



WORKFORCE  
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## Effective Employer Engagement: The Year Up Model

PREPARED BY  
WORKFORCE STRATEGY CENTER

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

It is hard to imagine a more critical time for helping the low-skilled and disenfranchised youth in our communities to become gainfully employed. Even as our nation suffers through its worst economic downturn in decades, America's business and industry leaders are predicting an unprecedented shortage of educated and skilled workers to meet the increasing pressures of global competition. According to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the United States is facing a possible shortage of 14 million workers with college-level skills by 2020. This at the same time as The Annie E. Casey Foundation reports that in 2006 nearly 1.4 million teens between the ages of 16 and 19 were neither enrolled in school nor working.<sup>1</sup>

To develop America's future workforce, policymakers and youth development practitioners across the country must engage employers directly and meaningfully at the outset and throughout their efforts to employ at-risk youth.

Year Up, an organization that seeks to prepare urban young adults for thriving careers and higher education, has enjoyed tremendous success in engaging and meeting the workforce needs of employers. Its program model is premised on simple business principles: develop a relationship with your customers, understand their needs, offer a top-quality solution, and institute a management strategy of continuous improvement.

Year Up offers its students six months of college-credit bearing, intensive skills training followed by a six-month corporate apprenticeship. It offers its corporate partners a value-added proposition:

- 100 percent placement rate of qualified students into apprenticeships
- 87 percent of graduates placed in full- or part-time jobs within four months of graduation
- An average wage of \$15 per hour
- Nearly half of the graduates continuing in postsecondary education

The results speak for themselves.

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<sup>1</sup> The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2008 KIDS COUNT Data Book Online, <http://www.kidscount.org/datacenter/summary08/summary13.jsp>

The Year Up organization takes an entrepreneurial approach to employer engagement that goes beyond the rhetorical as demonstrated by its strength of commitment to providing a value-added service. It presents a viable model for youth and workforce development organizations to study, learn from, and use. For serving this select population of students, its results are not only worthy of note for these organizations, but also for potential funders and policymakers.

## INTRODUCTION

With 22 of the 30 fastest growing career fields requiring some postsecondary education<sup>2</sup>, the “war for talent” is the central battleground for businesses in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>3</sup> Simply put, in today’s knowledge economy, individuals, businesses, and regions will succeed or fail on the basis of highly innovative and productive workforces. Educated individuals will earn more money on average, businesses with innovative employees will be more competitive, and regions with talented workforces will be more successful in attracting and growing businesses.

But what of our most vulnerable youth and adults? How will these individuals succeed when pit against the highly educated and soon to retire baby-boom generation? And in today’s current economic climate, how will they ever stand a chance of getting a job when competing against the country’s growing jobless population?

To help disconnected youth and workers secure gainful employment, organizations today have to deliver candidates for employment that not only meet employers’ needs for knowledge and skills, but also beat their increasing number of competitors. As a result, these organizations are making a more concerted effort to engage employers directly in the development of their future workforces. Once successfully engaged, employers are more likely to both help train and hire these disconnected individuals.

Among organizations offering workforce development, youth development, and college access services, Year Up is attracting considerable attention for its success. A key to Year Up’s success lies in its ability to bring employers to the table and establish lasting relationships with them. The latter is the direct result of the meticulous care the program takes to prepare and train its students, and maintain a service that meets employers’ continually changing needs.

The information contained here was gathered through interviews with employers, 20 Year Up staff across four sites and the national office, including executive directors and functional area managers, as well as several students. The report details Year Up’s

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<sup>2</sup> Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/topics/Pages/postsecondary-education.aspx>, accessed January 15, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Ed Michaels, Helen Handfield-Jones, Beth Axelrod. *The War for Talent*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business Press, 2001.

approach to employer engagement with the hope that it will serve as a model for other workforce development organizations. Written for policymakers and practitioners, it presents Year Up as a business model for employer engagement.

A brief synopsis of the program is followed by a more in depth report on the organization's three components to employer engagement: cultivating relationships with business, training students to achieve, and continuous improvement. The conclusion offers youth and workforce development organizations a framework for following Year Up's model.

### **YEAR UP: THE BUSINESS PROPOSITION**

Many workforce and youth development organizations struggle to assemble comprehensive strategies for engaging employers in their efforts to secure employment for their low-income clients. Part of the problem is that employers simply lack awareness of the programs these organizations offer. But more often than not, the struggle is borne out of two root causes: either programs are not successful in selling their services in a manner that appeals to business or employers acquainted with employment programs perceive them as suppliers of workers with limited technical and professional skills.<sup>4</sup> With the downturn in our economy, it is not just opening the doors of business that is difficult, it is making certain these potential workers are sufficiently prepared both personally and professionally.

For the founder of Year Up, a seasoned executive and Harvard Business School graduate, it is a business proposition. A former software entrepreneur, Gerald Chertavian opened Year Up in Boston in 2000 by applying his organizational management and business background to teach basic business skills to urban young adults and, at the same time, give companies confidence in the urban workforce. His goal is clearly stated: "Our mission is to close the opportunity divide by providing urban young adults with the skills, experience, and support that will empower them to reach their potential through professional careers and higher education." In the past eight years he has helped countless businesses meet theirs as well, and that is a direct product of Year Up's successful employer engagement effort.

The first class of 22 students in Boston began the program in January 2001. By 2005 sites had opened in Providence, New York, and Washington, D.C. To date, the program has

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<sup>4</sup> Carol Clymer. "By Design: Engaging Employers in Workforce Development Organizations." New York: Public/Private Ventures, 2003.

served 1,889 students (through July '09) and 95 employers have partnered with Year Up and sponsored apprentices in, among other industries, the financial services, government, healthcare, and communications sectors. A new site in San Francisco began serving students in Fall 2008 and an Atlanta site opens its doors to students in March 2009.

With an annual operating budget of \$25 million, approximately 60 percent of the budget at each site comes from the “sale” of apprenticeships, which cost businesses on average \$795 per week for each apprentice. The remaining revenue comes from a combination of gifts, grants and contracts from private individuals, foundations, and government.

### **“High Expectations, High Support”**

Year Up provides a service that makes sense for its corporate partners while at the same time serving a greater social good. Its “high expectations, high support” program model expects students to meet rigorous technical and professional standards in order to enable them to attain apprenticeships and transition into full-time work. At the same time, to help overcome barriers students are provided with strong, structured support services.

As a result, the numbers of Year Up corporate partners and apprenticeships have grown each year since the organization began serving students. In fact, in a recent survey, 96% of its apprenticeship partners say that based on their apprentice's performance, they will continue their relationship with Year Up. Ninety-three percent of partners chose to stay as “active” partners or “on board for the future.”

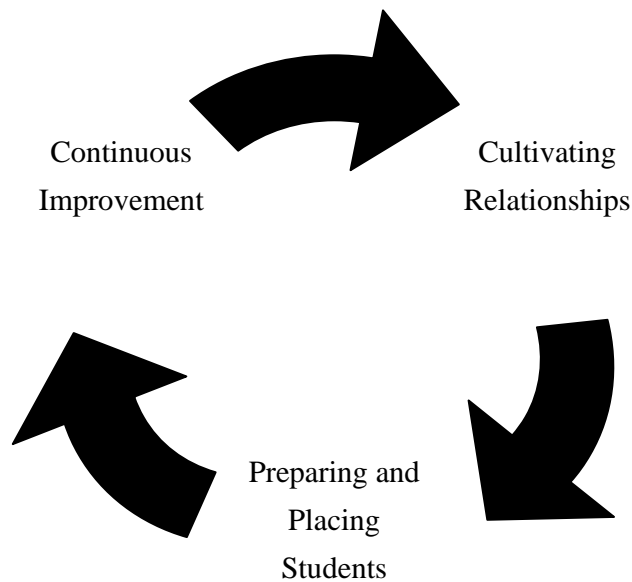
### **Employer Engagement: A Business Improvement Model**

As with most successful business models, Year Up's approach to employer engagement is a circular process whereby all components are continuously improved, as needed, based on customer needs and lessons learned. Year Up's model has three components: cultivating relationships with businesses, preparing students for successful transitions into the workplace, and perhaps most important, continuously improving the quality of services to students and businesses. Each of these components is crafted to ensure top-notch quality. Attention is paid to every detail. Processes are put in place for every contingency. Customer service is a constant, feedback and participation are encouraged, and all critical findings are fed back into the loop to improve the model.

At Year Up, cultivating relationships with employers depends almost entirely on the proposition that the potential workers will fit well in workplace environments, that the

employers' workforce needs are understood and incorporated into the training the students receive, and that support is available if problems emerge. Preparing students involves delivering training programs that develop both technical and professional, or soft, skills such as self-reliance, dependability, personal initiative, communication, and interpersonal skills. It also involves providing support services to help students overcome life obstacles as they pursue their goals. Continuous improvement requires that systems are updated and sharpened as business needs evolve and lessons are learned throughout the process.

### **The Continuous Process of Employer Engagement**





## **CULTIVATING PROFITABLE RELATIONSHIPS WITH BUSINESSES**

Year Up takes a strict business approach to building and maintaining employer relationships. Borrowing from private sector engagement strategies, it couples a sophisticated sales approach with a compelling value-added proposition that offers employers hand chosen apprentices trained by highly qualified staff to meet their business needs. Employer buy-in and program accountability are integrated into every step of the process.

### **A Value-Added Sales Strategy**

Year Up apprenticeship staff are guided in the sales effort by a 100+ page manual that helps them to identify and target potential corporate partners, deliver the pitch, match apprentices with companies, and manage accounts once they are developed. Offering employers a single point of contact greatly facilitates employer engagement. The sales effort is premised on two traditional business engagement strategies: networking and establishing relationships at the top of the corporate ladder.

Year Up uses networks to identify contacts and potential “buyers” of apprenticeships—otherwise known as corporate apprenticeship partners. Companies are courted and developed systematically from the top down, meaning that Year Up engages high level executives who then recommend the Year Up program to subordinate hiring managers. In fact, because networking has spread the word about Year Up apprentices among local businesses, nearly all apprenticeship placements have been the result of networking contacts rather than cold calling.

In addition, Year Up staff are trained to address common concerns that corporate apprenticeship partners frequently voice during the sales process. A stable of suggested responses are available to sales staff that are designed to convey that Year Up is receptive to corporate input and that the program speaks to employer needs. A sense of partnership begins to develop during the sales process and businesses begin to understand that Year Up is invested in meeting their needs.

Once companies express interest, Year Up is especially effective at delivering its “value proposition.” Rather than an appeal for charity, the funding and training of apprentices and hiring Year Up graduates is an arrangement that makes good business sense. This is due to the fact that employers are hosting qualified apprentices, which means they will meet their

corporate responsibilities, while at the same time providing an opportunity for urban young adults.

As part of its business arrangement with potential corporate partners, Year Up offers to facilitate a smooth transition of the apprentice into the workplace and to provide support to employers on an ongoing basis. It does this by assessing, recognizing, and resolving issues that emerge with these young adults while they are on their apprenticeships. Year Up offers a money back guarantee on its apprentices should the experience fail to meet an employer's expectations.

Bob Kiely currently heads human resources for Leerink Swan, LLC, in Boston, but he first became acquainted with Year Up while at Merrill Lynch in New York City in 2006. He recalls Chertavian approaching him with a distinct business proposition. As far as Chertavian was concerned, Kiely had a problem Year Up could solve with ready assets, experience, and a track record. Merrill staff were pleased to have the chance to help Year Up "close the opportunity divide," but Kiely noted that sponsoring Year Up apprentices was first a business transaction and second an act of altruism. Merrill sponsored five apprentices during the first training cycle and another five during the second cycle. To date Leerink has sponsored two apprentices. "They are excellent, high quality workers that came prepared to be hired."

What generally follows a business' expression of interest is a careful cultivation of the employer relationship. Staff embrace an apprentice management philosophy that includes a matching process, a transitional process for introducing apprentices to the workplace, and a system for supporting apprentices throughout the apprenticeship phase.

### **Making a Good Match**

Once a partnership develops, Year Up works diligently to ensure that a good match is made between corporate partners and apprentices. The matching process entails gathering intelligence on both employers and apprentices. Through face-to-face meetings, phone calls, emails, and word-of-mouth, a Due Diligence Report is developed for each corporation. The report contains information on the corporate culture and work environment, including the potential supervisor's managerial style, the demographics of the workplace, the dress code, physical environment, and other characteristics.

This information is then aligned with information about each student. Staff develop a Face Card for each student, which is a file that includes data on performance evaluations and aptitudes, personal preferences, residential location, car ownership and status of transportation availability, childcare needs, and other characteristics that may impact successful job performance. To make matches, Year Up staff hold roundtable meetings in which each student is discussed and matches are made. The level of attention devoted to the matching process is a large part of what contributes to apprentice success.

#### ORIENTATION

Once apprenticeship destinations are known, both employers and apprentices go through an orientation process. This process is another aspect of Year Up's high support culture. Approximately two to three weeks before the start of each apprenticeship, an employer's Year Up liaison meets with the new apprenticeship supervisor to discuss the program's goals and expectations. Apprentices are taken on a "meet and greet" to introduce them to supervisors, co-workers, and their new place of work. The meeting allows the supervisor an opportunity to clarify expectations for the apprenticeship and helps diffuse potential anxieties among apprentices, which staff note is especially important for students who have limited prior work experience and suffer from anxieties as a result. Before apprentices begin work, Year Up works with employers to ensure that hiring requirements such as background checks, drug tests, and other assessments are complete.

The Harvard Graduate School of Design contacted Year Up early in 2008 after hearing favorable remarks about its IT apprentices from neighboring departments. Originally apprehensive about reaching beyond the usual sources for interns, the School has just finished sponsoring its first Year Up apprentice. Computer Resources Manager Hal Gould came away impressed with the added measures Year Up takes to acquaint employers with the program and stay in touch with the managers. He also pointed to the professionalism of the apprentices and the various means Year Up employs to hold students accountable and focused on their opportunities. He added that his apprentice "surpassed expectations."

#### TROUBLESHOOTING

Once apprentices begin their work, there is ongoing communication between Year Up staff and corporate apprenticeship supervisors. In many cases, Year Up staff and corporate apprenticeship supervisors meet weekly, either in person or by phone, to discuss the progress of the apprentice. One of the lessons learned by the program is just how important

it is to build strong relationships with mid-level managers. Another is to come prepared with a business solution.

When problems emerge, Year Up staff initiate what they call “service recovery,” a process for providing counseling and support services to apprentices to rectify the issue. Typical issues include absenteeism, lack of professionalism in the workplace, poor on-the-job performance, and attitude problems. As issues emerge, Year Up staff will intervene and provide counseling to the apprentice in order to understand what is at the root of the problem and recommend a course of action to solve the problem. In addition, Year Up staff work with the partner supervisor to develop a plan that will best serve the student’s learning experience while also serving the corporate partner. Apprenticeship partners report that this additional level of service provides a measure of security when hiring apprentices.

#### **TRAINING STUDENTS TO ACHIEVE**

Of course, no efforts to build relationships with employers would succeed if the services delivered by Year Up failed to meet expectations. Once businesses have come to the table and partnered with Year Up, the ongoing health of relationships depends entirely on the capacity to deliver well-prepared apprentices. To ensure that this happens, Year Up provides students with the technical and professional skills necessary to be successful in the workplace, while providing support services to reduce barriers impeding success.

Year Up prepares students by:

- Understanding the unique challenges that face each student and making support services available in order to reduce barriers impeding career and educational success.
- Implementing formal learning programs that provide students with marketable skills by integrating technical preparation with professional skill development.
- Fostering an informal environment that develops students’ self-reliance, dependability, personal initiative, and interpersonal skills both inside and outside of the classroom.

### **Reducing Barriers to Career Success**

In a 2006 report, Jan DeCoursey and Ada Skyles of the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago assert that the quality of relationships between employers and workforce service providers depends in large part on the support services that students and new workers receive in helping them overcome challenges.<sup>5</sup> Disconnected young adults may be unfamiliar with workplace expectations and environments, making it difficult to fit in when taking a new job. Furthermore, they may struggle with everyday barriers such as finding transportation, assembling an acceptable wardrobe, or managing relationships with co-workers and supervisors. These problems are compounded by the challenges of needing to develop marketable technical skills and functional professional skills.

During the admissions process students take a comprehensive intake assessment so staff understand the students' risk factors. Student services are then coordinated to assist students accepted into the program with their challenges. Student services include assistance with finding housing, attaining medical or dental care, attaining professional workplace attire, resolving legal matters, and others. Additional assessments are conducted at weeks seven and 14 in the program to ensure that students are receiving all of the necessary services to facilitate their success.

In addition, staff advisors help students navigate the program, access needed services, resolve issues with other students or staff, become familiar with Year Up expectations, and provide a guiding hand throughout. Mentors—volunteer members of the business community—offer advice and perspective about what is expected by employers and how to resolve work-related issues. Student service coordinators work to ensure students know how to access the appropriate support services.

#### ESTABLISHING CORPORATE PARTNERS

To supplement in-house support for students, Year Up has an extensive network of partners who support the organization in various ways. Corporate apprenticeship partners are the businesses that hire Year Up apprentices. Other corporate partners provide funding and other resources such as physical space for housing the program, sponsorship of events, student mentors, and guest lecturers. Nonprofits and community-based organizations work with Year Up to enhance the services available to students, and local postsecondary

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<sup>5</sup> Jan DeCoursey and Ada Skyles. "Making Connections: Engaging Employers in Preparing Chicago's Youth for the Workforce." Chicago: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago, 2007.

institutions partner with Year Up to offer students college credit for the coursework they complete during the program.

With the exception of counseling and student advisement, services are typically outsourced to these external organizations. This type of operational structure allows Year Up to focus on teaching and apprenticeships.

### **The Year Up Program: A Curriculum with High Market Value**

To ensure that the curriculum is built with business needs in mind, Year Up begins the process of developing the technical skills of students by hiring instructors who have extensive subject matter expertise and familiarity with industry needs. All instructors either have professional experience in the industry they teach or have teaching backgrounds in their fields.

The Year Up program consists of two six-month phases: Learning and Development, followed by Apprenticeship. During the Learning and Development phase students take part in an intensive training session to develop the professional, or soft, and technical skills necessary to succeed in a corporate environment. For the technical skills portion, students receive training in either information technology (IT) or investment operations (IO), which, according to Year Up research, are two of the skill sets in highest demand in corporate America. Students have the opportunity to choose a training area of interest to them. Their technical learning is then complemented by coursework on communication, team work, self advocacy, and general workplace skills.

To increase their marketability, students receive college credit through articulation agreements or dual enrollment partnerships that Year Up sites have set up with local colleges or universities. The articulation agreements vary from site to site, but currently students can earn as many as 18 college credits.

The second part of the program year, the Apprenticeship phase, involves on-the-job training. Students complete a full-time apprenticeship with a local partner company in a field related to their IT or IO specialty. IT apprentices typically work in help desk or desktop support roles in their host companies. IO apprentices work in jobs as portfolio accountants, fund administrators, and in trade reconciliation roles. Each Wednesday throughout the apprenticeship, students return to Year Up to share experiences and continue professional and technical learning.

To develop professional skills, curricula incorporate a few unique elements. Week one of the program is an intensive orientation designed to establish program expectations, build community, and cultivate trusting relationships among students and staff.

Learning communities of approximately 35 to 40 students proceed through the Year Up program together. Students have staff advisors to help them access student services or additional academic support, and have mentors that help them with the practicalities of the business world. In this so-called “high touch environment,” feedback sessions, team-building exercises, and resource sharing help students to build a network of mutually supportive relationships, and, with easy access to each other throughout the program, learn to internalize constructive feedback from peers. Employers find the peer critiquing aspect of Year Up’s soft skills curriculum to be especially important because it prepares apprentices for taking and giving constructive feedback from and to supervisors.

#### INVITING EMPLOYER PARTICIPATION

As part of its overall employer engagement strategy, Year Up also invites corporate apprenticeship partners to visit and participate in the classroom. Employers and returning apprentices often make presentations about their companies, job characteristics, and workplace experiences. Employers find this participation helpful in the hiring process because it familiarizes them with the Year Up classroom environment, and students and staff find this exposure informative about workplace needs and expectations.

Year Up also invites its corporate partners to review the program curriculum, and supervisors to weigh in on soft skills curricula. As a result, employers are quick to point out that Year Up’s apprentices do a great job of staying on top of the learning curve.

#### **Developing Soft Skills**

Year Up strives not only to provide students with the technical training necessary to obtain rewarding jobs, but also to cultivate confident, assertive young adults who believe they can achieve all of their goals. The goal is to prepare students intensively for success in the workplace by providing a barrage of learning opportunities.

As such, the Year Up philosophy places a strong emphasis on the development of soft skills. Among others, self-reliance, dependability, personal initiative, and interpersonal skills are behaviors staff cite as important for successful transition into the workplace.

Year Up creates an environment that instructs and reinforces these behaviors inside and outside the classroom.

One major method for doing this requires students to sign a Performance Contract. The contract states expectations for the program in detail and uses a “point system” under which students lose or gain points depending on their fulfillment of these expectations. Each student enters the program with 200 points. Punctuality, appropriate dress, politeness and respectfulness, and other aspects of professionalism are measured under the point system. Point deductions and bonuses are directly related to the amount of the educational stipend a student receives, reinforcing the concept that workplace performance has a direct bearing on earnings. If performance deductions reduce the student’s points to zero students are said to have “fired themselves,” affirming that students regulate their own standing in the program.

The Year Up staff reinforce interpersonal and professional skills by diligently looking out for “teachable moments”—opportunities to help students to internalize appropriate professional behavior. Should a student neglect to hold a door for someone behind him or her, for instance, a staff member might seize the opportunity to discuss what message that sends; or if a student interrupts another while speaking a staff member might reinforce a message about conversation etiquette.

### **CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT**

One overarching principle that contributes to the success of the Year Up approach to engaging employers is the tacit recognition that success rests on the degree to which employers’ needs are met. Program staff work diligently with employers on an ongoing basis to keep abreast of their needs and feed information into the training process so students are prepared to meet high technical and professional standards.

Moreover, keeping businesses coming back as repeat customers requires Year Up to ensure that programs and services are updated and sharpened to serve the changing needs of the job market. Year Up seeks to keep its programs and services up-to-date and performing at a high level through a sophisticated system for performance management.

A set of tools and interfaces—both formal and informal—allows Year Up sites to sustain and refine services to their business clients. Improvements from qualitative and



quantitative sources are integrated into service delivery; updates about student needs and the quality of classroom instruction are incorporated into the content and service delivery in the classroom; and the professional development of staff is managed through a reflection and training process. The result is that Year Up apprentices are always prepared for work, even in the face of a changing environment, and employers have a sense of confidence that programs are always new and never outdated.

A software program called Salesforce is used to manage all internal systems including corporate contacts, revenue, and networks. The program tracks information about when businesses were contacted, the nature and content of the conversation, and the follow-up activities required. Salesforce is also used to manage student portfolios; it captures risk assessments and risk factors associated with each student, data regarding student demerits recorded under the performance contract system, and data on classroom performance and support service needs.

GradeBookWizard captures the classroom grades of students in the Learning and Development phase. The tool is linked across all sites, so managers at the national level can analyze overall student performance. The Wizard has been used to identify particular modules of classroom instruction with which students struggle, and whether the approach to teaching those modules needs to be modified.

Employers are asked to evaluate apprentice performance via Survey Monkey, an online survey tool. Surveys are typically administered twice during the Apprenticeship stage. Questions asked of employers address both technical and professional development skill levels. Their responses are then used to inform curriculum content and more importantly provide feedback directly to the students on their performance.

Additionally, apprentices are debriefed and asked for practical feedback about their experiences on the job. This step is especially important as it provides robust and direct insight into the workforce needs of employers without overburdening them with frequent requests for information. Kiely of Leerink Swan, LLC says "Year Up apprentices joined the Leerink workplace with very relevant and up-to-date skills enabling them to make an immediate contribution." According to its employer surveys, 90% of Year Up's partners say its students meet or exceed their expectations for technical and professional skills.

### **Sharing Information, Reflecting, and Learning from Peers**

Automated tools are excellent resources, but they do not constitute a complete approach for structural quality control. Year Up builds in mechanisms so staff can engage in frequent information exchange. For example, it is standard practice for all Year Up staff to speak monthly, if not more often, with their counterparts at other sites.

In addition, all sites dedicate time to reflect on program performance during intercessions between the completion of one Learning and Development cohort phase and the start of the next. Far more than a debriefing, staff delve into student classroom performance and the strengths and weaknesses of the delivery of lessons. Staff performance is critiqued as well, with select members attending in-service training and professional development classes as needed. Finally, staff attend an annual organization-wide retreat at which corporate strategies are discussed and team-building exercises are used to cement relationships.

The result is a system for performance management that enables Year Up to provide consistently strong services for employers, a characteristic that serves to bolster relationships with employers.

### **CONCLUSION: APPLYING THE YEAR UP MODEL IN THE WORKFORCE AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT FIELDS**

As those in the fields of workforce and youth development know all too well, there are no quick solutions for building strong relationships with businesses. There are no clear-cut or formulaic approaches. Engaging employers takes time, ingenuity, resources, and commitment.

The cornerstone of Year Up's entrepreneurial approach to employer engagement is its strength of commitment to providing a value-added service. The approach recognizes that engaging employers involves reaching out to understand their needs, following up with the provision of exceptionally prepared apprentices, and finally, building in a continuous improvement process for sharpening services. The Year Up model offers lessons for workforce and youth development service providers or any other organization seeking to improve employer engagement efforts in serving disconnected groups.

## **Cultivating Profitable Relationships with Businesses**

- *Recognize the value of your services for businesses.* Prospective employer partners must be able to recognize the business case for sponsoring workers before they do so. In return, prospective workers need to be prepared to meet the technical and professional needs of the company. Year Up is able to make a business case for sponsoring apprentices, placing an average price and value of \$795 per week on the exchange. The fact that businesses have been willing to pay the sum indicates that they recognize the value added of Year Up's program. The fact that Year Up offers a money back guarantee indicates a strong confidence that their apprentices will prove their value to the employers.
- *Develop an effective sales approach that cultivates and manages relationships.* Cultivating business relationships is hard in any business. It is especially hard in the workforce and youth development fields where employers view service providers with skepticism. To be successful, develop a sales strategy that includes gathering intelligence on prospective corporate partners, networking, making pitches that clearly communicate the value of services, and managing client relations. In its sales process, Year Up uses Due Diligence Reports to collect intelligence on companies and Face Cards to collect information on each student in order to make the right match between apprentice and employer. Year Up follows up regularly with employers to check the progress of apprentices and offers ongoing service during the Apprenticeship phase to correct personnel issues that may arise with apprentices.
- *Establish a relationship with your employers.* Ask businesses to provide input regarding what they need and expect from apprentices. Invite them to help develop curricula, tour classrooms, participate as guest lecturers, and provide frequent feedback regarding the on-the-job performance of apprentices. Year Up staff are in frequent contact with employers to check on apprentices and hear about employer needs. Additionally, employers are frequent visitors to classrooms to present to students about workplace environments and expectations.

## **Training Students to Achieve**

- *Prepare students to achieve their goals, nothing less.* At Year Up, this begins with a careful assessment of a student's aptitudes and needs. The Year Up model utilizes a core organizing philosophy of "high support, high expectations" in order to ensure that students undergo rigorous technical and professional skills development while receiving the support resources that they need. Once students are prepared, they are matched with their employers so that they are ready when they arrive at the work site. The Year Up model also recognizes that lifelong learning is a part of long-term career management and thus incorporates articulation and dual enrollment agreements with local colleges to give students a running start toward continuing postsecondary education.
- *Take every opportunity to develop soft skills.* It is impossible to underestimate the importance of soft skills development in preparing disconnected young adults for employment. Punctuality, appropriate dress, politeness and respectfulness, and other aspects of professionalism are as much valued by employers as they are critical to succeeding in life. Professional behavior is learned inside and outside the classroom. Students are expected to maintain professional behavior at all times while on site at Year Up. Staff is expected to identify "teachable moments" when students display behavior that is unprofessional and to make on the spot corrections.

## **Continuous Improvement**

- *Embrace technology.* Continuous enhancement of systems needs to be a constant and evolving process, and the right tools can capture data that can be used for performance improvement. Maximize the use of automated management tools such as Salesforce for contact and student portfolio management, and GradeBook Wizard for classroom performance to capture data and aid in making continuous improvements. Year Up uses a suite of automated tools to gather and analyze information that gets fed back into processes for administering programs and services.
- *Seek employer, student and staff feedback to improve services.* Invite your corporate partners to review your program's curriculum and to assess the performance of your students on an ongoing basis. Invite the same of students and staff. Incorporating

lessons learned is invaluable to program and service improvement. Employers value a program that is based on the premise and results of continuous improvement.

- *Encourage peer learning among staff members.* Gathering quantitative performance management data tells managers a lot about outcomes, but often fails to capture the granular information about how programs and services are delivered. Therefore, it is important to incorporate qualitative information into the performance management system. There are both formal and informal means of communicating qualitative information, and both serve an invaluable role. Year Up holds regular feedback sessions and retreats for peers so they can learn from each other. Additionally, staff at each site are in regular contact with their counterparts at other sites in order to provide mutual support.

For more details on the Year Up program model, please refer to the Year Up case study published by Harvard Business School at [www.hbsp.harvard.edu/educators](http://www.hbsp.harvard.edu/educators).