Today’s youth are tomorrow’s workforce. For businesses to remain competitive—and for young people to transition smoothly into the workforce—promoting young people’s attainment of certain skills has proved beneficial to both parties.

Forty-six percent of new workers fail in the first year-and-a-half and for 89% of them it’s due to attitude problems.¹ Employers struggle to find young people with soft skills such as punctuality, professionalism, teamwork, and communication. Providing youth with the foundational professional skills that employers need is where organizations like Urban Alliance can bridge pathways and partnerships that are mutually advantageous.

Urban Alliance is a year-long internship program to prepare disadvantaged high school seniors for college or career following graduation. Urban Alliance executes its work through partnerships with businesses, such as Bank of America, 21st Century Fox, Pepco, and many others, in the District of Columbia, Baltimore, Chicago, and Northern Virginia. Once selected to participate in the program, students are linked with paid internships by matching the needs of business with the skill level and interests of the student. Typical office-based work includes basic tasks (e.g., correspondence with members and clerical duties) that support the intern’s foundational growth. Financed by internship sites and foundations, Urban Alliance has quickly grown into a multisite organization that has worked with more than 1,500 students.²

The Urban Alliance model is not designed to provide students with specific technical skills. Instead, the program’s greatest contribution to the youth employment space is their focus on soft skills training. The program teaches soft skills during the 6-week pre-training session and later evaluates the students’ proficiency. At the end of the training students participate in a mock interview where they can demonstrate their acquired skills. In addition, students participate in workshops, weekly professional development, case management services, coaching, mentoring, and alumni support to further refine their skills. As Urban Alliance staff and mentors get to know the students, they can tailor the program to fit the student’s needs.

Urban Alliance’s job partners have the task of supervising the interns as mentors, providing meaningful tasks and experiences for the intern, and submitting a tax-deductible contribution to Urban Alliance covering the salary, training, and alumni support for the interns.

The result: Urban Alliance’s youth employment model offers many benefits to businesses that choose to participate including cost-effective employment, better trained staff equipped with critical soft skills, and the opportunity to improve their community.


For more information on the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation’s work on youth employment, visit uschamberfoundation.org/CEW.