload and how to navigate technology platforms so as not to lose their work in progress.

These forums appeared to allow youth to take ownership over the help-seeking process, to place trust in the process in which they learned solutions that had worked for their peers, and to take comfort in knowing that they were not alone in facing problems—essentially, that they didn't need to feel embarrassed for requesting help.

One program, Finance You, encouraged students to create their own Slack channels to ask each other for help as needed. Youth created a channel dedicated to clarifying assignment instructions and troubleshooting tech issues. As the program director noted, "I love it when I see students answering other students' questions…I think there's definitely room for empowering that peer-to-peer communication, which happens on the job all the time."

PROGRAM DIRECTOR

" *I think one thing that we have done well with them is teach them how to ask for support when it's overwhelming. So we get a lot of that on their text messages, but we've also tried to enforce the sisterhood that you should ask someone else. So learning how to communicate with your peers.*

PROGRAM DIRECTOR

" *I think the reason why we extended it is 'cause we found if we gave the space and made space for it, some students who stayed behind would problem solve with each other, similar to this peer consultancy model, they would start making suggestions to each other.*

That was something that came out: tips, like real proven tips for others, trusted messenger tips. You're going through the same things I am. You're getting real-time, real-world suggestions, and I'm seeing that's something I can try.

6.7

ENCOURAGING HELP-SEEKING BEHAVIOR

6.7.3

USE SUPPORTIVE MESSAGING

What did we see?

Program leaders at Tech Possible actively monitored the individual project progress of each of the thirteen youth they served. When they noticed someone falling behind on their project, they reached out individually to check on the youth to offer support.

When a program leader noticed that a youth who was very engaged in discussions was not making progress on their individual project, she wondered, "Is the student not having confidence in their tech abilities? Are they missing instructions? Are we not delivering instructions in a way that worked for that student?" When she checked on the youth, the youth claimed that everything was fine and that they didn't need help. Yet, the youth continued to not make any project progress.

The program leader put herself in the youth's shoes: "I think had we just kept being like, 'Do you know what's going on? Are you with us? Are you following along?' I wouldn't wanna say, 'I'm lost' to the person who was asking me that kind of question."

She worked to use messaging that was encouraging and not punitive: "I think, what we saw in this instance was that the student didn't feel like they could say they were behind, until we said, really explicitly, "You're not in trouble if you're feeling behind. It's not gonna affect your pay, or anything. We're just here to support you. And if something happened, it's okay.'"

PROGRAM DIRECTOR

" *Sometimes we're focused on making sure we're moving forward, that we don't always make our language as understanding or our tone as understanding as it could be, 'cause it's so easy to assume that someone is choosing not to do something, follow along, when, really, an early mistake, an early oops can cause so much...such a ripple effect.*

It became really evident that if we told a student, 'You're not gonna get in trouble.

It's not gonna affect your pay, it's okay, we're here to help you, there's no reason to be embarrassed or worried,' that students were much more able and ready to admit like, 'Yeah, I fell behind.' Or, 'Yeah, I need some help.' And then they were able to catch up.

And even giving the student a benefit of the doubt, and an out, and saying, 'It seems like maybe there was a glitch or it seems like maybe it didn't save. That's such a frustrating thing.' Or, 'You forgot your password, ugh, what a frustrating thing. We can help you.'

6.8

ORIENTING TOWARD CHANGE
WHAT'S THE ISSUE?

Not all youth know what they want to do with their careers, nor do their career trajectories always follow linear pathways. Furthermore, careers and industries dynamically change over time—some collapse while new ones emerge. And as youth transition into college programs and new jobs, they may find their transition period to be difficult and stressful.

Taken together, many youth will experience social and emotional needs around adjusting to nonlinear career trajectories, unstable work landscapes, and novel professional environments. If these social and emotional needs are not adequately addressed, youth may experience declines in their social and psychological well-being during major shifts in national labor markets (Helve & Evans, 2013), as well as in their own personal transitions from school to college (Hays & Oxley, 1986; Larose & Boivin, 1998).

Three pedagogical strategies that programs used to orient youth to change are featured here:
+ **normalize uncertainty during career exploration**
+ **research the changing work landscape**
+ **provide mentors to help youth ease into transition periods**

PROGRAM DIRECTOR

" *For many students, hearing the stories of other professionals has been such a breath of fresh air to know that they don't have to have it all together, to acknowledge the social pressures that they feel from friends and family members to have everything together."*

He was like, 'You know, I thought I wanted to be pre-med and my family wanted me to be pre-med. I hate it. I don't know what to do. I don't even know what I'm interested in.' ... I think he's a student who has fronted that he knows himself very well for a while, and it was cool to see him in that place where he's starting to sit back and he's like 'Okay, maybe I do need to figure out these things, and how I show up in the world and what I want.'

QUESTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

? What steps is your program taking to help youth:
+ Normalize uncertainty in the career exploration process?
+ Research the changing work landscape?
+ Prepare for and adjust to major transition phases?

6.8
ORIENTING TOWARD CHANGE

6.8.1
NORMALIZE UNCERTAINTY

What did we see?

Adola Sani, program director for Finance You, worked to normalize the notion that a career trajectory can consist of unknowns, obstacles, and changes in direction. To interrupt the mainstream narrative that career trajectories should be predetermined and unwavering—along with all the societal pressure that comes with such a narrative—she leveraged her professional network to host career panels of guest speakers that spoke directly to the difficulties they faced and the directions they explored.

These career panels provided program participant Isabel Mencia with "a nice reminder to just keep my mind open to other careers out there." Isabel began to see career exploration as a normal part of the process, and started to look beyond her initial interest in health care. She deliberated about her options in the following way: "My experience in my lab at my college, it does make me think, 'What if I just go for a master's degree in biology, or a PhD, and just do research?' 'Cause I don't know, it is fun. I don't know if I have a burning passion for it, but it is fun, and it's nice because you're not dealing with people's lives like you are in health care. It's less weight on your shoulders because no one's life is on the line. So I think about that a lot, especially this year."

Isabel credited Finance You for showing her that there are many careers that she didn't know about and felt that, "it's just a matter of me finding them and if they're a good fit for me."

YOUTH

" *Some of the speakers we had in Finance You, they did say that they didn't always know what career they wanted, and not knowing is okay and exploring is normal.*

I'm not as certain as I was before. Before Finance You and even last year, I was more certain that I wanted a career in health care, but now I'm not sure anymore. Which is normal.

PROGRAM DIRECTOR

" *We've had three different speakers from a variety of experiences, an art background, technical background, sales background. And that's to really encourage students, to expose them to various careers and help them to learn that 'I don't need to have it all together or know exactly what I wanna do right now, or even by the time I graduate.*

6.8
ORIENTING TOWARD CHANGE

6.8.2
RESEARCH THE CHANGING WORK LANDSCAPE

What did we see?
Finance You organized its curriculum around focal Project Based Learning questions that asked youth, "What digital careers exist in the new normal?" and "How can students and families survive and thrive in the new normal?"

A series of research and reflection activities helped youth to deepen their answers to these questions. In one activity, youth watched news videos and formulated ten tips for surviving a crisis from a financial standpoint. In another activity, youth watched CNBC report trends around which job types were declining, on the one hand, and increasing, on the other. In another, they read through the LinkedIn Jobs Report to identify high-growth sectors.

After each activity, youth were prompted to identify jobs that interested them, to explain why, and to read job descriptions. As they figured out what skills those jobs require, they were asked to reflect on the question, "If these are the skills that I need to be building, what's one skill that I want to build over the next six months?"

Program participant Isabel Mencia shared that a research activity around "making a budget for yourself and trying to discover ways you can earn more money" directly led her to becoming a tutor. She also felt inspired by an activity in which she had to research several people—youth, young adults, and adults—whose businesses were thriving and who could serve as role models.

YOUTH

❝ *So one of the [role models] I chose was a little girl, and she had her own T-shirt business, where she just promoted happiness and being proud of her skin color. And another business owner who made her own curly hair product line.*

PROGRAM DIRECTOR

❝ *We slightly adjusted our program with three main goals due to the catastrophe of the pandemic. So our number one goal is to expose youth to digital careers in the new normal, equip them with financial literacy skills, and equip them with a professional network.*

PROGRAM DIRECTOR

❝ *How can you know what you want if you don't know what's out there?*

6.8
ORIENTING TOWARD CHANGE

6.8.3
PROVIDE MENTORS TO EASE TRANSITIONS

What did we see?

One program brought in representatives from approximately ten colleges and universities to help youth understand the college admission process and what to expect once they are on campus. The admission counselors from these schools gave virtual campus tours, as well as general admission advice, including writing the college essay and building an admissions brand.

In Empathy Unbound, youth were matched with near-peer mentors from the City University of New York (CUNY). Many of the youth in the program were either already attending CUNY, were about to begin their first semester at CUNY, or were thinking about going to CUNY. The CUNY mentors led multiple meetings with the youth over the summer and shared professional tools and skills to help prepare youth for their transition to college life.

One of the program directors of Empathy Unbound also had an affiliation with CUNY, and created plans to provide future mentoring to youth in the program who would go on to attend CUNY. This director planned for the one-on-one mentoring experience to include a series of "real talks" on topics that go beyond what is normally taught at freshman orientation. Additionally, guest speakers who are women of color created plans to lead talks on issues around health and wellness for the youth who transitioned from the summer program into CUNY.

YOUTH

" *We still keep in touch with her and she does help us as far as being that I'm in college, so she gave me a mentor and I was able to be better in college.*

Each time I listened to a speaker talk, I always wrote down notes because there was never a point where I couldn't take anything they said into account or apply it to my own life. It was like everything was relatable; even if I couldn't use it right now in the present, I could still use it for the future.

PROGRAM DIRECTOR

" *These girls are going to have a leg up when they get into these freshman classes.*

6.9 Conclusion

The shift to a remote model for work-based learning programs in the summer of 2020 required a wholesale rethinking of what youth experiences would look like. Traditionally, New York City's Summer Youth Employment program places most youth directly in work experiences within sectors such as education, entertainment, technology, government, and law, among many others. In the wake of the pandemic, however, such placements were deemed unfeasible. Instead of work site placements, the focus turned to Project Based Learning models provided by community-based organizations, social service agencies, specialized nonprofits, and cultural institutions.

This chapter highlighted the ways in which these Project Based Learning models—distinct in the ways that programs could tailor curriculum, mentorship, group projects, and conversations with professionals, among other things—were able to meet the particular needs of youth during a turbulent summer. Program leaders not only adapted their programs for the technical realities of remote learning, but also designed for the broader life and global context youth were experiencing. The practices we found and detailed in the chapter attended to both the present realities of the pandemic and the long-term needs of youth around preparing for professional life, highlighting an approach to work-based learning that infused social and emotional development across program models.

Critically, none of these practices should be seen as something to be discarded upon a return to "normalcy"— they represent a deeply relational, communally-oriented, 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.

YES 2020

Conclusion

The Youth Empowerment Summer coalition of 2020 emerged out of crisis conditions—organizations experiencing slashed budgets, students navigating uncertain futures, and communities mourning lost lives. We all share the hope that we never experience a year like that again, with its compounding challenges and tragedies. On one level, simply documenting the ways in which education systems, stakeholders, and youth worked to meet extraordinary circumstances has value within broader efforts to record what life and society looked like during this period. At the same time, the findings and broader story contained in this report offer lessons that the education field can collectively learn from to create stronger pedagogy, programming, policy, and ecosystems that support equitable futures for youth and communities.

Moving forward, it is essential that we retain and build on what was learned: valuable lessons around designing quality work-based learning models and delivering them virtually, pedagogical strategies that prioritize human connection when it is needed most, and a blueprint for an ecosystem that can rapidly mobilize to address a problem with the central goal of ensuring that students have the experiences they need and deserve. Though born out of the context of the pandemic, these lessons and case studies will continue to be useful and relevant as we move beyond Covid-19 and build our shared future.

While the story of YES is specific to New York City's unique challenges, assets, and stakeholders, it is relevant to any community seeking to coordinate to improve outcomes for youth— policy makers aiming to create youth-centered policy, program leaders designing models for a technology-rich world, and frontline educators building relationships with young people remotely. We hope these experiences and lessons will be helpful to other communities as they seek to mobilize and coordinate to solve big problems and navigate unforeseen challenges.

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Methods Overview

Context and Approach: Rapid Response Research-Practice Partnership

The context in which this research effort was born—a crisis period for youth development organizations in New York City during which they served young people during unprecedented circumstances—was mirrored in the experiences of the research team. In a fast-paced environment in which the broader YES initiative was organizing and implementing efforts that usually take months on the order of weeks, the research effort likewise had to crystalize and mobilize on a similar timescale.

We frame the approach to this work in two ways. First, it's an example of "rapid response research," an approach wherein processes of team formation, study design, seeking funds, preparation of data collection strategies and other research activities that typically take months to accomplish had to be condensed into weeks. As a result, the research team was only able to begin implementation of the study in late July 2020, well into the implementation of SYEP and months after YES organizing efforts had begun in March 2020. While this reality constrained study design and data collection in various ways, in line with the broader spirit of YES, the R&D team aimed for speed and adaptability, honing in on key questions and methods that would allow the generation of insights to support initiative leaders.

The second guiding frame was that of a Research Practice Partnership (Coburn & Penuel, 2016). Rather than a traditional evaluation approach—one that would have been difficult to achieve given the context laid out above—the project aimed to work in collaboration with

YES leadership to generate lines of inquiry that would simultaneously accomplish a number of goals:

+ Support improvement of the YES initiative's work.
+ Generate insights relevant to practitioners, policymakers, organizational leaders, and intermediaries both within and beyond YES initiative stakeholders.
+ Contribute to the broader research knowledge bases related to focal lines of inquiry.

Researcher positionality

As with many elements of the YES initiative, the formation of the research and documentation effort relied on existing prior relationships, knowledge, and experience that set the conditions for swift mobilization. Practically speaking, this meant that many research team members had multiple positionalities within the YES coalition. Lucy Herz and Alexandra Lotero of Student Success Network were both involved in the YES RFP development and review process that were core to the programmatic supports that YES enacted around Summer Bridge, and other members of Student Success Network were more directly involved in the YES design committee team that helped formulate the initiative. Rafi Santo of Telos Learning, in his position on the Hive NYC Learning Network governance council, co-led the role that Hive NYC played within YES, one that aimed to support the YES ecosystem through partnership brokerage and convening efforts. Additionally, David Phelps of Telos Learning and Alexandra Lotero of Student Success Network collaborated with facilitators of YES's peer-learning convenings to create a Workplace Challenge in which a group of teens participating in Summer Bridge developed a reflection space for educators.

These positionalities are important to note for a number of reasons. On the one hand, they afforded the research team critical insights into the work that improved its ability to understand the context and conduct research effectively, especially in that it meant deep familiarity with the initiatives and actors within the ecosystem. At the same time, while the project team was ultimately independent in its judgement around how to implement this study and resulting claims, holding these multiple positionalities within the larger YES effort brought with it investment in the success of the initiative. Such investment is not uncommon in research-practice partnerships, but given that multiple team members were not only research partners but were actively engaged in YES implementation activities, it is important to disclose their full range of involvement.

Research questions

The focal research questions addressed in this report were developed in collaboration, first with broader stakeholders in the YES ecosystem and then more directly with members of the YES coalition leadership. With regard to broader YES stakeholders, members of the research team originally began formulating possible lines of inquiry during breakout group conversations that took place within large-scale YES collaborative design sessions in April 2020 (see Chapters 2 and 3). As the research project came together more formally in June 2020, team members worked with YES coalition leadership to establish more targeted questions, which then were iterated on and revised during study implementation as new context came to light about phenomena of interest.

The research presented addressed two lines of inquiry:

1. Collective action and rapid response in youth development and work-based learning
2. Adaptive remote pedagogies within youth development and work-based learning programs

To explore these areas, the project centered on two sets of research questions.

Rapid response ecosystem
+ RQ1. How did the YES coalition take shape, and what conditions mediated its formation?
+ RQ2. What problems did the YES initiative aim to solve, and through what mechanisms? To what extent and in what ways did YES deliver on its intended value proposition?

Adaptive remote pedagogy
+ RQ3. What conditions did leaders of youth-serving organizations face in the context of the pandemic, as well as the policy environment of New York City, as they worked to create summer work-based learning programs for youth?
+ RQ4. How did youth-serving organizations structure remote work-based learning program models, and how did decisions about program structure play out in the context of implementation?
+ RQ5. What pedagogical approaches did youth-serving organizations use to address youth's social and emotional needs around remote work-based learning during the pandemic?

Study participants

As the YES effort spanned multiple levels of activity within a citywide initiative, study methods and data involved a broad range of participants. This section notes only the nature of these participants; the section that follows will outline the data sources.

+ **Youth** who participated in YES-supported SYEP programs
+ **Youth program facilitators** and **organizational leaders** who were either directly supported through YES funds, were partnered with those who were, or were more broadly involved in planning or implementing youth development programs in New York City during the summer of 2020
+ **YES coalition leaders** who were involved in the organization and implementation of the initiative
+ **Advocates, municipal actors**, and **city contractors** who were involved in SYEP restoration.

Data sources

Centering on a rich qualitative data set and augmented by targeted quantitative data, the study methods and associated data sources aimed to create a foundation for retrospective analysis along the lines of inquiry outlined in the research questions above. While the crisis conditions that characterized the focal period of study meant that not all planned elements of data collection came to fruition, the data collected represent a cross-section of activities, actors, and experiences. This section outlines the six primary forms of data collected through the study:

+ Semi-structured interviews (n=61)
+ Remote youth program site visits (n=17)
+ Youth focus groups (n=6)
+ Video recordings from YES professional convenings (n=17 sessions, 22 hours)
+ Organizational documentation from YES, news articles, and YES awardees (n=57)
+ YES awardee final reports (n=26)
+ Citywide survey responses (n=88 responses)

Taken individually, each of the data sources provided useful context and a potential basis for claims, but taking a view across them supported analysis rooted in triangulation to provide greater confidence in these claims.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted with a range of stakeholders, including youth program facilitators, organizational leaders and supervisors, YES leadership, and a broader array of actors such as advocates, city employees, and city contractors. All interviews followed semi-structured protocols, with most lasting one hour. Interviews fell into two categories: Partner and provider interviews centered on those involved in youth service provision, and ecosystem retrospective interviews engaged stakeholders in the broader policy landscape around SYEP Summer Bridge and the YES coalition.

Partner and provider interviews

Interviews with youth program facilitators and organizational leaders or supervisors focused on organizations that were either direct recipients of YES program funds or partners of these organizations. For the most part, the former group were framed as content partners in the context of YES, while the latter group were SYEP providers.

There are some exceptions, where SYEP providers were direct recipients of YES funds. These interviews took place at two time points in the context of SYEP implementation—a first round was conducted in early August during the early weeks of program implementation, and a second round was conducted in early September, following the conclusion of the program. The focus of these interviews included exploration of the following themes:

+ The organizational context prior to the summer
+ The program planning process and core program designs
+ The partnership formation process
+ Pedagogical approaches around YES focal youth development outcomes
+ Perceptions of student learning experiences within programs
+ Remote facilitation strategies and the role of technology
+ Interaction with and perspectives on YES infrastructural features (the design process, funding approach, partnership brokerage efforts, and convenings)
+ Experiences of and perspectives on SYEP instructional policies

Throughout these interviews, we aimed to surface both what respondents saw as successes and what they saw as challenges at all levels of activity, be it in shifting to remote instruction generally, resourcing and training staff, interacting with policy requirements and attendant resources, or engaging with the YES initiative.

The research team considered many factors in choosing the sample for the interviews. First, we aimed to interview actors who occupied different

levels of activity. Organizational leaders and supervisors were able to provide context around broader organizational conditions, experiences with the YES initiative and DYCD policy, and organizational development and program design decisions. Program facilitators were able to speak more directly about their pedagogical approaches and challenges, and could contextualize site visits made by the research team, as facilitator interviews followed these visits. Second, in interviewing both SYEP providers and the YES content partners they worked with, we aimed to get "both sides of the story" when it came to such partnerships and perspectives on how they functioned, providing a stronger basis for triangulation. Finally, we aimed for diversity in approaches to pedagogy, program structure and design, focal disciplines/careers (e.g. STEM, arts, activism, etc.), and partnership structure (e.g. virtual work site partnerships, curriculum partnerships, etc.).

Ecosystem retrospective interviews
Interviews with YES leadership, as well as with advocates, city employees, and city contractors, took place during the fall of 2020, and focused on a more targeted line of analysis related to both the formation of the YES initiative, the attendant problems it was attempting to solve (RRE.RQ1), and views on the results of its efforts (RRE.RQ2). The interviews most often aimed to have participants reconstruct timelines from the spring and early summer of 2020, surface activities they engaged in or observed at various time points, and highlight the motivations and considerations that undergirded the decisions that drove their actions. Sampling for these activities was done quite carefully, with the research team engaging in multiple consultations with YES leadership around potential respondents, gaining context

on the roles of various stakeholders, and making decisions around inclusion in the study based on ensuring diverse perspectives.

Interviews

Actor	Number of interviews
Youth program facilitators	8
Youth program supervisors or organizational leadership	35
YES leadership (YES coordinating committee, YES design team)	5
Other (advocates, municipal actors, municipal contractors)	14
Total	62

Remote youth program site visits

In order to more directly understand program models, pedagogical approaches, and instructional policy implementation, the research team conducted site visits to youth programs. These site visits were guided by an observation protocol focused on the following:

+ The nature of the program being observed and its degree of emphasis on focal youth development outcomes
+ Pedagogical approaches and facilitation techniques
+ The activity flow of the session
+ Youth engagement and experiences related to focal youth development outcomes

For these visits, research team members logged into the remote programs, all of which utilized the Zoom video conferencing platform. Data was captured through field notes and, occasionally, screenshots of program activity. As noted previously, site visits were augmented by interviews conducted with program facilitators following the observation, and were sampled based on diversity in approaches to pedagogy, program structure and design, focal disciplines/careers (e.g. STEM, arts, activism, etc.), and partnership structure (e.g. virtual work site partners versus curriculum partners).

Remote youth program site visits

Number of organizations represented	Number of site visits
18	17

Youth focus groups

To solicit more direct perspectives from young people regarding their experience within the programs under study, the research team conducted focus groups with youth participants. Each focus group included youth who had been part of a single program in order to surface details around that particular program model, and utilized a protocol centered around the following themes:

+ Youth experiences within the program related to focal youth development and career exploration outcomes
+ Perceptions of agency and choice, both in program selection and within program structures
+ Issues of technology as they related to program access
+ Views on the overall benefits and drawbacks of program participation

It should be noted that sampling of participants for youth focus groups was contingent on program facilitators identifying potential participants and conducting subsequent outreach on behalf of the research team. As such, these were likely young people that had stronger relationships with these facilitators, which is often more common among youth who participate more actively and consistently in programs. As a result, subsequent analysis and interpretation of youth perspectives offered were highly qualified in terms of how representative they were, not only of broader youth participants within YES-supported programs, but also of youth within the programs that focus group youth came from.

Youth focus groups

Number of focus group participants	Number of focus groups and programs represented
15	6

YES convening video recordings and field observations

One element of the YES infrastructure that the research team had reliable access to were the convenings conducted by Hive NYC Learning Network, a YES coalition partner that led efforts to promote partnership development and cross-organizational learning during the period of program implementation. Conducted biweekly in July and August 2020, during the weeks leading up to implementation and continuing through the end of the summer program period, these convenings initially focused on "matching" YES content partners with SYEP providers, and, as program implementation commenced, focused on creating peer-to-peer learning opportunities

based on a range of topics related to pedagogy and program implementation (see Chapter 3).

Members of the research team attended each of the convenings, and also coordinated with YES leadership to create video recordings of each session. Activities within these sessions were relevant to two particular organizational outcomes within the YES logic model (see Chapter 3), support for partnership formation and promotion of cross-organizational learning and community development. The closing convenings provided data distinct from the broader convenings in that they were co-designed by the Hive/YES team and the research team to focus on gathering feedback, perspectives, and lessons learned from participating organizations.

YES convening video recordings

Number of sessions	Total hours
17	22 hours

Organizational documentation

The research team gathered a variety of forms of organizational documentation.

In coordination with YES leadership, we curated a corpus of documents related to the development and implementation of the initiative. These included:
+ Various meeting notes, emails, project plans, and communications documents associated with the planning process
+ The request for proposals (RFP) and subsequent submitted proposals from a range of organizations within the ecosystem
+ Agendas and presentations associated with various convenings conducted throughout the effort

Additionally, we gathered publicly available data, most often present in press articles, that related to the broader SYEP effort, spanning reporting on the cut of the program, associated advocacy efforts, and program restoration.

Finally, a variety of documentation was gathered related to YES-supported programs. A significant portion of this was provided to YES leadership via awardee reporting processes and was made available to the research team. Others were made available to the research team through direct requests to awardee program staff, most often following interviews or site visits. Such documentation included:
+ Examples of student work
+ Curricular materials
+ Outreach materials
+ Partnership coordination documents

Organizational documentation

YES Initiative internal documents (planning documents, meeting notes, proposals, etc.)	**15**
Press-based data (news articles, press releases, etc.)	**7 press releases**
YES awardee-provided documentation (student artifacts, curricular examples, outreach materials, partnership coordination documents, etc.)	**35 documents**

Surveys

Two forms of survey data were collected: YES awardee final reports and a citywide summer learning survey.

YES awardee final reports

Taking into account the reality that such mechanisms represented key, if complex, opportunities for data gathering, the report structure for YES awardee final reports was developed collaboratively between YES coalition leadership and the research team. Awardees were asked to provide a variety of forms of data within the report, including:
+ How funds were used and what services were offered
+ The number of staff salaries supported through YES funds
+ The number of youth reached through YES-supported programs
+ Educator/student ratios, the frequency of meetings, and the balance of synchronous/ asynchronous participation time within Project Based Learning offerings
+ Which organizations an awardee partnered with to implement funded programs, and evaluations of the extent to which those partnerships helped or hindered reaching focal youth development outcomes
+ Provision of professional development efforts and numbers of participating educators
+ How YES-supported efforts were playing into future activities during the school year
+ Relevant artifacts from supported programs (e.g. examples of student work, educator reflections, locally collected survey data, etc.)
+ Challenges and successes associated with program implementation

As with other forms of data, the information provided in these reports was not taken at face value. The research team viewed and interpreted data provided within these reports in light of its power-laden collection context, one in which organizations had incentives to emphasize their successes. At the same time, the reporting structure also meant that much of the data, especially related to more structural features of awardee programs, such as forms of partnership and aspects of youth program models, were more straightforward and unlikely to have been biased by respondents.

City-wide summer learning survey
In an effort to collect broader contextual data on the nature of youth development and the career exploration landscape in New York City during the spring and summer of 2020, the research team conducted a survey aimed at any educators involved in the planning and implementation of such programs, not limited to those either supported by YES or related to the SYEP program.

Sampling and respondents. The survey sample, in that it was designed for potential responses from a large pool of participants, involved first developing an outreach list of 495 participants who had been connected to the YES initiative in some way (e.g. were on the initiative email list, had attended convenings, were employees at organizational that had received YES funds, etc.). Additionally, we made specific requests of leaders of organizations that had received YES funding to circulate the survey more broadly among their staff. Beyond this, outreach efforts were made to a variety of networks connected to youth development in New York City, including Student Success Network, Hive NYC Learning Network,

and the New York City STEM Network. Given the broad outreach associated with the survey and the invitation for individuals who had received it to participate, we do not have a precise number of individuals who received the survey, and as such are not able to provide a response rate. However, in that we know that all YES-supported organizations received survey invitations, based on responses, 73 percent (n=22) of these organizations responded to the survey.

Focal areas. The survey gathered a range of data about individuals, including their organization, role, and participation in a range of networks and initiatives associated with youth development and career exploration in New York City.

The first battery of items included Likert-based questions related to respondents' perceptions of their organization's access to resources relevant to implementing youth programs over the summer period, including:
+ Information and municipal guidance
+ Partnerships
+ Funding
+ Staffing
+ Curriculum
+ Professional development

A second battery included Likert-based questions relating to the extent of various organizational shifts and adaptations that we understood, based on our qualitative research, to be common at many youth-serving organizations, including:
+ Laying off or furloughing staff
+ Hiring new staff/contractors
+ Changing existing staff roles
+ Developing/adopting new technology
+ Developing/adopting new curriculum

+ Changing youth engagement and facilitation strategies
+ Training staff on new strategies
+ Changing program sequences/structures
+ Changing preexisting scopes of work

A third battery of Likert-based items focused on perceptions of support and learning from the broader field of youth-serving organizations and professionals in New York City. These included questions around perceptions of:
+ Support from peers in other organizations
+ Being part of a healthy and robust professional community
+ Ability to ask for assistance from peers in other organizations
+ Extent of learning new strategies from peers in other organizations related to the implementation of summer youth programs
+ Belief in their own organization's ability to adapt to change and uncertainty during summer program planning and implementation

A final section of the survey employed a social network approach, asking respondents to list up to seven organizations that they interacted with most closely between the spring and summer of 2020, and whether they went to these organizations for advice during either the planning or implementation periods for the summer program.

Surveys

YES awardee final reports	**29 final reports**
Citywide summer learning survey	**88 survey responses**

Analytic approach

Given the substantial corpus of data outlined above, the research team engaged in a number of approaches to analysis, and a range of sub-analyses focused on particular elements of the data set.

Data sensemaking routines

From an organizational routine perspective, following the initial period of data collection held during the summer implementation, the team began to hold weekly data sensemaking meetings between September and November 2020. These sessions focused on sharing various highlights related to recently collected data and engaging in "toy analyses" in which the team would begin with a simple prompt and utilize this as a jumping off point to systematically discuss various phenomena. For example, one sensemaking session focused on surfacing examples that team members had encountered during data collection related to organizational challenges and attendant organizational adaptations and pivots. Another engaged in preliminary analysis of data related to focal youth development outcomes articulated by the YES initiative (see Chapter 3) and aimed to surface examples of what the team saw as nascent, developing, and robust pedagogical approaches to reaching these outcomes that had been observed in the data collection to date. The outcomes of such sessions were documented in various sensemaking protocol documents or general data observation documents.

Such routines served to continually tune the broader team to emerging themes, establish shared understanding and language, and specify existing gaps in the data in order to guide forthcoming data collection efforts.

Additionally, these routines created a series of preliminary data syntheses that the research team returned to and referenced as it engaged in later-stage data analysis.

Qualitative coding

Following the completion of data collection, the research team developed a coding scheme that drove analysis of interviews and program site visit observations. The coding scheme was derived through review of focal research questions and existing data collection protocols, as well as through ideation of specific lines of analysis the team planned to engage in. The coding scheme contained four primary areas:

+ **YES intervention:** Codes focused on efforts and themes directly related to YES infrastructure, including the formation of the initiative, funding approach, partnership brokerage, convenings, cross-organizational learning, and development of professional community.
+ **Policy context:** Codes focused on the nature and interaction with the broader SYEP policy context, including policy information flows, policy interpretation and compliance, perspectives on policy, and engagement with specific aspects of SYEP Summer Bridge instructional policy (e.g. Workplace Challenges, career panels, etc.).
+ **Program models:** Codes focused on the remote programs implemented by youth providers, including issues of staff supervision and training, partnership formation, overall program structure and focus, role of technology, youth recruitment and retention, and remote program model considerations.
+ **Pedagogy:** Codes focused more granularly on the nature of the pedagogies enacted within programs, including approaches to reaching focal youth and career exploration outcomes, relationship development between educators and youth, facilitation techniques, and decisions around synchronous and asynchronous engagement.

Beyond these, an additional set of normative codes were applied orthogonally to the above codes to note the presence of tensions, problems, and challenges, on the one hand, and adaptation, resourcefulness, and innovation on the other. These codes were intentionally left up to the discretion of the team member engaged in coding, and rather than seeing these as final claims, they were intended to help surface data, in conjunction with other codes, that would allow for further analysis and interpretation within broader analyses.

A total of 55 interview transcripts, 15 program site visit observations, and six youth focus group transcripts were coded utilizing a formal code book, with 1,099 coded excerpts created.

Analytic method by chapter

Chapter 2: Emergence of a Rapid Response Ecosystem: How the YES Coalition Formed
Chapter 2 addressed research question 1:
How did the YES coalition take shape, and what conditions mediated its formation?
The chapter primarily drew from semi-structured interviews with organizational leaders who participated in the YES coalition. Additional background information was drawn from internal materials generated by the coalition during its period of formation (emails, calendar invitations,

meeting notes, recordings, and slide presentations) as well as from press and media coverage during this time (news articles, press releases, and social media posts). These data were systematically pieced together to reconstruct the timeline of events from multiple perspectives during YES's formation. Finally, our analytical process used collaborative sensemaking approaches and qualitative coding to provide our analysis, discussion, and implications.

Chapter 3: Interventions and Impacts of the YES Coalition
Chapter 3 addressed research question 2: **What problems did the YES initiative aim to solve, and through what mechanisms?** To what extent and in what ways did YES deliver on its intended value proposition? The chapter drew from the same source material as Chapter 2, with a number of additional data sources that focused on summertime implementation. These data include: semi-structured interviews with leaders of youth-development organizations, materials from YES's RFP, contracts, digital communications, online meetings, and final reports from YES contractees. We performed quantitative analyses to assess the reach of YES implementation support and youth-serving activities, social network analysis to understand the relationships between organizations in the YES coalition, and qualitative analysis to identify key themes from interviews and documentation.

Chapter 4: Organizational Leadership in the Context of Summer 2020
Chapter 4 addressed research question 3: **What conditions did leaders of youth-serving organizations face in the context of the pandemic as well as the policy environment of New York City as they worked to create summer work-based learning programs for youth?** The chapter drew primarily from 35 semi-structured interviews with organizational leaders and supervisors, including SYEP providers themselves as well as partners such as curricular providers and Project Based Learning sites. It was supplemented with data from a citywide survey we conducted of leaders within youth-serving organizations (Citywide Summer Learning Survey, n=88) regarding their experiences during the spring and summer of 2020. Additional background information was drawn from internal materials generated by the coalition during its period of formation (emails, meeting notes, recordings, and slide presentations), press and media coverage during this time, and DYCD materials provided to SYEP providers. Our analytical process used collaborative sensemaking approaches and qualitative coding to inform our analysis, discussion, and implications.

Chapter 5: Levers for Impact in Design of Remote Work–Based Learning Models
Chapter 5 addressed research question 4: **How did youth-serving organizations structure remote work-based learning program models, and how did decisions about program structure play out in the context of implementation?** The chapter drew from semi-structured interviews with partners and providers—primarily leaders of youth development organizations and program facilitators—as well as remote youth program site

visits, focus groups with young people, and final reports submitted by YES awardees. First, we performed quantitative analysis using final reports to identify differentiating factors among programs: the number of participants, youth-to-facilitator ratios, and the number of synchronous and asynchronous hours associated with programs. Next, we used qualitative analysis of our interviews, site visits, and focus groups to investigate why program leaders and facilitators made various program design decisions and how such decisions were received by facilitators and participants. We then selected six case examples from the broader data corpus in order to high-light similarities and contrasts among program models with regards to six key elements of re-mote program models: (1) curriculum; (2) educator capacity, expertise, and support; (3) program scale, (4) synchronous and asynchronous structures, (5) the role of technology, and (5) youth agency. We then used these categories to structure analysis and interpretations across the case examples to highlight levers for impact, or decision points for program designers, that influenced the quality of pedagogy, and finally, identified emerging lessons and questions to be considered by program designers and policy makers.

Chapter 6: Humanizing Pedagogy for Equitable Futures

Chapter 6 addressed research question 5: **What pedagogical approaches did youth-serving organizations use to address youth's social and emotional needs around remote work-based learning during the pandemic?** The chapter drew from semi-structured interviews with partners, providers, facilitators, and youth, site-visit observations, video recordings of YES peer-learning professional convenings, program

final reports, as well as program documentation such as curriculum materials, student feedback forms, and artifacts of youth's final projects. A thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was conducted to make salient different types of social and emotional needs identified by programs or youth. Working across the various data sources, we employed a "dialectical process of discovery" (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000) to move back and forth between data sets so that as a specific theme became visible in one data set, the researcher became better attuned to recognizing its presence or absence in the other data sets. In keeping with the nature of the research question and the intended audience of educators and practitioners, the themes were disambiguated and refined during recurring research team meetings until each theme became distinct at an analytic level, self-evident at an intuitive level, and actionable at a practical level. Through this iterative process in which each data set was revisited multiple times, the analysis eventually stabilized into a set of seven distinct social and emotional needs around two major focal areas: (1) helping youth to cope with the pandemic and (2) helping youth to pursue professional opportunities. In line with the purpose of the chapter to provide practical guidance for programs working to better serve youth on the social and emotional front, three pedagogical strategies that programs used to meet youth's social and emotional needs were selected for each of the seven themes.

After cancellation in April, New York City's Summer Youth Employment Program was ultimately restored in a new, completely virtual programmatic model called Summer Bridge. SYEP Summer Bridge was not a "virtual internship" that simply moved the existing SYEP model into a remote work environment with young people embedded in an organization reporting to a supervisor. The model represented a significant departure from direct work placements toward career exploration and skill building opportunities. Youth experienced a blend of three core program components:

1. **Hats & Ladders:** A self-guided digital learning platform allowed youth to complete a remote work-readiness experience. Topics on the platform included foundational work readiness subjects such as career exploration, resume writing, interviewing skills, workplace communication, financial literacy, and civic engagement. The online curriculum was required to be completed during the first three weeks of the five week program. Younger youth were required to complete five hours per week for the first three weeks (15 hours total), while older youth were required to complete 10 hours per week (30 hours total). See the table below for more information about hours required.

2. **Project Based Learning (PBL):** All participants took part in Project Based Learning and career exploration activities (including career panels) on themes that included civic engagement, community service, public health, and more. DYCD partnered with the Youth Development Institute (YDI) to create a virtual library of PBL activities focused on civic engagement and career readiness. SYEP providers, partners contracted by SYEP providers, and organizations funded by YES also designed PBL activities. These activities were similar in form to more traditional STEM, arts, activism, leadership, and creative media afterschool programs, but were facilitated remotely.

3. **Workplace Challenges:** A new pedagogical element to SYEP that was distinct to Summer Bridge, Workplace Challenges are career preparation activities. Small groups of young people engage in solving a real-world problem or challenge identified by an industry partner. When these challenges are presented in their ideal form, participants work as a team to identify a challenge to address, generate possible solutions, and then create and deliver a final deliverable and/or presentation about their solutions to the industry partner. DYCD partnered with Grant Associates to create Workplace Challenge modules and TechNYC to develop Workplace Challenge modules and broker relationships between SYEP providers and 99 tech companies.

Youth were paid stipends for participating in Summer Bridge, contingent on fulfilling the following requirements:

Younger Youth (14-15)

Week	Program Component	Hours/ Week	Total Hours/Week
1	Hats & Ladders	5	12
	Project Based Learning	7	
2	Hats & Ladders	5	12
	Project Based Learning	7	
3	Hats & Ladders	5	12
	Project Based Learning	7	
4	Project Based Learning	12	12
5	Project Based Learning	12	12

Total Program Hours: 60

Older Youth (16-24)

Week	Program Component	Hours/ Week	Total Hours/Week
1	Hats & Ladders	10	18
	Project Based Learning	8	
2	Hats & Ladders	10	18
	Project Based Learning	8	
3	Hats & Ladders	10	18
	PBL/Workplace Challenge	8	
4	PBL/Workplace Challenge	18	18
5	PBL/Workplace Challenge	18	18

Total Program Hours: 90

The following appendix provides a chronological account of the formation of the YES coalition, reconstructed from retrospective interviews and analysis of contemporaneous documents. This account is provided as a supplement to the outline of key activities described in Chapter 2: Emergence of a Rapid Response Ecosystem: How the YES Coalition Formed.

March 2020: surge in Covid-19 cases

Following the first documented death from Covid-19 in the U.S. on February 29 in Washington State, concerns began to rise across NYC in early March. Employees at youth development organizations that we interviewed shared that their workplaces were weighing whether or not to stay open, and early meetings among youth development stakeholders indicated a sense of concern for summer plans.

Covid-19 cases began to surge in the middle of the month, and on March 13, President Trump declared Covid-19 a national emergency. On March 15, Mayor Bill de Blasio announced the closure of school buildings in NYC.

In the second half of the month, Brian Cohen (Executive Director of Beam Center), Alison Overseth (Chief Executive Officer of the Partnership for After School Education) and Saskia Traill (President and CEO of ExpandED Schools) began a correspondence that would later evolve to become Youth Empowerment Summer (YES).

PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION: At this point, the perceived challenge was to assess the impact of Covid-19 on community-based organizations and informal learning providers in afterschool and summer contexts.

Early April 2020: pre-SYEP cut announcement

By the start of April, there were widespread concerns about potential disturbances to SYEP during the coming summer. Mr. Cohen, Dr. Traill, and Ms. Overseth hosted a meeting on April 1, with nine additional participants from around the NYC youth development ecosystem, to consider the following premise:

> *"In-person instruction is likely to be suspended through June. Given their understandable focus on short-term response, DOE and DYCD will need a strong collective of partners to help/ lead them to envision and design scenarios for engaging youth this summer. We would like this call to begin the formation of this collective."*

Acknowledging that municipal actors were likely most immediately focused on the near term, the group took the initiative to look outward toward what the crisis would mean for summer youth programming.

At the same time, other actors in the NYC youth development and work-based learning ecosystem were also responding to growing concerns about potential implications for the summer. On April 2, for example, Teens Take Charge, a youth-led education advocacy group, hosted a meeting with teen activists entitled "Urgent: Action to

Save SYEP," which drew about 50 participants. The following day, Teens Take Charge launched an #ExpandSYEP petition and campaign on Instagram, preempting subsequent cuts (Beecham & Kwek-Rupp, 2021).[1] United Neighborhood Houses (UNH), an advocacy organization representing NYC-based community development groups, dedicated a weekly roundtable discussion on April 2 to the potential disruptions SYEP might face, and hosted an emergency session attended by almost 60 SYEP providers on April 6 to prepare a response to impending cuts.

> **PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION:** YES was not yet coined, but "Summer Learning Discussion" was focused on safe program design during the pandemic.

> **PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION:** UNH and Teens Take Charge began to mobilize and prepare for an advocacy response to anticipated cuts.

April 7, 2020: announcement of SYEP cut

On April 7, the mayor's office announced a complete cut to SYEP. SYEP providers received a letter that informed them that they had 24 hours to shut down their programs, and that no expenses incurred after 24 hours would be recognized by the city. One interviewee described this as "a retroactive cut" in effect, due to the immediate impact it would have on staffing. In the letter, the rationale for the cut centered on health and safety concerns. DYCD's SYEP website, where youth had applied to SYEP, was updated to share a similar message.

Advocates moved quickly in response. Eighty organizations in UNH's network cosigned a letter in response to the cuts. Teens Take Charge had collected 5,000 signatures to their petition by April 8 and 10,000 signatures by April 10. Many others in the city reacted strongly as well. This immediate reaction seemed to have an effect: DYCD extended the deadline to allow providers one week to close out expenses, rather than the initial deadline of 24 hours.

The second meeting of YES (at the time, simply labeled "Summer Learning Discussion" because YES had not yet been coined) convened with a total of 16 participants, centered on how to serve youth who might have otherwise participated in SYEP. The meeting agenda clearly stated that the program design happening in the meeting would inform and overlap with advocacy efforts, but not focus on them.

> **PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION:** YES had still not yet been coined. The group was focused on designing possible alternatives to SYEP for the summer of 2020, with the assumption that the city program would not run.

> **PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION:** Simultaneously, advocacy groups were leading a public push for full reinstatement of SYEP, and challenging the health- and safety-based rationale provided for the cut.

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[3] For more details on the advocacy work of Teens Take Charge during the spring and summer to restore SYEP, see the report "The Story of #SaveSYEP", authored by two members of Teens Take Charge: https://www.heretohere.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/The-Story-of-SaveSYEP.pdf

April 2020: post-SYEP cut

After the cut was announced, the "Summer Learning Discussions" formally adopted the name "Youth Empowerment Summer" and held design sessions on April 15, 22, 24, and 27. On April 23, in the midst of these design sessions, YES hosted a larger design "Advisory" convening, with an open invitation that attracted 122 participants. The more frequent, and smaller, design session meetings prepared for and followed up on this larger engagement, and focused on information sharing (policy and advocacy updates) and what YES had then identified as four programmatic elements to ground deliberation within the larger Advisory meetings: program design and quality, program partnerships, evaluation, and program needs. The YES initiative pursued a "big-tent" strategy in this design work, seeking broad participation from diverse actors in the youth development field. One survey circulated by this team collected feedback from 30 individuals (including representation from youth leaders, SYEP providers, youth-serving nonprofits, intermediary organizations, advocacy groups, public institutions, and philanthropies), on an early proposal of YES's program structure. Constructive feedback from this survey led to changes in the YES program model (e.g., allocation of funds to support programming for undocumented youth), with feedback being positive overall. As one respondent stated: "This is inspiring at a time when it's hard to be inspiring."

With program design sessions underway, the YES initiative began a simultaneous advocacy effort. Lazar Treschan, Vice President of Policy and Impact at HERE to HERE, an organization which describes itself as "a critical connector between students, educators, and employers"

(HERE to HERE, 2021), invited conversation between ExpandED, Teens Take Charge, and DreamYard. These relationships played an important role in advancing program design and jumpstarting YES' advocacy.

Around the same time, Julia Bator, an experienced nonprofit leader deeply connected to philanthropy networks in NYC, reached out to Dr. Traill following the SYEP cut offering help. Ms. Bator brought along an additional collaborator, who was an expert in public-private partnerships throughout New York State. Together, these three discussed working with Tusk Strategies, a lobbying firm described by Dr. Traill as "aggressive." Their focus was to launch a brief campaign directed at the mayor.

> "*It came across like [the SYEP cut] was the mayor as an individual, and that he was going to be the person as an individual who's going to turn this back on. And so we got an advocacy and program design target, and [YES advisors] called and said, 'What can we do to help?' We have these really strong systems builders as individuals who understand big picture policy, and can help us think through an advocacy strategy that we can get directly to the mayor.*"
> — Saskia Traill, ExpandED, 10.23.20

The introduction of Tusk Strategies coincided with escalating advocacy efforts from other groups. Dr. Traill reported that the introduction of Tusk Strategies, in particular, made waves: The choice of the firm was recognized as a signal that ExpandED was taking an adversarial stance. ExpandED did not engage with Tusk on their own—youth advocates from Teens Take Charge interacted with Tusk as well over the course of the next few weeks, starting with a Sunday, April

12 phone call in which Dr. Traill brought together Tusk Strategies and youth leaders from Teens Take Charge.

In the following weeks, Teens Take Charge's advocacy received repeated attention in the press, in outlets that included *Chalkbeat*, *Teen Vogue*, and the *New York Times*, and on social media, including a retweet by Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

These advocacy efforts showed early signs that they were making a difference. One stakeholder we spoke with reported that as early as April 8, New York City Councilmember Deborah Rose agreed during a public meeting that the stated rationale for the cancellation of SYEP was dubious, and that she suspected the real issue at hand was the impending budget crisis due to the pandemic rather than the health and safety concerns that were initially cited. This bolstered rumors, shared by two interviewees, that the decision to cut SYEP came from NYC's Office of Management and Budget and was accepted by the mayor, while others in City Hall were proposing alternative ways to run the program safely. Days later, a public statement from Mayor De Blasio offered a new rationale about the cancellation, citing concerns that so many employers would be closed that the employment program would not be able to accommodate

youth placements, as it had in years past. And even before these signals of a changing political context began to occur, retrospective interviews with CYE, DreamYard, and UNH all indicate a growing expectation during the spring that the initial SYEP cut would not be final, but that the degree of an inevitable restoration would depend on public demand.

Within days of initiating these advocacy efforts, Julia Bator simultaneously began supporting ExpandED in fundraising for YES. At first, a fundraising document showed YES being positioned as part of an ambitious trisector collaboration, stating, "YES anticipates serving up to 75,000 young people this summer, providing each with 100 hours of stipended, career experience." This document refers to SYEP in the past tense, indicating that it was unlikely to return that summer, while simultaneously acknowledging advocacy efforts being led by Teens Take Charge to restore it. The result is a suggestion that YES was initially framing itself as a replacement for SYEP, at least in the context of conversations with potential funders, while balancing a complicated role in advocating for SYEP's restoration. Interviews with YES collaborators during this period agree with this characterization, though some questioned the viability of the ambitious goal of replacing SYEP.

PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION: Advocacy groups needed to heighten pressure on the mayor's office to force a change to the decision to cut SYEP.

TENSION: Running parallel efforts of program design, advocacy, and fundraising introduced challenges around perceptions of YES and competing interests within these three components of the initiative. One interviewee, for example, cited a concern about joining YES's advocacy effort if such advocacy stood to financially benefit YES's programmatic work.

TENSION: Just as there was a growing expectation that SYEP would be cut before its official announcement, there was also a growing expectation during this period that some version of SYEP would be introduced or reinstated over the summer. However, communication about this was limited and unclear—what came to be called SYEP Summer Bridge was not announced until the release of the budget on July 1. This created an information void, in which the ecosystem expected that a program would return but did not have confirmation, instructional policy guidelines, or funding to prepare for it.

May 2020: YES stabilization

Despite the chaotic policy landscape and lack of clear expectations for the summer, YES moved forward with program design and advocacy efforts through the month of May. By the end of the month, YES had published an RFP to support summer implementation. Its overall value proposition had stabilized: one part advocacy for restoration, one part instructional policy design and coordination, and one part program implementation support.

Policy design and coordination had already begun via the design meetings held throughout April. On May 4, Dr. Traill's fundraising efforts led Julia Bator to establish a dialogue with Julie Samuels, the Executive Director of Tech:NYC. By June, Dr. Traill connected Ms. Samuels to DYCD in what eventually coincided with a significant component of the SYEP Summer Bridge instructional policy: "Workplace Challenges," a series of learning opportunities designed to expose youth to industries and careers while simultaneously building workplace skills. By the end of the summer, a total of 99 companies from the Tech:NYC network had engaged with youth via Workplace Challenges. A number of additional activities further supported the implementation of Workplace Challenges: YES funded Grant Associates, who developed materials in partnership with DYCD to support professionals in these engagements, to provide support in the form of additional resources and technical assistance; and PENCIL, to support Workplace Challenges via employer engagement and creating resources. This policy coordination effort provides some of the clearest evidence of trisector collaboration through the tumultuous spring months: Public institutions (DYCD, CYE) worked with a philanthropically-funded nonprofit coalition (YES) to engage private companies (Tech:NYC) to design and implement a new approach to career exploration for youth participating in SYEP.

In addition to these catalytic effects, fundraising also acted as a forcing mechanism in terms of policy coordination. On May 5, Dr. Traill was prepared to share about the YES initiative at the Youth Education Funders Briefing, which was also attended by representatives from the mayor's office. This provided a significant opportunity to begin a direct public-private relationship between the mayor's office and YES, which was followed up on May 14 with another meeting. These points of dialogue likely supported some degree of alignment between YES and the emerging plans for SYEP Summer Bridge. The degree to which this coordination had an impact on the design of instructional policy is unclear, however, and at best was indirect: leaders of YES did not formally meet with DYCD until July 7, one week after the announcement of SYEP Summer Bridge, in a meeting brokered by CYE.

Meanwhile, advocacy efforts continued to gain traction, as did evidence of their impact. On May 19, Teens Take Charge published its SYEP Plan (2020a), which, following weeks of coordination, reflected the program outcomes presented by YES. On the same day, Mayor de Blasio held a press conference (NYC Office of the Mayor, 2020) introducing changes for the summer: He announced adapted remote summer school for some students and signaled that "summer activities" (which advocates believed could include SYEP) were "in the works." On May 20, two days before YES released its RFP, DYCD Commissioner Bill Chong said at a City Council hearing, "I am confident there will be an alternative, remote SYEP program this summer" (Teens Take Charge, 2020b).

YES's efforts to support program implementation were most visible on May 22, when it published an RFP. The publication of the RFP broadcasted a loud signal that municipally-supported youth development work was likely to move forward this summer, that it would be remote, and that YES was providing resources to support it. In the continued absence of official policy guidance from DYCD or the mayor's office, YES had entered an information vacuum, filling it with a communications infrastructure (website, mailing list, online meetings), a program design (which had garnered some degree of trust and legitimacy through its big-tent approach), and resources (signaled through the RFP). Widespread engagement with the RFP and open-invite convenings both before (May 7) and after (May 26) the RFP's publication indicated that YES was addressing a need in the ecosystem.

Along with the broader stabilization of YES's value proposition during this period, the funding approach changed as well. Documents from fundraising efforts in May no longer suggested the potential to replace the cancelled SYEP program; instead, one asserts that partner organizations, "coming together under the name Youth Empowerment Summer, or YES, have confirmed their commitment to and alignment with SYEP." As evidence of city restoration became more clear, the intent of fundraising efforts were more clearly situated as a complementary program rather than a replacement, as noted in internal YES documents reflected:

"Private funds managed by a donor-advised fiduciary will be distributed to NYC youth-serving organizations. These include DYCD-contracted SYEP Providers and organizations that propose to serve as technical assistance partners to SYEP Providers. Grants will be awarded for curriculum development, training and technical assistance and virtual and project-based experiences. Funds will also be use for evaluation, emergency technology and stipends for undocumented youth."

PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION: YES's four-part value proposition stabilized during this period: (1) advocacy for restoration, (2) influencing instructional policy design, (3) helping materially coordinate the necessary infrastructure for instructional policy, and (4) supporting implementation of instructional policy.

June–August 2020: Preparation and implementation

With the formation of YES having stabilized in May and early June, it moved forward to deliver on its emerging value proposition through the summer. YES engaged in iterative feedback cycles with organizations that submitted to its RFP; it awarded contracts totalling over $1M; through its coalition partner, Hive NYC Learning Network, it brokered dozens of partnerships to support Summer Bridge providers; and it continued to host convenings in support of partners and providers. Following the announcement of the new budget and the introduction of SYEP Summer Bridge on July 1, YES ended advocacy efforts and redoubled its focus on implementation support.

SYEP Summer Bridge launched on July 27 and concluded five weeks later, on August 28.

The Youth Empowerment Summer coalition provided funding to support supplemental partnerships between specialized and community-based educational organizations and SYEP providers. Below is a complete list of organizations that received direct funding from the initiative.

+ Build
+ BronxWorks
+ Building Beats
+ Career Village
+ Commonpoint Queens
+ CUNY School of Professional Studies
+ Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation
+ DreamYard Project
+ Duro Workforce
+ Educational Video Center
+ Exalt
+ FamilyCook Productions
+ Grant Associates
+ HYPOTHEkids
+ Latinas on the Verge of Excellence - Love, inc.

+ Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City
+ Mentoring in Medicine
+ MetaBronx
+ Mouse
+ New Settlement Apartments
+ New York City Mission Society
+ PENCIL
+ Pockets Change
+ Queens Community House
+ RiseBoro Community Partnership
+ SCO Family of Services/Center for Family Life
+ Solar One
+ South Asian Youth Action
+ Tech Kids Unlimited
+ Teens Take Charge/The Bell
+ The Center for Urban Pedagogy
+ The Knowledge House
+ Tech Kids Unlimited
+ United Activities Unlimited
+ UnmaskEDU/Hey Girl!
+ Urban Wild
+ WeThrive

Over the course of Spring 2020, a core group of representatives from organizations across the youth development and work-based learning communities in New York City worked together to share information, plan broader community engagement, and work towards a collective strategy for the YES coalition. See Chapter 2 and Appendix C for additional details on these activities. The group included individuals from the following organizations:

+ City University of New York
+ HERE To HERE
+ Student Success Network
+ Partnership for Afterschool Education
+ Beam Center
+ Hats & Ladders
+ Youth Development Institute
+ DreamYard Project