



HERE TO HERE

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What's Next?

The Promise of Remote Internships
in the Future of Work-Based Learning

PRACTICE BRIEF

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About this Report

This report is designed to encapsulate the perspectives of remote internship program providers and participants based on their experiences during the summer of 2020. Remote internship programs were created in response to the limitations imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, and HERE to HERE felt it was important to document the learnings from the summer. With this report, we hope to inform future remote programming and make the case for remote internship programs to continue to be part of the work-based learning toolkit, even after in-person opportunities are once again viable. HERE to HERE supports the providers and participants who informed this report in their desire to make high quality work-based learning opportunities as accessible and impactful as possible, including remote, in-person, and hybrid internship models.



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Introduction

In the lead up to the summer of 2020, with the Covid-19 pandemic causing unimaginable harm to New York City, the Mayor sought to ease the fiscal pain caused by the crisis — and manage the city’s public health response — by eliminating the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP). This decision impacted approximately 75,000 young people who would be missing out on an opportunity to gain work experience and earn extra income for their family during the summer. Ultimately, due to pressure from advocates, the City restored nearly half of those slots for remote SYEP experiences. By the time the City announced the partial restoration of SYEP, several organizations had stepped into the void and put together programs that would provide young people with valuable remote internship opportunities.

Key Findings

The participants, providers, and other stakeholders that brought these programs to life deserve credit for ensuring that young people were still able to engage in internship and work-based learning opportunities over the summer of 2020. In doing so, they have provided a template for how we can engage in this kind of work during the remainder of the pandemic. Perhaps more importantly, it has shown how we might leverage technology and provide more opportunities — and more innovation — to the conventional set of work-based learning offerings even as things return to normal. In our research, ***we found that remote internship programs were of significant benefit to participants. Providers and young people see value in continuing to engage in virtual work-based learning experiences, whether they are necessitated by factors such as the pandemic or not.*** Rather than substituting for in-person experiences as they did during the summer, remote opportunities should be added to the existing set of work-based learning offerings. Later in this report, we discuss some of the areas for which remote experiences are particularly promising and could be prioritized.

HERE to HERE was among the organizations committed to ensuring that young people in the Bronx would still be able to participate in summer learning and work and accrue many of the benefits that in-person work-based learning experiences are designed to offer. Building off our work identifying the essential elements of work-based learning in multiple settings — the Key Distinguishers of Work-based Learning¹ — we developed a similar set of standards for virtual internship and project-based learning experiences.²

HERE to HERE issued a request-for-proposals (RFP) including a requirement that applicants address how they would adhere to the Key Distinguishers in their virtual summer internship programs. Funding — through the Bronx Community Relief Effort — was awarded to five community-based organizations (CBOs) with program offerings ranging from career exploration to public health initiatives, to a computer-aided design (CAD) competition.³

Additional summer programs receiving funding from the Bronx Community Relief Effort joined these five programs to form a community of practice so that organizations could collectively address any challenges they were facing and discuss best practices.⁴ Conversations with and between providers, as well as a series of focus groups with program participants, inform this report. The outline for this report along with key findings are below.

I. Remote internships offer many of the same benefits to participants as in-person experiences, and have unique value.

- Participants were able to grow both transferable and occupation-specific skills depending on the program they were involved in. Young people frequently cited improving their communication and collaboration skills as a benefit of their program.
- Remote internships allowed students to build a set of skills that are particularly important in remote settings, but are increasingly valued and necessary in in-person workplace settings including collaborating using Google docs and creating online presentations.

II. Participants and providers believe students should continue having access to remote opportunities, even in a post-pandemic world.

- For participants, some of the primary benefits of the remote internship model include the convenience and flexibility that they afford.
- Providers feel that remote experiences are a way to open up opportunities to more young people, and to innovate in ways that in-person opportunities don't always allow, including during the school year.
- While remote experiences could be utilized for a variety of work-based learning activities moving forward, there is particular promise in remote experiences for career exploration, project-based learning, and efforts to address the needs of local communities.

III. Standards of practice — such as HERE to HERE's Key Distinguishers — are critical supports for effective work-based learning programs.

- Many of the potential challenges of remote work-based learning experiences were mitigated because providers and other stakeholders were aligned on common standards of practice before the experiences began.

- Among the areas highlighted by the Key Distinguishers that proved valuable to participants and providers were ensuring technology needs were met, and fostering connections between participants and their peers, mentors, and industry professionals.

Summary of Recommendations

HERE to HERE proposes the following recommendations to increase the prevalence and improve the quality of work-based learning, with remote internships as an important addition to the toolbox of work-based learning activities:

- Develop more opportunities for credited remote internships through high school/ community-based organization (CBO) partnerships that occur during the school-year and during school hours
- Ensure high quality by utilizing standards of practice such as HERE to HERE's Key Distinguishers
- Clarify the role of schools and providers, including the settings in which specific knowledge and competencies should be gained
- Enable students to build on their summer experiences by facilitating participation in related courses or programs, including those they may not typically have access to
- Ensure schools and CBOs have capacity to support a range of participant needs

The remainder of this report discusses the key themes that emerged from our research on the summer's remote internship programs as well as implications for the future of work-based learning.

Remote Internships Offer Many of the Same Benefits to Participants as In-Person Experiences, and Have Unique Value

Young people cited a number of benefits from their participation in virtual internships over the summer. While there were elements of the in-person experience that participants regretted not having, the virtual internships were able to offer many of the same elements as in-person experiences. By nature of being remote, participants were also able to develop computer and online skills that will be valuable across settings. This suggests that while in-person experiences retain tremendous value, particularly for certain types of experiences, there are other types of opportunities where a remote internship can be nearly as beneficial and even hold distinct advantages to the in-person model. Below, we discuss the broad areas in which participants experienced the greatest benefits from the summer's remote internships.

Virtual Internships Helped Young People Plan for the Future

HERE to HERE believes that work-based learning — specifically, the career exploration aspect — should help students gain various types of knowledge throughout their secondary school experience in order to make informed postsecondary choices. First, students should have an opportunity to learn about themselves: what are their interests and aptitudes? Secondly, students should gain an understanding of the labor market: what kinds of industries and occupations align with their interests; how much do different job types pay; which fields are most in-demand? And finally, students should learn about the steps they would need to take to pursue a career in a given field: does a particular occupation typically require a college degree; what field of study should one pursue to work in a certain industry; what kind of skills and credentials does one need to acquire? With this knowledge, students can make more informed choices about the types of opportunities they pursue as they get older, and the specific occupational skills they should focus on.

Several of the virtual internship programs funded by HERE to HERE and The Bronx Community Relief Effort included a career exploration component. Providers, using online tools, exercises and activities,

“This was the first internship where it was trying to prepare for my future. I feel like this program was very beneficial...Before I didn't have a sense of what I wanted for my career and the future; I have a sense now because of the program.”

—Remote Internship Participant

and facilitation from supervisors and mentors, were able to work with students so that they could learn about their interests, careers, and the necessary steps to enter into different industries and occupations.

“The career exploration program actually made me look more into the things I need to do, the goals I need in order to be successful in the career path I want to go for. Also, learning about other careers — it made me feel like that’s not the only choice I have. I really enjoyed it because I got to learn more about my strengths and weaknesses and the things I have to work for every day, the goals I want to reach to become a better person in many aspects.”

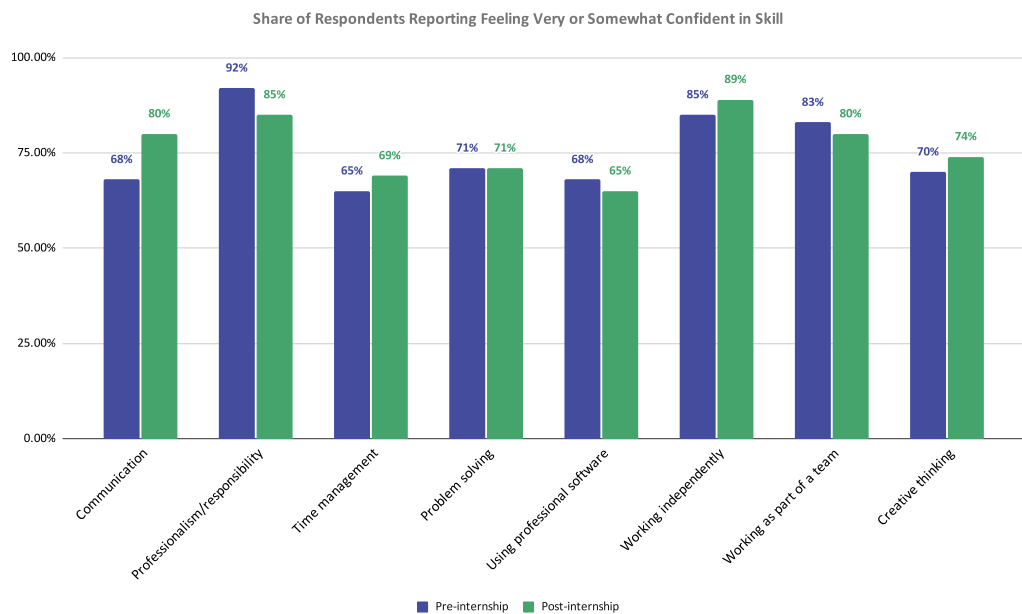
— *Remote internship participant*

“Now I know what education, training and certification requirements I would need to get to the place I want to be for the careers I want to do.”

— *Remote internship participant*

Participants Were Able to Build Skills

HERE to HERE believes that early internship experiences, in particular, are where young people should be gaining transferable skills that are necessary across industries. Whether they were in programs geared toward broader career exploration, or an experience connected to a specific industry such as digital media or advanced manufacturing, remote internship participants were able to gain meaningful skills during their experience. These skills, including communication, time-management, professionalism, and teamwork were all cited by young people as being benefits of their participation in virtual internships. In the chart below, we see that communication was the skill in which participants appear to have exhibited the greatest growth.⁵



Many participants also received training on specific occupational skills that, in many cases, can transfer across industries. Participants at the Educational Video Center learned how to produce and edit videos; at Duro, young people used computer-aided design (CAD) to create new products and pitch those products to industry professionals. In other programs, young people gained experience in public health strategies and outreach or coding and web design.

"I was able to learn different things with editing, and things related to videography and media. I also learned how to work as a team member. I'm so glad that I did this."

— *Remote internship participant*

Remote Internships Offer Unique Skill Development Opportunities

By nature of being remote, virtual internships also taught students a set of skills that are particularly important in remote settings, but are increasingly valued and necessary across workplace settings. Virtual internships provided experience to participants in using online meeting platforms such as Zoom, using social media and digital design tools, working collaboratively in Google documents, conducting online research, and presenting for an online audience. Even before the pandemic, these are skills that were increasing in value to employers, and are certain to be of importance even when most work is not being conducted remotely.

"It helped me build my communication skills. My last internship I had to present to members of the New York City Department of Education. This job also helped with my communication skills and knowledge for how to do things over Zoom. The skills from the last internship transferred and I could build upon them."

— *Remote internship participant*

Participants Were Able to Develop Valuable Relationships

Research points to the importance of social capital — one's network of relationships and personal connections — as well as the difficulty many young people of color from low-income communities face in accessing opportunities that expand their professional networks.⁶ In addition to helping young people develop their skills, internships and other forms of work-based learning can create meaningful connections between young people and their peers, supervisors and mentors, and industry professionals.

Without intentional efforts on the part of providers, there is a possibility for remote internships to feel isolating for participants. Some young people we heard from did report feeling isolated, and would have enjoyed more opportunities to engage with their peers outside of the professional context. In other cases, participants felt isolated initially, but, as they became more comfortable with the

technology, were able to create and utilize spaces for engagement with their peers. Most participants we heard from said they were able to experience social connections, thanks to the structure of programs that included doing work in teams, utilizing breakout rooms and online communications platforms, and creating spaces for casual conversations.

“You would see in the Discord [online communication platform] channels, students helping each other, and that really created some bonds. And we have students who are saying that they have made lifelong friends, and this program really helped to build their self esteem. Ultimately the most powerful force in a teenagers life is peer pressure, and because their peers are all pressuring them to get their projects done, it really created this spiral upward effect where people are pitching in where they could to support each other’s project.”

— *Remote internship provider*

“We would get together and do a debate style conversation where we would introduce topics and it would get everyone out of their shell to go back and forth, to interact with people from other cohorts, people they didn’t see every day, who weren’t in their particular breakout rooms... They loved the debates. It took away pressure from having to do the task that was assigned. But everything related back to the issues they were researching.”

— *Remote internship provider*

Students in remote internships were also assigned mentors with whom they could address issues and come to for advice. Participants and providers both found the mentors to be vitally important, so much so that some providers wish they had empowered their mentors with even more responsibility. Mentors were typically most helpful with issues related to participant engagement, but some providers felt they could also be utilized as sources of information for participants on stipends and other logistics. Some programs recruited college students to be mentors for participants in their program. These types of arrangements were beneficial not only to program participants, but to the mentors themselves.

“I had a mentor meeting every Friday. Every time I had a problem she would go over it with me and I would learn some new things.”

— *Remote internship participant*

“I was thinking the mentors were going to do something specific; in the end, mentors were helping with everything. Once [a participant] makes the connection with somebody, then they think it’s the whole package. We can’t limit the roles of the mentors going forward.”

— *Remote internship provider*

Despite the remote nature of the summer’s internships, young people were still able to make professional connections, and several providers we heard from actually noted that it was easier to secure guest speakers and other professionals to engage with program participants in a virtual setting. Participants spoke highly of their exposure to guest speakers and opportunities to interview industry professionals.

"[I liked] interviewing professionals that are in the field already and people that are successful. From the interviews, I could see the different steps they took to get to the point where they are now and how important it is to spread your network and let people know what you're doing."

— *Remote internship participant*

"I liked how every Wednesday there was a guest speaker talking about their career, because it opened our eyes about careers we didn't know about. We learned about etiquette, being professional — it really helped me become a more professional person. I can use that in the future for job interviews and meeting with new people."

— *Remote internship participant*

Remote Internships Enabled Participants to Have Meaningful Impacts on Their Community

The summer's remote internships programs provided many participants with opportunities to positively impact their community, something that the young people we heard from appreciated a great deal. With the COVID-19 pandemic and issues of racial injustice particularly impacting the communities where many participants live, the virtual internships offered an opportunity for young people to meaningfully contribute to the response and dialogue focused on these social, economic, and health crises. At H.E.R.O. High, for example, students conducted outreach to community members to ensure their basic needs were being met and direct them to vital resources when appropriate. Participants in the Mentoring in Medicine program created public health messages across a range of formats to ensure community residents had accurate information on the pandemic. And at the Educational Video Center, students studied and created videos about the Black Lives Matter movement and related issues impacting their community. Many of the students expressed that they felt it was important to work on these kinds of issues, and view work within the community differently than they had prior to their internship.

"There is a stigma around community work and now I see community work as something more meaningful to me because it helps people and communities that need that help. Community service is something that not a lot of people love to do. I see it now as something that can make a big impact. You're really helping the community and you get a chance to reflect on how to help the community and how to do better as a person."

— *Remote internship participant*

"It helped me figure out something I'm really interested in — helping my community and finding ways to solve current issues that have a great impact on us. It helped me realize I can make a difference and I can do something that can help and benefit others."

— *Remote internship participant*

Participants Wanted to Build on their Remote Experience

Participants in remote internships over the summer expressed a strong desire to build on the work they did in the summer, and providers and schools were eager to create opportunities for young people to do so. According to one provider:

“Students kept on saying, “What’s next?” So we developed something next. We have approximately 30 virtual labs dealing with misinformation when it comes to Covid-19. Now students are super excited to go from a virtual lab to a physical lab. Students are going back to their schools and getting leadership at their schools to allow them to create a DNA lab. That was a nice surprise. It’s really about what’s next and building in continuity; that’s something that we could have thought of before but now we have put in place and it’s creating a level of momentum that we didn’t initially expect.”

— *Remote internship provider*

Students were also interested in taking courses during the school year that helped them build on their summer experiences — and to have project-based learning integrated into their classes — but such classes are often not available. Providers see the value of carrying the summer’s work into the school year, but recognize that there is not often time and space to do so in a meaningful way.

“I would like to add on to what I learned in the summer, build more experience with it. I would like to take a class that builds off of my experience in the summer, make my experience better, and make my resume better. There aren’t classes in my school that would allow me to do that.”

— *Remote internship participant*

There is clearly an interest in having young people build on their summer experiences during the school year. It is worth taking a closer look at the obstacles that prevent this from occurring more naturally, and examining how students, educators, and providers can work together to make these opportunities more widely available.

Participants and Providers Believe Students Should Continue Having Access to Remote Opportunities, Even in a Post-Pandemic World

I feel like school should include more career exploration so students could have an idea of why they want to go to college. We should have more career exploration because not all careers involve college; it's better to tell students about different careers so they know what to do.

—Remote Internship Participant

The students and providers we heard from overwhelmingly support the idea of continuing to utilize remote internships even when circumstances allow for in-person experiences to resume. While there is recognition that in-person experiences provide value that can be difficult to replace, and not all types of experiences can be transitioned to a remote setting, there are many aspects of work-based learning that can be completed remotely or through a hybrid model. We found that there is particular promise in the remote format for career exploration, project-based learning, and efforts to address the needs of local communities. Ideally, such opportunities would not only be implemented by individual schools and CBOs, but would become part of the planning and program offerings of the City's relevant agencies [i.e. Department of Youth and Community Development, Department of Education, etc.]. One possible approach is to position remote experiences in the areas mentioned above as the primary option for younger students to gain foundational skills, before moving on to more advanced, in-person opportunities as they progress through high school.

For participants, some of the primary benefits of the remote internship model include convenience and flexibility. Young people mentioned that having a remote experience that allowed them to complete the work on their own time meant that they could participate in other experiences or part-time work that the more rigid structure of an in-person experience would not allow. Additionally, many young people are simply not able to take advantage of some opportunities that are not easily accessible or would require lengthy commutes. This is a particularly relevant point considering that many employers — particularly in certain industries of interest — are less geographically accessible to residents of low-income communities of color for whom such experiences can be especially beneficial. The remote internship mitigates these scheduling, access, and transportation issues.

“Virtual internships would be really helpful during the school year; it would be helpful for us because we’re doing school and we’re also exploring our careers for what we want to do in the future.”

— *Remote internship participant*

“We do need virtual internships because it would be much easier for us. Sometimes we can't go to certain places, we might have to do things at home. To do them online, it's going to be better for people who don't have a lot of time.”

— *Remote internship participant*

Many young people are particularly eager to engage in more active career exploration while in school, something that could be done remotely and incorporated into a school's curriculum.

Providers also recognized several benefits of the remote model, including being able to offer a greater number and more varied opportunities. We mentioned earlier that some providers found it easier to secure guest speakers and other professionals to engage with program participants. Providers also appreciated that there was more room for them to innovate, including in the ways they shared information and resources with participants. This was particularly useful if a participant missed a session; the remote format made it much easier for the participant to access relevant materials or even view the entire session if it was recorded.

“[The remote model] creates additional ways to get access to work-based learning opportunities. It increases the volume of experiences that can be offered. It's an opportunity to innovate; there are outside the box things we can do as a result of the virtual setting to take into next year.”

— *Remote internship provider*

Standards of Practice — Such as HERE to HERE's Key Distinguishers — are Critical Supports for Effective Work-Based Learning Programs

HERE to HERE's Key Distinguishers, which outlines the essential elements of high quality work-based learning programs, were utilized by many providers in their program design and planning. This allowed providers to prepare for and mitigate many of the challenges that were expected from the quick pivot to remote internships. The success of the summer's programs underscores the importance of having clear standards and expectations, such as those outlined by the Key

Distinguishers. Below, we look at some of the areas in which the Key Distinguishers helped address potential challenges and ensure participants were getting the most out of their experience.

Technology Needs Must be Met

The most basic challenge for any young person seeking to engage in a remote experience is access to the necessary technology. At a minimum, participants needed a computer and reliable Internet access to properly engage in their internship [along with a suitable working environment at home]. Internet access is an issue in many low-income communities in New York City, with nearly 1 in 4 households in some districts lacking home Internet access.⁷

The challenges of hardware and Internet access were substantially mitigated by the work of the Bronx Community Relief Effort, which provided laptops and Wi-Fi hotspots to Bronx high schools to be distributed to students. As a result of these efforts, challenges around technology were relatively scarce. The Key Distinguishers also guide providers to ensure that technology needs are met, including both access to necessary equipment and training in relevant platforms or software.

Some students did report having occasional problems with their computers or Internet access, but were able to communicate with supervisors and mentors within their programs to troubleshoot issues as they arose. This underscores the importance of having clear expectations of providers related to meeting technology needs; providing training on how to use necessary technology and digital tools; and ensuring that participants have regular touch points where they can raise issues, all of which are highlighted in the Key Distinguishers. Employers who participate in work-based learning programs should also consider using any public funds they receive toward student technology needs.

Encouraging Participant Engagement is Necessary, but Complicated

The Key Distinguishers also point to the importance of virtual programs fostering connections — between participants and their peers, supervisors, mentors, and industry professionals. In order for these connections to occur, participants must be actively involved and engaged in the sessions. As mentioned earlier, providers utilized various methods to promote participant engagement, and most of the young people we heard from felt like they were able to make connections with peers, program staff, and professionals. However, the remote setting did mean it could be difficult to ensure that all participants were sufficiently engaged. The ability for a participant to “roll out of bed” and keep their camera off was a challenge for some providers. At the same time, providers were cognizant of the many legitimate reasons a young person might have for keeping their camera off — including Internet bandwidth issues — or otherwise not engaging as much as would be desirable. Providers we heard from recognized the importance of meeting the young people where they were, and working with them to encourage greater engagement while being understanding of their unique situations. As one provider put it, “How might we honor students’ circumstances, but on the flip side, how do we navigate how important the social/community aspect is.” Tools to foster participant engagement

must be utilized throughout the program, from working to align experiences with student interests to having mentors who can work individually with a participant on challenges they may be facing.

Providers Need Support in Helping Students Address Challenges

Providers recognize the importance of offering support to program participants that will help them overcome any challenges they may be facing in succeeding in their internship, as outlined by the Key Distinguishers. Having designated mentors in addition to supervisors, instructors, or facilitators can go a long way in addressing participant needs. However, there are a variety of challenges a young person may be dealing with, and providers — even with mentors — may not have the capacity or resources to offer the appropriate assistance. Providers mentioned that it was challenging for just one or two people to offer students the various types of support they needed. The Thinkubator — a CBO in the Bronx that offers innovative work-based learning models — partnered with local social work graduate school programs to secure interns who could help with student engagement, but also serve as a resource to support health and wellness for program participants. DreamYard partnered with CUNY to hire college-age mentors for participants in their summer program.

Experiences Should Be Aligned with Student Interests and Promote Youth Voice

The Key Distinguishers call on programs to make sure internship experiences are aligned with student interests. For the summer’s virtual internships, providers in many cases administered surveys to gauge student interests and allow them to select specific program components. For many students, this was their second opportunity to provide input into what their internship experience would entail. Before being matched to a site, students were provided descriptions of the various internship programs that were available and asked to rank their preferences. Most students we heard from received their first, or in some cases, second choice of internship site. The ability for students to select from several internship programs, and then make selections about the nature of their experience, helped participants get the most out of their internship opportunities. As one participant put it:

“I like the format of us getting to choose...what we want to do during the program... That helped a lot because I did it off my own interest, so I was researching for my own benefit. It was very beneficial and I learned a lot.”

— Remote internship participant

This underscores the importance of programs that prioritize a deeper understanding of student interests and an intentional connection between those interests and work-based learning experiences, such as the school-based SYEP model. Another provider echoed this sentiment when discussing the importance of aligning participant experiences to their interests:

“Interest in the subject plays a huge role in engagement. We have too many instances in school where students are only doing things because it’s the path that’s set for them or to get some carrot that’s outside of their satisfaction. I think it makes a huge difference for how they show up, even if they show up.”

— *Remote internship provider*

It is a promising sign that more programs and providers are recognizing the importance of youth voice in their work. As described above, when students are allowed to inform the activities they participate in, there will be greater engagement and benefit to the student. Not only will the young person gain skills through the experiences they have chosen to participate in, but simply being afforded the agency to make such decisions can play a role in their personal development. The examples above illustrate the importance of having standards of practice to ensure program quality and effectiveness. The Key Distinguishers for Virtual Internships served as a guide for providers this summer, and HERE to HERE’S Key Distinguishers in other areas of work-based learning are similarly designed to be a valuable resource for the field.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Remote internship programming for summer 2020 was developed as a response to what will hopefully be a once-in-a-generation global crisis that upended the way young people attended school and threatened to eliminate their ability to engage in meaningful summer experiences. Fortunately, thanks to the work of so many young people, providers, and others, those experiences were not lost. Not only were young people still able to engage in meaningful experiences, but remote internships have emerged as a tool to add to the work-based learning tool kit, potentially allowing for greater access to and innovation in work-based learning opportunities.

Based on learnings from the summer, and conversations with students and providers, HERE to HERE offers the following recommendations for the field to effectively integrate remote internships into the portfolio of work-based learning opportunities offered to students.

Develop more opportunities for credited remote internships through high school/community-based organization (CBO) partnerships that occur during the school-year and during school hours:

There is no reason that remote internship opportunities should be limited to the summer. As many young people we heard from noted, the flexibility that remote internships provide allow young people to engage in multiple opportunities at once and better balance school, work, and other responsibilities. Remote internships are particularly promising for young people to engage in career exploration, project-based learning, and efforts to address the needs of local communities. Remote internships should be structured so that participants are acquiring valuable knowledge and skills, and should provide credit toward graduation. Schools and providers should work together to ensure that virtual internships are aligned with Career Development and Occupation Studies (CDOS) standards, which allows students to use work-based learning experiences to fulfill part of their requirements for a Regents diploma.

Ensure high quality by utilizing standards of practice such as HERE to HERE's Key Distinguishers:

Many of the ways in which the summer's remote internship programs succeeded — and potential challenges were overcome — were through practices that providers were required to plan for and engage in. When issuing a request-for-proposals, HERE to HERE required all applicants to address how they would meet the Key Distinguishers for Virtual Internships, and engage in what research and on-the-ground experience suggest are the critical elements of a successful remote program. Of course, many providers would have engaged in some of these practices on their own, but the Key Distinguishers ensured that all participants in programs funded by the Bronx Community Relief Effort would benefit from the same essential components and programs would meet a high baseline level of quality.

Clarify the role of schools and providers, including the settings in which specific knowledge and competencies should be gained:

Remote internships offer an incredible opportunity for young people to learn skills that will serve them well in school, in future work-based learning and employment opportunities, and over the course of their professional career. However, there can be confusion over which skills students should be learning in a classroom so that they are prepared for an internship and which skills are better learned via a situated workplace learning opportunity. Schools and providers should work together — using the Career Ready NYC framework developed by the New York City Center for Youth Employment — to determine the knowledge and skills that should be prioritized in school and workplace learning settings based on where a young person is in their career readiness trajectory. Relatedly, schools and providers should maintain communication throughout and following work experiences so that schools are aware of which students completed their experience and what skills they acquired. Ideally,

every school will have a work-based learning coordinator who can manage these communications between the school and CBO program staff.

Enable students to build on their summer experiences by facilitating participation in related courses or programs, including those they may not typically have access to:

A major challenge for schools, providers, and students is ensuring that young people are able to build on their summer experiences in the following school year. This can be addressed in part through greater access to remote opportunities during the school year. However, schools should also explore other ways to make sure students are able to build on their summer experiences, including being able to take courses — either remotely or in person — at other campuses or through CBO programs if courses are not available at a student’s school. Schools should also consider using advisories, internships, and classes to help students develop their interests and map out next steps in their career exploration.

Ensure schools and CBOs have capacity to support a range of participant needs:

The Key Distinguishers suggest that remote internship programs should be able to provide participants with supports that extend beyond issues that are directly tied to their work-based learning experience. They also suggest that participants have a mentor — whether it be a near-peer college age student or industry professional — with whom they can address any issues that arise. These elements will go a long way in ensuring that students have the support they need, but schools and CBOs need the resources — including staffing capacity — to make sure these program elements can be implemented effectively and in a way that can benefit all participants. In cases where these supports cannot be offered in-house, internship providers should at least be able to make referrals to organizations that can offer necessary services. The City should aim to create alignment between its programs so that these supports are offered in a way that supports the goals of multiple programs at once [for example, CUNY Service Corps members could serve as mentors for SYEP].

Appendix I

Key Distinguishers for Virtual Internships

In an effort to identify and elevate the core components of successful work-based learning, HERE to HERE has developed Key Distinguishers for four areas in which the work takes place: *high schools*, *post-secondary programs*, *paid work experiences*, and *employers*. The Key Distinguishers were informed by a review of relevant literature and a design-based, iterative research process that leveraged the experiences and expertise of various stakeholders — including students, work-based learning coordinators, teachers, intermediary organizations, and employers — in existing programs.

The Key Distinguishers were designed as a tool to guide work-based learning practice and assessment. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the transition to virtual work-based learning experiences for many programs and young people, HERE to HERE created a set of *Key Distinguishers for Virtual Internships*.

HERE to HERE believes it is critical that young people have access to career awareness and exploration, professional networking, personal development, and skill building opportunities that internships and other work-based learning experiences can provide. During a time of great uncertainty, when many young people have experienced significant disengagement, virtual internships represent a way to ensure that students aren't forsaking valuable developmental opportunities over the summer as a result of the pandemic.

Our hope is that this document can provide intermediary and provider organizations, as well as employers and community-based organizations who are hosting interns, with a better understanding of the considerations necessary to successfully implement meaningful virtual work-based learning programs. While virtual experiences are being increasingly looked at to combat the restrictions in place amid the Covid-19 crisis, it is possible that they will become a complement to in-person placements even after a return to normal.

To learn more about HERE to HERE and Key Distinguishers, visit www.heretohere.org.

The Key Distinguishers for Virtual Internships are grouped into four categories:

Resources — students should have reliable access to all necessary technology and internships should feature advising and other supports to help students succeed

Connections — experiences should be linked to student interests, classroom learning, and foster social and professional relationships

Relevance — assigned projects should result in work that is of value to the employer and/or

community and helps students build meaningful skills

Takeaways — work experiences should be paid or offer academic credits or certifications, and lay the foundation for future roles

Resources

Young people have reliable access to technology, including computers, high-speed Internet, and any necessary software/hardware

A lack of access to necessary technology should not prohibit any young person from participating and succeeding in a virtual experience. Young people should receive free access to computers, high-speed Internet, and any other necessary software and hardware. This access should be portable, in the event the young person is living in an unstable housing situation.

Young people receive training on digital tools and working remotely

In addition to having access to necessary technology, young people should receive training on how to use the digital tools that will be necessary for a particular work experience and the world of work more broadly. Young people should also be provided with resources that will help them get accustomed to virtual work norms and best practices.

Young people receive access to targeted resources to address challenges and inequities that may prevent success in their work experience and in the labor market

Those implementing virtual experiences should be able to assist young people in dealing with issues that are not directly related to challenges they may be facing in the virtual classroom or workplace, such as food insecurity or housing instability. Providers may have limited capacity to address such challenges in-house; however, organizations should be familiar with local resources so that young people can be directed to the appropriate supports.

Connections

Experience is connected to student interests and classroom-based learning

Virtual experiences should help students expand skills related to what they are learning in the classroom and/or their areas of interest. This can be driven by a young person's interest in a particular subject in school, extracurricular activity, or other means for a young person's preferences to be stated [i.e. one-on-one conversation, survey, or assessment].

Young people are provided with frequent opportunities to interact with industry professionals and peers

Virtual experiences should foster collaboration and the formation of both social and professional networks. When possible, young people should begin their experience as part of a cohort with whom

they work together on projects and collectively participate in other online activities and experiences. Young people should also have virtual exposure to a variety of professionals, careers, and worksites. These activities and experiences should be supported and facilitated by staff member(s) from a CBO and/or employer.

Young people receive frequent, one-on-one advising from a coach or mentor

Young people in virtual experiences should have a dedicated coach or mentor — separate from their supervisor — with whom they can connect — on at least a weekly basis — for any issues that may arise. The coach/mentor should have regular check-ins with the young person to make sure the needs of both the young person and employer are being met. Coaches/mentors will ideally come from a similar background, and understand the young person's community and cultural norms. Coaches/mentors should receive appropriate training, support, and compensation for this role.

Relevance

Experiences should be part of a young person's career exploration

Virtual work experiences should provide young people with resources and opportunities to learn about fields of work and help them determine their interest and aptitude for roles within a given industry. For experiences that are more specifically tailored to particular careers, young people should come away with knowledge of some of the next steps for how to go about pursuing that career.

Young people are learning skills and competencies that will prepare them for future work and a career

Young people should acquire a wide range of skills that will benefit them in finding and succeeding in employment opportunities. This ranges from transferable skills, including effective communication, email etiquette, etc. to hard skills, including the use of certain types of software and other workplace tools. Young people should be able to describe the skills they have acquired and are in the process of developing.

Young people are engaging in meaningful work that provides value to the young person, employer, and/or community

Young people will ideally engage in work that addresses real challenges faced by employers or their community. This could include short-term projects (or micro-internships) and research projects that respond to a range of needs. Students may also participate in relevant training, upskilling, and/or educational activities that aid in their personal, professional, and/or academic development.

Takeaways

Experience leads to a portable high school or postsecondary credit or credential that is recognized across the industry and/or work that students can document for Capstone projects, portfolios, etc.

Ideally, virtual experiences result in young people being able to acquire a high school or postsecondary credit that counts toward graduation across educational institutions, or an industry recognized certification or credential that denotes progress on a set of skills and competencies. At a minimum, students should leave their internship experience with a tangible take away — a final deliverable, product, and/or presentation — that they can use to present their work and potentially use as part of a Capstone project, portfolio, etc.

Virtual experiences that do not offer academic credit are paid and are of sufficient duration for young people to meet personal, professional, and/or academic goals

If a virtual experience is not offering academic credit to participants, then participants should be paid either an hourly wage or a stipend, in accordance with applicable local and federal labor laws. Experiences should also be of sufficient duration [at least 70 hours] for young people to establish and meet their goals.



Background

In an effort to help fill the void created by the cancellation — and only partial restoration — of SYEP in the summer of 2020, HERE to HERE, in partnership with The Bronx Community Relief Effort (BxCRE), issued a request-for-proposals (RFP) for virtual internship experiences. Before doing so, however, we sought to do for virtual internships what we have done for other areas of work-based learning: codify the essential elements of a high quality program with Key Distinguishers.

HERE to HERE had previously created initial Key Distinguishers for several areas where work-based learning takes place: paid work experiences, high schools, postsecondary programs, and employers. To create a new set of Key Distinguishers for virtual internships, we conducted additional research and held multiple workgroup sessions to learn from staff who work closely and directly with young people, CBOs, and employers.

Issuing an RFP with Key Distinguishers

To ensure that programs were meeting the criteria that were established for a high quality program, the Key Distinguishers were included with the RFP and applicants were directed to address each of the Key Distinguishers in their proposal. If an organization did not address one of the Key Distinguishers in their initial proposal, they were given an opportunity to address a set of follow-up questions.

Providers we heard from agreed on the need for standards and appreciated clarity on what was expected of them in a funding application:

"I'm a fan of models like the Key Distinguishers because you're trying to ensure equity in implementation."

"I thought it was very helpful. When you're doing grants, you need to have a standard of what you have to do."

Providers also felt that the Key Distinguishers for virtual paid experiences encompassed things that any quality program should be able to offer:

“These are great standards. If [organizations] are not geared toward this, they should get that way... everything you have here, you would need to do a remote program successfully.... I struggle to come up with a company that would not be able to do these and still do a good program.”

“My sense is if someone were responding to the opportunity, they read to me as things that should already be part of the work.”

Providers also felt the Key Distinguishers were helpful in planning, with one provider mentioning how it brought individuals within the organization together to plan early in the process. Another provider mentioned that they had to give extra consideration to the specifics of broader program ideas.

“[Our program manager] told me normally, the information you were asking for is what we have to do for the program plan after the RFP. With this RFP, she knows from the beginning, what is the plan for the program. And now she’s invested in the beginning.”

“We certainly already had a vision for synchronous learning and an intention for guest speakers, but in reading through the way you all outlined connections, that gave us an opportunity to think more deeply about how young people would connect with professionals. We had to give it a little extra thought - thinking about how young people would benefit instead of it just being part of the program.”

Evaluating Applications Using the Key Distinguishers

After receiving applications for funding from provider organizations, HERE to HERE conducted an initial review of the applications and posed follow-up questions in cases where organizations did not address — or did not address clearly — one or more of the Key Distinguishers. After receiving responses to the follow-up questions, the Key Distinguishers were used - using a rubric with a four point scale for each Key Distinguisher - to evaluate the applications and determine which organizations would be awarded funding.

For the evaluation committee, the process gave them the greatest possible understanding of the applicants’ program and an opportunity to ask providers to address elements that may have been missing or lacking. This helped ensure that all of the providers receiving funding would be incorporating the elements necessary for a high quality program.

Because the Key Distinguishers are not overly prescriptive, this process still allowed applicants to innovate and respond to the Key Distinguishers in ways that fit with their organization’s programming and philosophy. And by being given an opportunity to respond to follow-up questions, it also allowed them the opportunity to modify their program design while still in the planning stages

Moving Forward

This case study on HERE to HERE's utilization of Key Distinguishers for its virtual internship RFP highlights the potential of having a standard set of program characteristics that providers are expected to address in their proposals and adhere to in their programs. Providers appreciated knowing what was being looked for in their proposals; acknowledged the importance of the program elements that were being emphasized; and mentioned how addressing the Key Distinguishers in their proposals helped with planning. At the same time, the providers felt there was adequate flexibility for them to address the Key Disitnguishers in ways that best align with their current practices and unique circumstances.

With the Key Distinguishers for virtual internships, HERE to HERE hopes to develop a community of work-based learning stakeholders and have them coalesce on a core set of principles that promise a meaningful experience for young people participating in virtual work-based learning opportunities. At the same time, we recognize the flexibility that providers need given each organization's unique strengths and challenges. It is critical to strike a balance between grounding work-based learning in established best practices, while encouraging innovation that can lead to the best practices of tomorrow.

HERE to HERE will continue its work in all of the areas for which Key Distinguishers have been established — paid work experiences, high schools, postsecondary programs, and employers. In each case, the goal of the Key Distinguishers is to ensure that all stakeholders — from students, educational institutions, community-based organizations, employers, and funders — are sharing a common language and set of standards, to increase transparency and accountability, and to best engage the young people who are at the core of this work.

End Notes



- 1 HERE to HERE's Key Distinguishers aim to coalesce the field around a shared language and set of standards for high-quality work-based learning in the different areas where this work takes place: high schools, postsecondary programs, paid work experiences, and employers.
- 2 See Appendix I on page 19 for a full list and descriptions of the Key Distinguishers for Virtual Internships
- 3 The five organizations that received funding through the RFP are Children's Arts and Science Workshop, Duro, Educational Video Center, Mentoring in Medicine, and United Activities Unlimited.
- 4 The additional organizations that joined the Community of Practice were DreamYard Arts Center, H.E.R.O. High School, Knowledge House, Urban Assembly, and The Thinkubator
- 5 It should be noted that only a subset of participants took the pre- and post-survey, and it was not necessarily the same students completing both surveys. This likely explains why, for some areas, fewer respondents reported feeling confident after their experience. It is also possible that the summer experience changed student perceptions. For example, a young person might have felt very confident in their professionalism before their internship; but after gaining a deeper understanding of what professionalism is, they may have realized they initially overstated their confidence in that area.
- 6 Lazar Treschan. One Step Closer to Achieving What I Learned in School. HERE to HERE. January 2020. <https://www.heretohere.org/resource/one-step-closer-to-achieving-what-i-learned-in-school/>
- 7 Keeping Track of New York City's Children. Citizens' Committee for Children of New York. data.cccnewyork.org