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MENTOR



LESSONS LEARNED: TAKEAWAYS FROM THE ASA & MENTOR FORUM ON YOUTH WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT & DIGITAL WORK-BASED LEARNING DURING COVID 19

During a forum sponsored by MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership and American Student Assistance, panelists from The Clubhouse Network, Philadelphia Youth Network, Symba, Big Picture Learning, Skills for Rhode Island's Future, John Hancock, and the Bank of America Charitable Foundation shared the following suggested practices for moving an internship program and other employment and career engagement opportunities for youth to a virtual environment. You can view the full conversation [here](#) or consider some of these best practices when moving your work-based learning experience from in-person to online.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN:

- Think long-term don't just react to a momentary need. Try to build a program that can last but will be adaptable to changing situations.
- Build political will and trust with community leaders so that if you need to make a shift, they are confident you can accomplish it.
- Adapt your thinking: there's nothing that can't be done if you think outside the box.
- Remember: it's a process of lifelong learning, not about training for a specific job so what skills can you help someone learn?
- Adopt a flexible attitude: Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good—know that it won't be perfect and be willing to pivot when something doesn't work.

BEGINNING STAGES:

- Make sure internal staff is onboard and can manage the change you are proposing. Ask for help from partners, funders, and other collaborators if you don't have what you need internally. Look around your internal teams and give staff permission to lean on their strengths even if they fall outside of their job description.
- Coordinate with your partners and supporters so you don't have to do everything yourself.
- If needed, inform funders of your desire to shift the model and get their buy-in.
- Think through things from the student perspective and build from there—this opportunity should be about their learning experience and filling your business need is secondary.
 - » Which of your partners could provide a lunch and learn opportunity for young people?
 - » Do board members or staff have interest in hosting informational interviews and/or sharing their educational and career pathways?
 - » How will young people engage with each other in a virtual setting?



EXECUTION

- Keep programs relevant by including the student voice in both planning and execution.
- Don't lower standards for students but have realistic expectations about what they can and should achieve in a virtual environment.
- Structure your program—don't just wing it.
- Carefully think through your onboarding procedures.
- Map out projects and deliverables.
- Line-up mentors who can help students learn, grow and navigate the working world.
- Think through how you will engage young people throughout their program.
- Set up ways to measure program success.
 - » Possible Measures:
 - Are students engaged?
 - Are they getting skills they couldn't learn in a book?
 - Are they building relationships?
- Technology may present challenges for youth and program management. Think through these potential issues and how you will overcome them in advance.
 - » Do students participating in your program have access to a computer and reliable Internet/WiFi? Is there funding available to help overcome any gaps in access or are there any partners who can help?
 - » Will young people have access to business email, files, servers, or other resources they will need to effectively work remotely?
 - » What facilitation tool(s) will you use to engage students during their program (Zoom, GoToMeeting, FaceTime, etc.)? Providing opportunities for face-to-face communication is a critical component for successful relationship development.

