

## Project Rise

### An Education-Conditioned Internship Program for Disconnected Youth

*Project Rise* helps unemployed 18 to 24 year-olds who are currently out of school and lack a high school degree or GED to re-engage in productive activities through a combination of educational opportunities, paid internships, and case management as a pathway to long-term economic self-sufficiency.

*Project Rise* is an education conditioned internship program being replicated through the national Social Innovation Fund (SIF). The Social Innovation Fund, administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service, is a public-private partnership to replicate successful programs and build evidence for more impactful ways to reduce poverty and improve communities. The SIF requires a 3:1 private match and its focus on evaluation builds in accountability for results.

#### THE PROJECT RISE MODEL

*Project Rise* builds on the promising experiences of New York City's Young Adult Internship Program, as well as lessons from evaluations of other youth programming. The yearlong SIF *Project Rise* program is anchored in a paid internship of up to 18 weeks, with entry into and continuation of the internship conditioned on participants' consistent engagement in an appropriate educational activity (or, in selected cases, occupational skills training that leads to a nationally recognized credential). At the beginning of the program, each participant receives an individualized plan for placement in secondary or post-secondary education and unsubsidized employment during the program. Strong case management and other supports are provided for a full twelve months in order to ensure a smooth transition to post-program placements. Set forth below is a more detailed description of the SIF *Project Rise* program elements, which providers in each participating city are adapting to local conditions:

- **Case Management** (*12 months*): A case manager is assigned to work with each participant from the beginning of the program through a smooth transition to unsubsidized employment and/or further education. The case manager conducts an initial assessment to determine the participant's job readiness/interests, appropriate educational placement, and needed social supports. An individualized plan is then developed for each participant with benchmarks that are monitored (and adjusted as appropriate) throughout the program. The case manager meets regularly with the participant and coordinates referrals and other staff engagement.
- **Pre-Internship Phase** (*The first 3-6 weeks of the program*): Participants receive career-readiness and job-readiness preparation (e.g., help with resume writing, interview skills, and "soft" workplace skills). Participants begin the education component in approximately the third week, and consistent attendance in the education component (described below) is required as a condition of being placed into a paid internship. In addition, a short-term group project allows participants to work as a team in a structured manner that benefits the community, while also providing an opportunity to reinforce participants' soft skills and further assess their employment interests and internship potential and needs.

#### Program Providers

##### New York City

- FEGS Health & Human Services
- Henry Street Settlement
- Kingsborough Community College

##### Newark, NJ

- Rutgers University

##### Kansas City, MO

- Full Employment Council
- Catholic Charities of Kansas City – St. Joseph

- **Education** (*Begins in approximately the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of the program*): Participants engage in educational programming (primarily basic literacy and math instruction, pre-GED, or GED) for approximately 15 hours a week. Educational programming is paired with group projects and then with paid internships until the end of the sixth month of the program. The educational component, to the extent possible, both complements the internship (e.g., with contextualized learning) and is a pathway to the next stage of the participants' employment and educational development (e.g., GED, higher education, or training). The educational component has an appropriate curriculum and class size, quality instruction (including individualized or small-group instruction where feasible), and regular progress assessments. Finally, providers offer incentives for educational gains and/or milestones to reinforce the value of education and sustain educational engagement.
- **Paid Internships** (*Begins in approximately the 6<sup>th</sup> week*) Participants typically engage in paid internships (at the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour) for approximately 10-15 hours a week for approximately 18 weeks, although some participants transition into unsubsidized employment earlier.

Quality internships are scheduled to accommodate time in educational programs and include elements such as a clear job description and expected duties, the commitment from a supervisor to provide regular feedback and professional mentorship, tasks appropriate to the field and the intern's skill, a specific project that can be completed during the internship, and a final presentation that the intern makes to the employer or program provider reflecting on the experience. To the extent possible, internships are in high growth sectors that have substantial prospects of regular job opportunities and are of interest to participants. Weekly group sessions are offered, to allow participants to reflect on and discuss work experiences, reinforce job readiness skills, continue career exploration, and obtain peer support.

## EVALUATION

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The evaluation of the SIF *Project Rise* program includes an implementation study and analysis of participant outcomes, with particular emphasis on lessons relating to youth engagement and program participation. The evaluation is addressing such questions as:

- Does this program hold broad appeal to disconnected youth, who have had difficult experiences in school and in making a transition to work? What types of disconnected youth are mostly likely to enroll in the program (e.g., what are their demographic characteristics, backgrounds, and prior program experience)?
- How do the providers, in practice, link the internships and educational component, and how effectively do they implement the principle of "school-conditioned work"?
- Among program enrollees, how many actually begin internships, how many concurrently participate in internships and education activities, and how many complete the internships?
- What are the characteristics of participants who are successful in the program (i.e., complete the program and/or return to school)?
- What paths do youth take after the end of their internships – how many continue in their education activities and/or are hired into unsubsidized jobs?
- How do variations in programmatic strategies and staff practices appear to influence participants' levels of engagement in *Project Rise*, success in completing the education and internships stages, and success in making a transition to work and/or other educational opportunities upon exiting the program?