County of Santa Clara

Social Services Agency

353 West Julian Street
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DATE: 10/29/21

TO: Board of Supervisors
          Jeffrey V. Smith, M.D., J.D., County Executive

SUBJECT: **Off-Agenda Report on Intern & Earn Program - Updates and Lessons Learned**

At the September 23, 2021, Children, Seniors, and Families Committee (CSFC) meeting, a report was provided by the Social Services Agency (SSA), Department of Employment and Benefits Services (DEBS), relating to the County of Santa Clara's Intern & Earn (I&E) 1.0 and 2.0 programs (Item No.11). Upon receiving the report, Supervisor Chavez requested staff provide an off-agenda report, containing updates, outcomes, and lessons learned at the conclusion of the second I&E 2.0 program cohort that was scheduled to end on September 24, 2021; additionally, staff was asked to propose how this information, as well as participant feedback, could be incorporated into future opportunities.

Background

The County of Santa Clara's I&E programs support SSA's mission of serving and empowering the County's youth by providing career exploration opportunities through positive employment experiences. The goal of these programs is to offer youth fixed-term subsidized job placements, while simultaneously promoting post-secondary education enrollment and completion, as a way to facilitate skill development, career advancement, and social connections to ultimately lead participants toward gainful employment. This program is separated into two groups labeled I&E 1.0, which is designed for low-income and disadvantaged youth, including foster youth; and I&E 2.0, which currently is solely focused on foster youth. Each of these sections is further grouped into cohorts that run for a specified duration of time.

Intern & Earn 1.0

The I&E 1.0 program serves eligible youth from the CalFresh, CalWORKs, and Foster Care programs and allows participants to work as interns at local non-profit agencies, private businesses, and County departments that provide career and work opportunities. I&E 1.0 was initially a summer internship model; however, due to the local impacts of COVID-19, which included diminished employers' worksite capacity, the program was converted to a year-round quarterly model where cohorts are provided additional opportunities beyond the summer months.

Intern & Earn 2.0

The I&E 2.0 program launched in September 2020 and ran through September 2021. I&E 2.0 served a total of thirty foster youth in two cohorts of 15 participants each, with a goal of providing participants with opportunities and resources that would enable them to secure employment, enroll in and attend post-secondary education, and/or both. Each cohort offered youth six-month internship opportunities within non-profit organizations, private businesses, and County departments. The service population targeted by I&E 2.0 were foster youth, ages 18 to 24, who were not working or enrolled in school. Participants were able to earn $16.50 per hour and work up to 30 hours per week.

Intern & Earn 2.0 Cohort Updates

<u>Cohort 1</u> – Cohort 1 was served from September 2020 through March 2021. 15 youth participated in the first cohort. Upon completion, program staff conducted regular check-ins with youth during the internship cycle and again 30-, 60-, and 90-days after the internship ended. A report updating progress on this cohort was received by the committee during the June 24, 2021, CSFC meeting (Item No. 16), and additional information was provided at the September 23, 2021, CSFC meeting (Item No. 11).
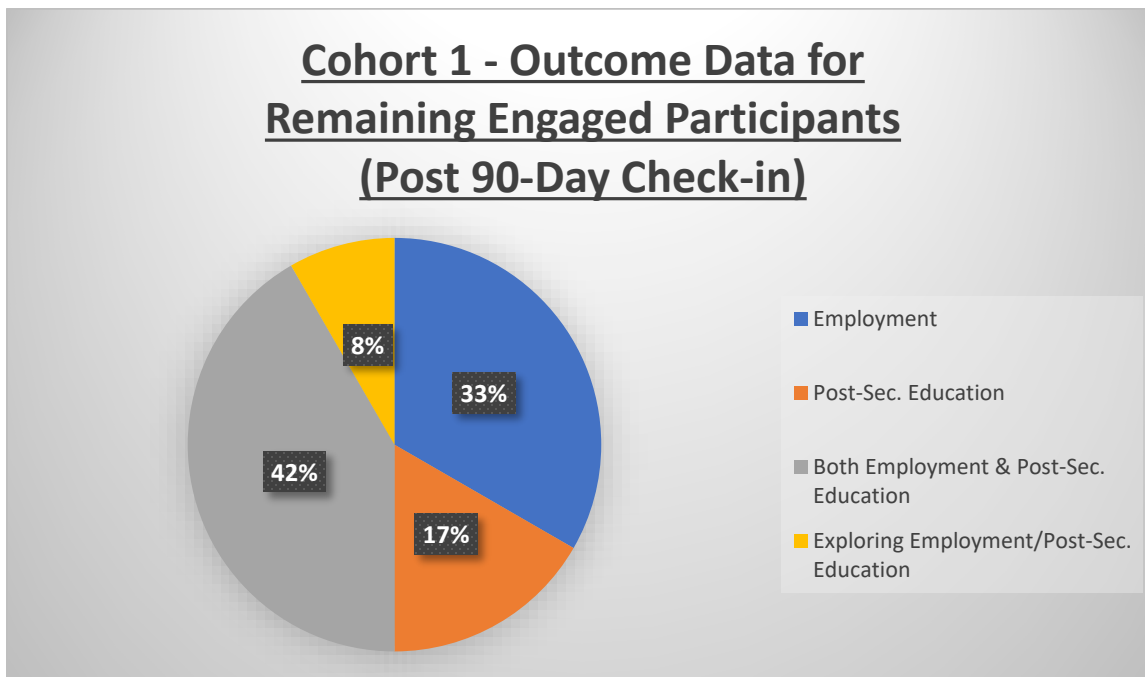
Outcomes

As previously reported, most youth from Cohort 1 were initially enrolled in post-secondary education (40%) or were exploring their options (47%) when they started the internship program. At the last check-in, 90-days after the internship concluded, two participants relocated outside of Santa Clara County and were seeking employment offers while one participant relocated outside of California for educational opportunities. Of the remaining engaged participants, the majority of youth reported that they are now connected to employment (33%) or both employed and enrolled in post-secondary education (42%). Participant outcome data can be found in Table 1.1 below, and Chart 1.1 is a visual representation of outcome data for participants who remained engaged in the program.

Table 1.1:

	Cohort 1 - Outcome Data (Remaining Engaged Participants – 90-Day Check-in)					
	Employment	Post-Secondary Education	Both Employment & Post-Secondary Education	Exploring Employment /Post-Secondary Education	Disconnected (Relocated)	Totals
Baseline	1	6	1	7	0	15
Exit	6	5	2	2	0	15
30-day	6	5	2	2	0	15
60-day	5	4	2	1	3	12

90-day	4	2	5	1	3	12
% - Based on those remaining engaged participants being tracked at 90-day check-in	33%	17%	42%	8%	0%	80%

Chart 1.1:

Cohort 1 - Outcome Data for Remaining Engaged Participants (Post 90-Day Check-in)

- Employment
- Post-Sec. Education
- Both Employment & Post-Sec. Education
- Exploring Employment/Post-Sec. Education

Cohort 2 – Cohort 2 began their session in March 2021 and concluded their internships September 2021. The session began with a full roster of 15 interns who were enrolled in, and finished, a four-week introductory soft skills workshop, with trainings designed to prepare participants to transition into the on-the-job internship. To successfully complete the program, interns pursuing employment and/or who were engaged in post-secondary education, were responsible for completing work experience requirements and all other internship duties.

Outcomes

As previously noted in the September report, the worksite requirements proved to be a barrier for three interns enrolled in this cohort as each prematurely ended the internship portion of the program due to medical barriers, one of which continued to pursue a path toward education. Of note, one of the three participants who disconnected early, did so as a result of being placed on maternity leave, and the other participant disconnected from the program entirely. The remaining 12 participants were expected to complete the internship portion and then either transition to a permanent job and/or pursue an

educational opportunity. However, before the end of the program one additional participant prematurely ended the program, citing the internship work experience requirement was too challenging to complete alongside his studies. The participant instead decided to prioritize education over the job requirement of the internship. This participant, as is the case with one of the other participants who ended the program early due to medical barriers, continues to be connected to post-secondary education without the internship component attached. So, although these two participants did not complete the program, the outcome of connecting them with post-secondary education was successful.

Data Collection and Analysis

To evaluate the program's outcomes, data was collected from Cohort 2 at the beginning, at closing, and again with a post-program follow-up query. These data elements, as seen in Table 2.1, Table 2.2, and Table 2.3 below, along with the post-internship surveys that were administered at the conclusion of the session, were analyzed to provide evidence of the program's overall impact and effectiveness. At the end of the session 73% of participants completed the program with four having disconnected or who were unresponsive to contact attempts; two of whom, again, even though did not complete the work requirement of the internship, are still connected to post-secondary education.

Entry Data

As with Cohort 1, at the beginning of the session youth from Cohort 2 were mostly said to be enrolled in post-secondary education (40%) or were exploring their options (53%) only one participant was both employed and pursuing post-secondary education (7%). See Table 2.1 for data and Chart 2.1 below for a visual representation of participant activity at the start of the session.

Table 2.1:

Cohort 2 - Entry Data					
	Employment	Post-Secondary Education	Both Employment & Post-Secondary Education	Exploring Employment/Post-Secondary Education	Totals
Baseline	0	6	1	8	15
%	0%	40%	7%	53%	100%

Chart 2.1:

Cohort 2 - Program Entry (Application)

- 0%
- 40%
- 53%
- 7%

Legend:
- ■ Employment:
- ■ Post-Sec. Education:
- ■ Both Employment & Post-Sec. Education:
- ■ Exploring Employment/Post-Sec. Education:
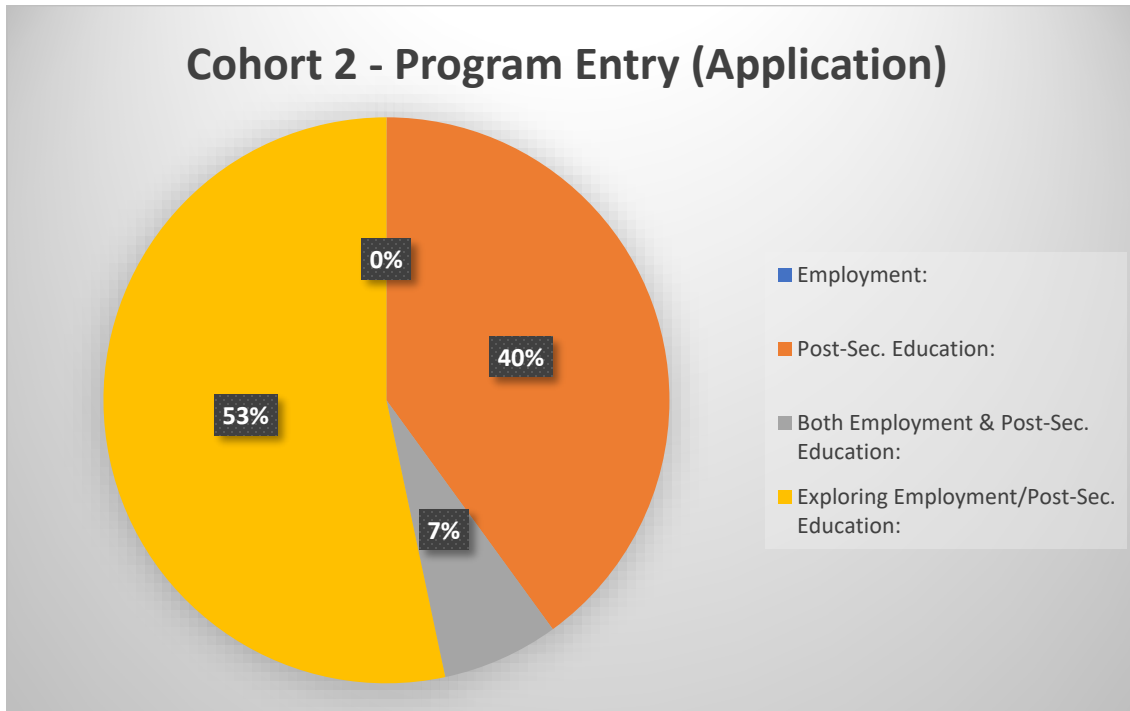
Exit Data

At the time that the session ended, two participants had newly acquired employment and one participant maintained active status in both employment and education. In addition, two participants who were previously exploring options finished the internship session and were actively engaged in pre-screening for employment. 47% were either employed, enrolled in post-secondary education, or were both employed and enrolled in post-secondary education. 73% were engaged in some type of activity at the conclusion of the session. See Table 2.2 for data and Chart 2.2 below for a visual representation of participant activity.

Table 2.2:

Cohort 2 - Exit Data						
	Employment	Post-Secondary Education	Both Employment & Post-Secondary Education	Exploring Employment/Post-Secondary Education	Ended Program - Disconnected	Totals
Program Entrance	0	6	1	8	0	15

Change	+2	-2	0	-4	+4	-4
Program Exit	2	4	1	4	4	11
%	13%	27%	6%	27%	27%	73%

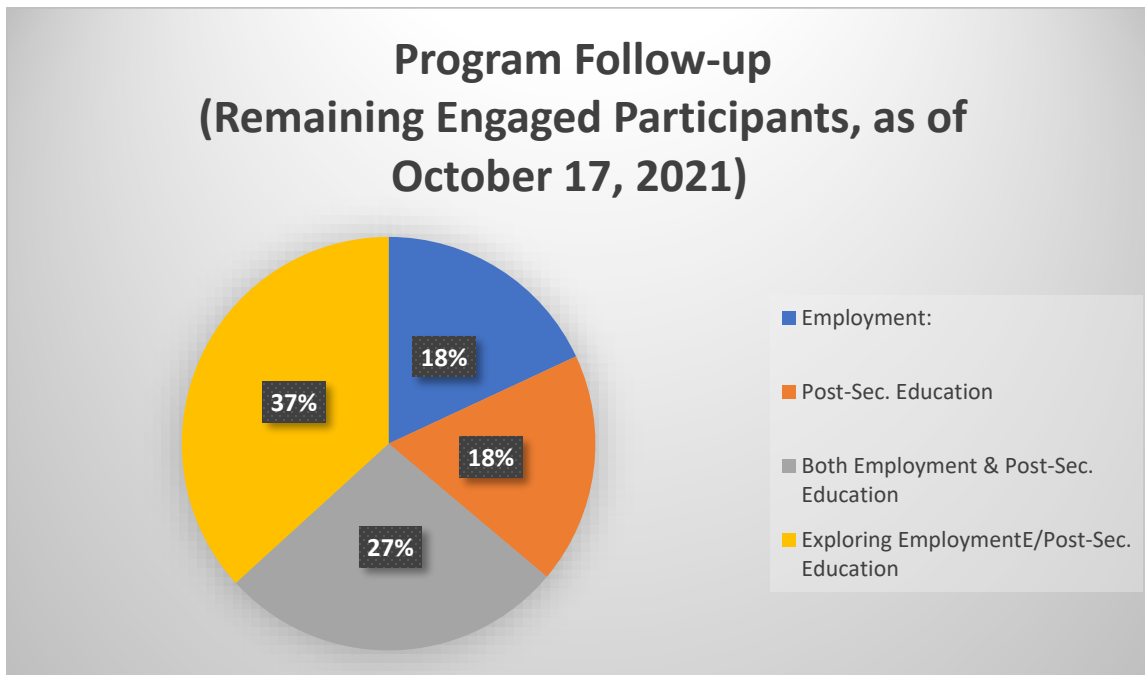Chart 2.2:
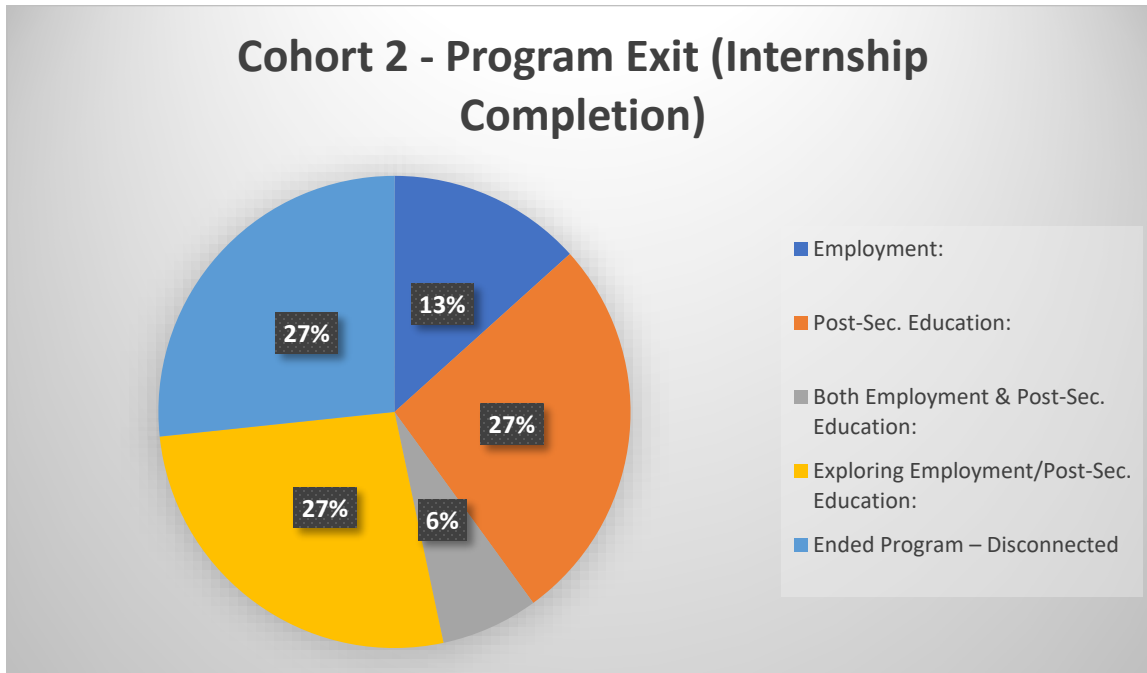
Follow-up Data

During the first check-in with participants after the internship session had concluded, one of the participants who was actively engaged in pre-screening for employment and who had been scheduled for a polygraph test informed staff that the exam was successfully completed, and a start date will be forthcoming from the Human Resources department. The other participant who was actively engaged in pre-screening for employment received an October 20 start date to begin work with the Santa Clara County Office of Education (SCCOE). Of note, the internship follow-up cycle is typically scheduled to occur 30-, 60-, and 90-days after the internship has ended; however, this follow-up was conducted to ensure the most accurate and current data is being presented in this report. The normal cycle will continue as planned and additional data will be collected based on these future check-ins with Cohort 2 participants. See Table 2.3 for data and Chart 2.3 below for a visual representation of the updates to participant activity occurring after the completion of Cohort 2.

Table 2.3:

Cohort 2 – Follow-up Data (Remaining Engaged Participants, as of October 17, 2021)

	Employment	Post-Secondary Education	Both Employment & Post-Secondary Education	Exploring Employment/Post-Secondary Education	Ended Program - Disconnected	Totals
Program Exit	2	4	1	4	-4	11
Change	0	-2	+2	0	0	0
Follow-up	2	2	3	4	-4	11
% - Based on those remaining engaged participants being tracked at the first check-in	18%	18%	27%	37%	0%	73%

Chart 2.3:

Program Follow-up
(Remaining Engaged Participants, as of October 17, 2021)

18%
37%
18%
27%

- Employment:
- Post-Sec. Education
- Both Employment & Post-Sec. Education
- Exploring EmploymentE/Post-Sec. Education

Data Analysis

According to this updated information, 63% of the participants who remain engaged and fully completed the program are either employed, enrolled in post-secondary education, or actively have both employment and are enrolled in post-secondary education, and 37% of this population continue to be engaged in exploring their options in terms of both employment and post-secondary education. Based on these numbers, it can be

concluded that the program is meeting its desired goal at a rate of 63% of those who actively participated, with an overall participation rate of 73%.

Considering the evidence collected, there appears to be a direct connection between those participants who actively engage in the program and the likelihood they will have a successful outcome. For example, although it is a small sample size, two of the four participants who started the program by exploring both employment and post-secondary education disconnected and ended the program early, whereas the other two participants from the same initial category who actively participated in the program benefited by moving away from exploration and instead moved toward attaining employment.

This latest cohort can provide key insight into program successes and barriers which can be used to shape future planning and promote increased participation and completion. The key drivers of future success are as follows: participant feedback, a review of outcome trends, and reviewing best practices and lessons learned to expand future opportunities. The following sections explore these key drivers as they relate to Cohort 2.

Participant Feedback

Intern Reflections were gathered using a survey administered to participants at the conclusion of the session. Feedback was provided by participants in direct response to the following questions:

1. What has the overall Intern & Earn 2.0 program experience meant to you?
    o This internship helped me find my purpose in life: to spread healing and love to the world.
    o The financial stability for 6 months meant a lot to me.
    o It was the one thing in my life that was stable when everything else wasn't
    o It allowed me to stabilize my housing and improve my grades.
2. What did you learn about the world of work and/or your career path?
    o I had participated in I&E 1.0 twice before, but this internship exposed me to a more "mature job" and opened my mind to other career paths.
    o I was offered job opportunities at my worksite, but I didn't meet the education requirements. I'm currently focusing on earning my bachelor's degree so I can apply to those positions when I meet the requirements.
    o I like non-profits because you have the ability to wear many different hats and build/broaden your skillset.
    o There is a lot of reform that needs to happen in the child welfare system. The youth voice and perspective need to be incorporated more.
3. What did you learn about yourself?
    o I like being given responsibility and leadership roles. It's very motivating to feel my boss trusts me and the work I produce, it makes me rise to the occasion.
    o It's okay to come out of your shell and experience new opportunities.
    o I'm a really caring person, I used to think it was a weakness, but I have learned how to turn it into a strength in the career I want (social work).
4. What did you like about the program?
    o I met a lot of new people over Zoom and in-person at my worksite. I

created bonds with people I never thought I would.
- o I like the environment we created in our group. Everyone has been welcoming and it's reassuring to not feel so alone.
- o I was able to train I&E 1.0 interns at my worksite. I learned that I was good at teaching others, and I enjoy doing it.
- o I like how much we check-in with each other, there's a lot of unity and support.
- o I enjoyed the length of the program the most, if it had only been 8 weeks, I wouldn't have been able to showcase my skills like I did over 6 months.

5. What professional skills did you learn or improve during this internship?
- o The importance of being consistent at work and how to create a daily work routine.
- o How to separate home life from work life. Check your emotions at the door because it affects your co-workers.
- o How to carry myself professionally, with co-workers and frustrated clients/customers.
- o How to professionally resolve workplace conflict with the help of my supervisor.
- o How to talk to my supervisor if I have a problem or concern.

6. What is some advice you would give to future I&E 2.0 interns and/or fellow foster youth?
- o Ask questions to your supervisors and co-workers, make sure you understand your tasks/assignments and the rules/processes of the workplace.
- o No matter how hard it is in life just keep going because you're one step closer to being where you want to be in life.
- o Talk to your boss about job opportunities, your career goals, and your skills. You are your biggest advocate.

7. What is some advice you would give to future I&E 2.0 interns and/or fellow foster youth?
- o We (youth) can be picky about where we want to work but we have to remember the big picture: we need to keep the bills paid and everything you learn at a job you can take with you to a new job. Be open-minded, some jobs are steppingstones on our career paths.
- o Some career paths will take longer than others to reach your goal, don't expect to be hired for the top positions right away. Continue gaining experience and education if you need it, as long as you keep moving forward, you're on your way to reaching your goal.

8. Acknowledgements/Thanks/Anything else you'd like to share?
- o You helped me find my dream job!
- o Longer internships are amazing opportunities for older foster youth that need career guidance and job security.
- o Thank you to all of the Employment Counselors and my peers, you made this program easier and more relatable knowing I'm not alone.
- o The format of this internship program was a game-changer for me. This internship program will change future interns' lives.

Lessons Learned

To measure the success of any program it is important to begin each new session by looking at the lessons learned from previous sessions, then by establishing clearly defined goals and setting expectations, assigning activities where progress can be monitored, and determining where participants are at when they start the session to set a baseline. Then, to measure the success of the program the baseline is compared to outcomes to determine whether what was done worked and to identify any areas of improvement.

As noted above, information was collected using pre- and post-surveys, assigned activities were monitored throughout the session by dedicated Employment Counselors, and outcomes were reviewed and compared to baseline data. This information will be a critical component in the planning of Cohort 3 as well as other future cohorts. Cohort 3 will begin on January 3, 2022. Outreach and recruitment are currently underway to identify 15 participants for this upcoming cohort.

According to participant feedback and data collected as mentioned in the previous sections, many participant responses from the post-program survey were positive and related directly to workplace communication, professional development, and opportunities for growth through networking and mentorship. Other areas of interest to participants were, financial stability for a sustained period of time, the importance of education in acquiring high-level jobs, and personal growth. Each of these areas were mentioned as areas of strength, where the program is succeeding. This qualitative feedback ties in directly with the program's stated goals of offering youth fixed-term job placements, while promoting post-secondary education enrollment and completion, by offering opportunities for skill and personal development, career advancement, and social connections that will ultimately lead participants toward employment. In addition, these reflections match the intended outcomes as evidenced by the quantitative data that was collected and analyzed. These two components as seen together indicate the program is working as intended. However, although the outcomes match the feedback there is still work to be done to help more participants stay engaged and have positive and successful outcomes.

Process improvements are being discussed to strengthen the program and enhance its overall value to its constituents. For example, in order to include participant feedback into future iterations of the program it is important to see where Cohort 2 was at when the session ended so that some of the lessons learned can be frontloaded for Cohort 3 to help them to more fully engage and to identify, reduce, or eliminate barriers as early as possible.

A committee has been formed, whose members include a Program Manager; Program Administrator, Management and Data Analysts, Practitioners, Employment Counselors, and Program Evaluation staff, as well as one youth co-evaluator from y-PAR who have been brought together to review and improve upon methodologies currently being used to monitor and measure the health of the program, and to optimize data collection methods so information can be used to enrich and strengthen the program. The committee is constructed with a 360-degree model in mind, where the program activities and outcomes are intentional, and is designed by having all areas covered by a subject matter expert. Employment Counselors provide a view from the case management standpoint, program management and administrators help to operationalize the changes being suggested, the analysts help to track the data, and the evaluators use

the data to strategize and predict outcomes. One key member of the committee who should be highlighted is the youth co-evaluator. This member provides a unique lived-experience perspective to the planning process. This viewpoint helps to provide context and insight into what participants may be struggling with and barriers that may be inhibiting progress. The contribution by this member is invaluable. This committee is currently in discussion on developing strategies that will incorporate best practices and participant feedback obtained from this latest cohort into the planning for future cohorts.

The following are areas currently being discussed by the committee as having the potential for process improvements. Each is being evaluated to determine whether modifications or changes will enhance the overall participation rate and increase the program's completion rate, or what else might be necessary to better design the structure of Cohort 3's session. A revised Logic model has been developed to standardize the process and provide the road map for future cohorts. This model includes inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes. Further, it is used to outline growth potential and provides a framework to ensure the program stays on track and is making steady progress toward achieving the intended results. The logic model will include any potential updates being discussed and will incorporate the lessons learned and feedback provided by Cohort 2 participants. Areas being discussed for process improvements include:

- o Enhancing participant reporting, tracking, and monitoring methods and increase the frequency they are being used, from the start through completion – beginning with an intake interview and survey; conduct a midpoint survey as a check-in on progress and to identify what is going well, what are the pain points and other areas of concern; and conduct exit interviews to go along with the survey. Participant feedback mentioned the communication as being a key driver for success. Continuing with an open line of communication is a critical component, so our current mode of communication is to be reviewed to identify barriers and ensure they are removed.

- o Engaging in continuous quality improvement (CQI) when developing future survey questions. Questions could be used to uncover critical information that could further enhance future program planning and may help to uncover program deficiencies, for example – What can be improved? What were things you learned along the way that you wish you would have known when you started? Would you recommend this program to others, why, or why not? What was the most rewarding part of the experience? What was the least valuable part of the program? If you could make one change to the program, what would it be? These types of questions can be used to gain a deeper insight and a better understanding of the end-user experience, which can help to strengthen the program and will help to identify any blind spots the program administrators may have and uncover any barrier that participants may be facing.

- o Encouraging participant feedback by offering more opportunities to provide participant input, creating a feedback loop that could potentially include the onsite supervisor - this can help staff track and monitor engagement and participation in real time and allow staff the ability to identify early warning signs if there is an issue so corrections or changes can be made immediately to ensure an overall positive end-user experience.

- Internal tracking measures can be developed to monitor participant progress, as well as progress with the worksite placement match, to determine if it is a good fit, and to uncover any patterns that could point to barriers or limitations. If these tracking measures are determined to be necessary, plan to evaluate placement information to see if participants are more successful in one placement than in another. Why is this the case? Is the placement at this location the wrong match or are there limitations within the placement that were not previously recognized?

- Develop a clear, consistent, and standardized methodology for addressing unexpected issues as they come up, such as with extension requests, reasonable accommodations, ergonomic requests, family emergencies. Design contingencies to be pro-active rather than reactive when unexpected issues arise.

- Continue to encourage and actively look for mentoring opportunities where interns who have previously been involved in the program can be provided with the skills and leadership opportunities to assist new interns transition into their new roles.

- Program evolution is discussed as a standing agenda item, and items such as developing rules for the COVID vaccination requirement and exemption process are also discussion topics that are addressed at each meeting.

Summary

Overall, based on the evidence collected at the conclusion of Cohort 2 the session went well. There was an overall participation and completion rate of 73%, and by the end of the session several participants were engaged in employment (13%), post-secondary education (13%), or both (20%) for a total of 46% of participants meeting the program's stated goal. Another 13% did not complete the intern portion of the program; however, they did remain connected to post-secondary education. In addition, based on the feedback received it was an overall positive experience, with 63% of participants who were actively engaged and completed the program having met the employment and post-secondary education goals by the first check-in after the session had ended. The lessons learned from this cohort will be used as building blocks for future cohorts. With each new cohort, the continued focus will be on achieving successful short- medium- and long-term outcomes by meeting standardized goals and providing a positive participant experience through efforts of continuous quality improvement. This will call for the constant and continuous examination and reexamination of processes to identify strengths and uncover areas that can be improved upon. As additional data continues to be gathered over the next few cohorts, the collection of data can be used together in a cumulative way to better identify, define, and assess areas of strength and areas that may require adjustment or fine tuning.

c: Chief Board Aides
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       James R. Williams, County Counsel
       Tiffany Lennear, Acting Clerk of the Board