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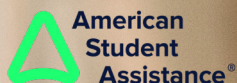
Preparing Youth for the Future

Teen & Young Adult Career Readiness Programs at Big Sister Association of Greater Boston

BIGSISTERBOSTON

American Student Assistance®

Contents

BIGSISTERBOSTON
ABOUT BSAGB

Big Sister Association of Greater Boston (BSAGB) was founded in 1951 by three Cambridge residents who identified a gap in mentoring programs dedicated to supporting girls. They created BSAGB's signature mentoring program where girls (Little Sisters) are matched one-to-one with trained, committed women mentors (Big Sisters). In its first year, BSAGB matched six girls with mentors; in 2021, BSAGB served 1,380 girls across all programs. Today, the organization remains 100% invested in girls to ensure they stay connected to a strong network of supportive, caring adults.

American Student Assistance®
ABOUT ASA

American Student Assistance® is a national nonprofit with a mission of helping students know themselves, know their options, and make informed career and post-secondary education decisions. ASA's aim is to fuel a readiness revolution so that every student leaves high school with a plan. ASA is devoted to shifting the conversation around career exploration in school buildings, state houses, communities, and through direct-to-kid digital resources. Through a robust portfolio of middle school grant programming, research, and educational resources and products, ASA has developed a framework for career exploration best practices at the middle school level.

All About

Big Sister Association of Greater Boston and Our Big Futures

It is estimated that Generation Z, ages 10 to 25 in 2022, will make up 30% of the US workforce by 2030[1]. Gen Z is set to become our nation's next wave of workers, innovators, and leaders—but are they prepared?

The pandemic has accelerated the impacts of globalization, automation, and artificial intelligence on the 21st century workplace, making post-secondary credentials, from certificates to degrees, even more essential for the workers of today and tomorrow. Yet research shows that Gen Z feels stressed and anxious about post-secondary education and career decision-making, and those negative emotions are even more pronounced in female-identifying youth and young adults. Nearly a third of girls and young women struggle to find resources or support when it comes to future planning[2]. Big Sister Association of Greater Boston (BSAGB) aims to help, by fostering positive relationships between female-identifying youth and mentors and implementing programs that support girls' healthy development. As the only female-identifying youth-serving organization in the larger Big Brothers Big Sisters of America network of more than 300 agencies, BSAGB is a leader in gender-intentional mentoring for girls, and its programming serves as an exemplar for other female-identifying youth-serving organizations.

BSAGB's approach to guiding female youth and young adults on their post-secondary pathways is strengthened by the support of mentors. Big Sisters engage Little Sisters in discussions that help them identify and take early steps toward their post-secondary goals. They also provide encouragement to help young women stay on track.

As part of the Big Sisters continuum of mentoring and commitment to girls' healthy development, Our Big Futures (OBF) was launched in 2020, with support from funders like American Student Assistance. OBF aims to provide currently enrolled and former BSAGB Little Sisters ages 14-24 with career exploration, coaching, support, and resources to achieve sustainable financial independence via career development and/or college success. According to a study by The American City Coalition, "young women have an expressed need for tools that will assist them with their transition to adulthood, including life skills, college and career planning, job training, financial aid, and paid internships.[3]" BSAGB is committed to the success of this program, and through this guide will provide best

> " BSAGB AIMS TO HELP, BY **FOSTERING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS** BETWEEN FEMALE-IDENTIFYING YOUTH AND MENTORS. "

All About...

practices to scale the lessons learned to encourage similar work in other organizations, with particular emphasis on those programs that serve female-identifying youth.

Why Female-Identifying Youth and Young Adult Organizations?

All students deserve a quality education that will give them the tools they need to feel confident in whatever decisions they make for their future. Too often young people report not having enough access to resources and information about their interests that could help them make more informed choices about their future education and career goals.

Studies show that over 50% of students (and 57% of female-identifying youth) feel uncertain of what the next 12 months will bring and the decisions they'll be making[4]. In addition to uncertainty, female youth report feeling more stress, anxiety, and nerves than their male counterparts. Interestingly, research has shown that female youth express higher interest levels in receiving mentorship opportunities (60%) and are more career-oriented[5]. However, only 38% of students working with a mentor are female-identifying. Comparatively, males report less interest in mentorships (40%) but make up 63% of the population of youth receiving mentorship opportunities.

Studies also show that when female youth have access to career exploration tools and resources,

they are more likely than males to utilize them. In a recent survey conducted by ASA on the overall usage of ASA Futurescape, an online career quiz that helps young people start to think about what careers might be of interest to them, female-identifying youth make up 78% of overall users. And, they are more likely than their male peers to return to the site after initial use.

Career-connected programs should focus on building confidence for female-identifying youth, supporting the development of learning more about oneself and growing confidence in one's ability to make good decisions for the future. In fact, when female-identifying youth do make decisions about their future, especially young females of color, many seek opportunities that further their education.

Seeking opportunities for growth doesn't stop when female-identifying youth become young adults, especially for young women of color. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, African American women received 64% of all bachelor's degrees obtained by women in 2015-2016 in the United States[6]. However, despite strong education gains, we know that women, especially women of color, are still paid and promoted less than their male equivalents. While we must break down systemic barriers to equal pay in order to make real change, programs like OBF can also play an important role by helping female identifying-youth build the confidence and knowledge they

THE NEED FOR FEMALE MENTORSHIP

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All About...

need to advocate for themselves throughout their education and career decision-making.

As we dive a bit deeper into the key program components and core values guiding this work, it's important to understand that by focusing on female-identifying youth, we can provide more opportunities to a population that is highly interested and eager to learn, enabling them to reach their education and career goals more efficiently. Simultaneously, we provide organizations and programs an opportunity to invest in female youth in more deliberate, equitable, and effective ways - and hopefully break down the systemic inequities that prevent female-identifying adults from achieving true parity in the workplace.

Additionally, as we provide programming that is centered around working with female-identifying youth, recognizing that not all women and girls view gender identity through

the same lens is critical. Being aware and having conversations about the importance of acknowledging one's own gender identity will be imperative when creating safe spaces for these

> ## RECOGNIZING THAT NOT ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS **VIEW GENDER IDENTITY THROUGH THE SAME LENS** IS CRITICAL."

youth to grow, learn and develop. Facilitating conversations around gender roles, identity and the key differences between biological sex and gender will not only create a welcoming environment, but will also provide participants more context and awareness of folks whose identities have historically been misrepresented, misunderstood, or marginalized by the larger society.

The Guide

In 2018, American Student Assistance (ASA), a national nonprofit that helps foster students' understanding of post-secondary education and career pathways, provided a grant to BSAGB to fund their OBF program. BSAGB and ASA have teamed up to create this guide so other youth-serving organizations can learn from and replicate the core components of OBF. This guide aims to equip organizations that serve female-identifying youth and young adults with the tools to start or expand on their own career exploration and planning programs. The guide will explore the core values that should drive programs like OBF, essential program components, and strategies to build a partnership network, measure success and ensure program sustainability, as well as provide an action plan for users to develop their own career readiness program. While there are key topics in this guide that are focused on female-identifying youth, the key findings and best practices are applicable to any youth-serving organization. ◾

Guiding Values

& Program Overview

Programs that aim to support female youth in gaining exposure to careers and future planning resources should consist of varied activities, events, and engagement opportunities. BSAGB intentionally focused OBF's program design based on three guiding values that other organizations could and should use to inform program planning: They should be youth-centered, committed to social justice, and focused on community engagement. While OBF has developed these values with female youth in mind, organizations serving youth of any gender can and should emulate and replicate these values in their programs.

Youth-Centered

The program design and implementation should be a collaborative process driven by youth voice through all stages of a program from initial design through implementation:

▶ *CREATION:* Program creators should provide youth the opportunity to articulate their needs and allow that input to drive the structure of the program. Youth agency and choice should be

honored in both overall programming and specific activity choices to ensure it best reflects the interests of the participants they serve. In addition, the structure of the program should be flexible enough to grow and change along with the needs of the target demographic.

▶ *YOUTH LEADERSHIP:* Once under-way, program staff should continuously engage youth participants and empower youth

PROGRAMS SHOULD BE YOUTH-CENTERED, **COMMITTED TO SOCIAL JUSTICE**, AND FOCUSED ON COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT. "

Guiding Values

> **"** HIGH-QUALITY, CULTURALLY INFORMED CONTENT AND RESOURCES SHOULD **SUPPORT AND CELEBRATE PARTICIPANTS** FOR WHO THEY ARE. **"**

to play a leadership role in program execution. This not only ensures the program remains youth-centered but allows youth leaders greater responsibility and more exposure to career opportunities.

▶ *CONTINUOUS FEEDBACK:* Participant feedback, collected through both informal and formal methods, should be included in the program evaluation and assessment that drive program adaptation.

▶ *YOUTH-INFORMED CONTENT:* Partners, employers, and community members should be leveraged to create a network for

young adult participants, and high-quality, culturally informed content and resources should support and celebrate participants for who they are.

OBF EXAMPLE: Our Big Futures created a Junior Advisory Board, which is composed of eight Sister Leaders who provide feedback on programmatic efforts and work closely with OBF staff on events and raising Little Sister voices in our organization. This allows youth the opportunity to develop and express their thoughts and ideas and witness the action that can come from sharing their voice.

Committed to Social Justice: Youth-serving organizations that serve learners in marginalized communities should be deliberate in creating programming that addresses inequalities and societal barriers for the youth they serve. By committing to social justice initiatives, program staff and organizational leadership can work to ensure that youth participants feel safe, genuinely supported, valued, respected, and confident in bringing their whole selves into program spaces. This will ensure the greatest chance of program success and will inform the larger strategic direction of the program, like how organizations can create partnerships and what drives decision-making.

There are various things to consider when making the foundational decision that your program will be rooted in addressing social justice work in a youth-serving organization. Some of which include:

▶ *RESOURCES:* Allocating internal resources to have strong ownership and leadership of this program

▶ *DIVERSITY:* Hiring a diverse program staff (valuing lived experiences as much as educational background)

▶ *PAY:* Supporting youth access to programs by supplying paid stipends, which may eliminate some financial barriers to participation

▶ *CHILDCARE:* Providing childcare options or other needed wraparound services

▶ *BACKGROUND:* Fostering mentorship opportunities with

Guiding Values

> PARTICIPANTS CAN MEET, CONNECT, AND LEARN TO **BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH PROFESSIONAL ADULTS** SO THEY CAN START TO DEVELOP THEIR OWN CAREER NETWORKS.

adults from similar backgrounds to participants

▶ *ENGAGEMENT:* Engaging in larger community efforts and fundraising initiatives that support shared understanding of social justice issues

▶ *FEEDBACK:* Adapting and developing programs based on youth feedback and programmatic outcomes

OBF EXAMPLE: OBF partners with companies that can provide paid employment/internship opportunities, recognizing that often female youth are responsible for helping support their families and may not have the luxury to participate in career development opportunities if they aren't being compensated for their time. Additionally, the greater Big Sister Boston offers an OBF member a paid summer internship.

Focused on Community Engagement:

Success of a career exploration program is dependent on building a strong community network that can give program participants opportunity to build career skills and social capital. A broad network of organizations and businesses is essential to creating career exploration, employment, and enrichment opportunities for youth. It is through these opportunities that program participants can meet, connect, and learn to build relationships with professional adults so they can start to develop their own career networks. With upwards of 80 percent of jobs coming from

someone you know[7], this sets students up for future opportunities, develops self-advocacy, and strengthens social skills.

OBF EXAMPLE 1: OBF participants are often connected to individuals working in careers that they are interested in. These informational interview opportunities give program members a chance to learn directly from people working in the industry and expand their networks, giving them first hand practice in stewarding relationships.

Our Big Futures Program Overview

The Our Big Futures program has been designed to allow female-identifying youth and young adults to explore potential career opportunities and the skills to plan for their futures. Critical components of the OBF program include:

▶ *PROGRAM DESIGN*:
  ✧ Career coaching and mentoring
  ✧ Career focused activities and events

▶ *PROGRAM EXECUTION:*
  ✧ Youth engagement
  ✧ Tools and resources

▶ *BUILDING A PARTNER NETWORK*

▶ *UTILIZING DATA COLLECTION* and outcomes measurements to drive program design

If an organization is interested in replicating elements of OBF, staff should consider these crucial elements and how they could fit into any workforce readiness program, for any youth participant. ■

Our Big Futures
Program Design

> OBF FOCUSES SPECIFICALLY ON **CAREER COACHING AND CAREER MENTORING**, AND THROUGH THESE RELATIONSHIPS, YOUTH CAN EXPLORE WHAT CAREERS ARE POSSIBLE."

Big Sisters and OBF focus on building girls' resiliency. Research suggests that in childhood, many girls have a very strong sense of self—where they are comfortable expressing their feelings and speaking their minds. This resiliency is linked to their strong relationships—being connected to others in an authentic way. And so, mentorships are at the heart of what Big Sister does, and OBF reflects this value through its programming design—through coaching, activities and events, and partnerships cultivated.

Building Authentic Connections

OBF focuses specifically on career coaching and career mentoring, and through these relationships, youth can explore what careers are possible and connect with professionals and staff members who can help youth experiment

Program Design

and navigate those career options. Program staff and volunteer professionals should represent a range of lived experiences and backgrounds, so youth can connect with adults who they identify with. For female-identifying youth, exposure to female professionals working in a wide range of industries showcases career options they may have not previously envisioned for themselves. Any organization planning on replicating components of OBF should center programming on career coaching and mentorships.

Career Coaching

Career Coaching is non-directive and exploratory, which means it is about posing the right questions and supporting young adults as they consider how they can achieve more, reach their objectives, and find capabilities within themselves.
▶ *ONE-TO-ONE:* Career coaching for youth usually takes place during 1:1 sessions with program staff or mentors.
▶ *SETTING GOALS:* The purpose of coaching sessions is to work on setting goals, support youth in talking through obstacles, share opportunities and resources, and assist program participants through application processes.
▶ *IMPROVING PROPSPECTS:* Career coaching is a proven strategy to help young adults build social capital, gain confidence and skills, and improve their academic, social, and economic prospects.

Career Mentoring

Career Mentoring is directive and focuses on preparing youth for future planning and decision-making. It helps youth determine their next step and teaches them important 21st-century and career skills.
▶ *SPECIALIZED SKILLS:* Mentors are usually recruited volunteers who have specialized skills and are willing to share their experiences and teach about their expertise and/or meet a specific need.
▶ *TRAINING:* Career mentoring sessions may include interview preparation, resume writing, assistance with college applications, on-the-job training, etc.
▶ *PREPARATION:* Internships, apprenticeships, job shadowing, and career days are experiences where career mentoring often takes place.

Enrichment activities are also an essential component of the OBF program. These activities support program members in developing the skills needed to thrive and achieve their set career and educational goals, and are vital to maintain engagement. Examples of OBF monthly activities include:

Junior Advisory Board is a monthly leadership activity where participants learn how a board is organized and run. Participants get to run for office, developing their leadership skills while advocating and elevating issues that are most important to them and providing feedback on OBF program implementation.

Financial literacy provided by

TIPS FOR CAREER COACHING AND MENTORING

Meetings can be in person and/or virtual, or a hybrid of the two. In-person engagement should, if possible, mimic professional networking practices to help train and prepare young adults to function independently in growing and stewarding their personal networks. Examples of appropriate coaching and mentoring include:

Meeting for lunch or coffee for check-ins and coaching sessions

Setting up regularly scheduled virtual meetings to build a relationship

Planning and providing networking events that give attendees the chance to meet valuable contacts, receive constructive coaching, and pursue specific job opportunities

Attending enrichment events at museums, libraries, and higher education institutions

Creating job shadow opportunities

Program Design

program partner Invest in Girls - an opportunity for members to develop strong personal finance skills and investment strategies, thereby expanding their knowledge of how to leverage their finances for their futures.

Connecting Youth to Real-World Experiences

After completing career coaching, and attending workshops, many youth participants will want to take a leap into the working world. One of the key services a career readiness program can provide is to serve as the intermediary or coordinating entity between the student and a prospective employer. A program manager's role is to smooth the transition and support the work-based learning experience. At OBF, female youth are introduced and connected to work-based learning opportunities by program staff.

Work-based learning is defined as an opportunity for a student to learn through work. This may be a project-based learning experience, internship, pre-apprenticeship, or entrepreneurial experience, etc. These opportunities provide the chance for youth to connect with employers to build a workplace identity (learn what they like and don't like about the working world), build social capital, build workplace skills, and earn money or school credit while learning about themselves and a prospective career.

Building a robust internship program takes coordination and

thought. There are liability issues for employers to consider when employing youth under certain ages (state specific) and employers are often hesitant to have younger workers in their workspace, often claiming that they have no work

appropriate for youth to successfully accomplish. One role of a career readiness program will be to help employers understand the value of having youth in the workplace and articulate the kind of work that is best suited to their skill sets. As an intermediary, a program manager's role is to try to eliminate all the reasons why an employer may say no to hiring youth and ease the process for all parties involved.

TIPS FOR BUILDING WORK-BASED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES *As you determine what work-based opportunities to provide to youth in your program, consider these guiding questions:*

WHAT LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT do you want to play in the process?
- *Low involvement involves informing students of available opportunities and directing them to an employer. Example: many school-based guidance programs or external career centers*
- *Middle involvement programs inform students about possibilities, help match them to opportunities, support them throughout their internship, and help smooth out issues as they arise on the jobsite. Example: Our Big Futures*
- *High involvement is actually acting as the employer of record for students and taking all liability, payment, etc. while they do work for a local employer. Example: Skills for Rhode Island's Future*

WHAT INCENTIVES will youth receive for participation?
- *Options include receiving school credit, gift certificates, scholarships, or paychecks.*
- *Who will provide the incentives: your employer, the youth's employer, or the youth's school?*
- *How will these incentives be coordinated?*

WHAT WILL BE THE TIMING and duration of work-based learning experiences?
- *Determine between part-time and/or full-time opportunities and summer versus school-year experiences.*

HOW WILL YOU DETERMINE if a work-based learning experience is effective and working for both the student and employer?

Age-Appropriate Activities and Events*

In addition to one-on-one mentoring, regular workshops and seminars are important OBF program elements and can be conducted by program staff or by external partners from various industries. The cadence of these activities and events are dependent on youth's interest and program enrollment. In general, age-appropriate topics can include:

14-15-YEAR-OLDS

CAREER EXPOSURE and Exploration During this age range, programs and activities should be exploratory by providing youth with opportunities to learn about different careers and industries and think about what interests or motivates them. Activities may include:
- *Career panels*
- *Job shadowing*
- *Interview workshops*
- *Exposure and connections to diverse careers and professionals*

CAREER READINESS skill building, which may include:
- *Financial literacy, an invaluable skill to develop in young people before or at the time they start to make money*
- *Navigating the job search and application process*
- *Goal setting*
- *Projecting professionalism in the workplace*
- *Advocacy, confidence, and leadership skills*

16-17-YEAR-OLDS

PREPARING FOR POST-SECONDARY PATHWAYS, which may include:
- *Scholarships*
- *Support in early college and dual enrollment*
- *Selecting a post-secondary pathway/program*
- *Financial aid support*

NETWORK BUILDING:
- *Connecting with a mentor or professional*
- *Building social capital, see the Clayton Christensen Instiute's social capital toolkit* **here**

WORK-BASED LEARNING opportunities, which include:
- *Landing a work-based learning experience or summer job*
- *Earning work credentials*

18-24-YEAR-OLDS

CAREER ADVANCEMENT OPPORTUNITIES:
- *Internships or paid work experiences*
- *Interview prep and resume workshops*

SKILL-BUILDING AND TRAINING:
- *Credential programs and trainings*
- *Connections to training providers*

FINANCE MANAGEMENT:
- *Credit building and/or repair*
- *Budgeting workshops*

* These ages/stages should be viewed as fluid. Additional workshop programming could focus on training and education planning, life-skills development, and network building.

Building Relationships

TIPS FOR BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Through relationships youth cultivate with program staff, mentors, and each other, they can build their own personal networks and social capital. Strong relationships lead to greater opportunity in education and careers. When youth are provided with strong connections through programs like OBF, they are able to strengthen their own relationship-building skills to use in other parts of their lives. Here are some key tips and considerations for building strong relationships:

ACTIVE LISTENING: Utilize active listening during 1:1 sessions and program activities. Through active listening, ask probing and clarifying questions, provide verbal and nonverbal positive feedback, and summarize what is being shared.

SAFE SPACES: Create spaces for youth to share their voices. Provide opportunities for youth participants to share ideas and insight that can shift program activities.

CONNECT INTERESTS: When youth share their interests, make an active effort to connect them to professionals or experiences to explore those interests. Plan program activities based on the youth being served.

HONEST CONVERSATIONS: Have real, honest conversations. Young adults are often aware of the challenges and issues they face, so give them the space to be able to talk openly about their concerns.

MENTAL HEALTH: Invest in mental health resources for both program participants and staff. Building relationships can be hard when an individual is not able to take care of themselves first.

CONSISTENCY: Remember the best way to create strong and influential relationships with young people is to show them consistency and commitment to building a healthy, symbiotic relationship with them.
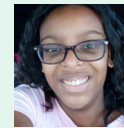
Hearing from Joi, an OBF Participant

*"When I joined **Our Big Futures**, I started to think more about what I want to do in my future. Then I started doing meetings with Ariel (Director of OBF) every month and we would talk about goals for me and what I am interested in looking more into. My goal for last year was to explore business careers. When I was with Ariel, we would talk about some ideas for me and she would look up some things that matched my interests, like marketing, nonprofit and real estate. She also gave me more resources, like different websites and different surveys for me to try, to help me figure out what I want to do in my future. I would say that I need more one-on-one calls with her because I find them to be very helpful and the more one-on-ones I do, the more it will help me understand where I am going to be in life after high school and how I am going to get there.*

Our Big Futures has helped me in a way that I get to learn more about myself as a person and helped me understand what I want to be when I become an adult. Our Big Futures gave me opportunities and resources that are going to help me find my path. Some goals that I have accomplished with the help of Our Big Futures are looking at different careers and trying to understand what I want to do and what I need to help get me there. I benefited from this program. The information provided was extremely helpful and I have also begun exploring career opportunities on my own as well."

—Joi, age 16, engaged in OBF resources since 2020

> OBF'S PROGRAMS AIM TO BUILD AND CULTIVATE **AUTHENTIC CONNECTIONS FOR FEMALE YOUTH,** THROUGH ENGAGING SESSIONS, EVENTS, AND TOOLS."

Our Big Futures

Program Implementation

During their teenage years, female youth tend to question themselves. Research on women's psychological development shows that connection and relationships are guiding principles for growth for women. While female-identifying youth continue to seek out meaningful relationships, questioning their own voices can lead to inauthentic connections where they are not comfortable with sharing their feelings. This can result in a disconnection from others and themselves. OBF's programs aim to build and cultivate authentic connections for female youth, through engaging sessions, events, and tools.

Youth Engagement
Once an organization has decided the types of programming and activities they will undertake, the next crucial step is to figure out the best way to engage the students they seek to serve. In this work, there is no "one size fits all" approach to centering the young person's needs, meeting them where they are, and supporting them in the most effective way. To best support all participating youth, OBF's career coaching sessions, as well as the program

Program Implementation

activities and events, are optional—there is no mandatory participation. OBF believes that supporting young people, especially female youth, in developing personal accountability for their future and keeping the commitments they make is coaching in and of itself. It's also important to be aware of the preferred communication methods of your participants to ensure the highest engagement possible.

ENGAGEMENT TOOLS
COULD INCLUDE:

▶ Active engagment with a career coach
▶ Opportunities to participate in fun activities (walks, museums, exploring a new neighborhood, escape room, classes, sporting or community events, etc.)
▶ Social media messaging that taps into a fear of missing out
▶ Making engagement as easy as possible through preferred communication methods (ex. Instagram messenger, texting, email, etc). Note that in OBF's experience, email has not proven to be a successful engagement strategy.
▶ Paid incentives like stipends, scholarships, or gift cards

Coaching is considered active engagement, but program participants may move from passive to active engagement several times throughout a program. Generally, what OBF staff have seen is that if a youth participant decides to disengage with personal coaching, they are either in transition, started receiving services elsewhere, or they are not in need because they have achieved the goals they set.

LENGTH OF PARTICIPATION

When and how long a participant stays in active coaching can be influenced by several factors:
▶ Youth might be accessing resources in other places.
▶ There may be no identified need.
▶ The need for coaching is solely around a time-bound goal.
▶ Youth might already have a strong support network and just need access to shared resources and opportunities.
▶ Social media and a fear of missing out!

Incentives are useful tools for initial engagement and re-engagement of youth. Providing scholarships, paid internship opportunities, raffle gift cards, etc. can lead to greater attendance and participation in programs. Build a section for incentives in the program budget or fundraise from community partners to have incentives throughout programming activities and events.
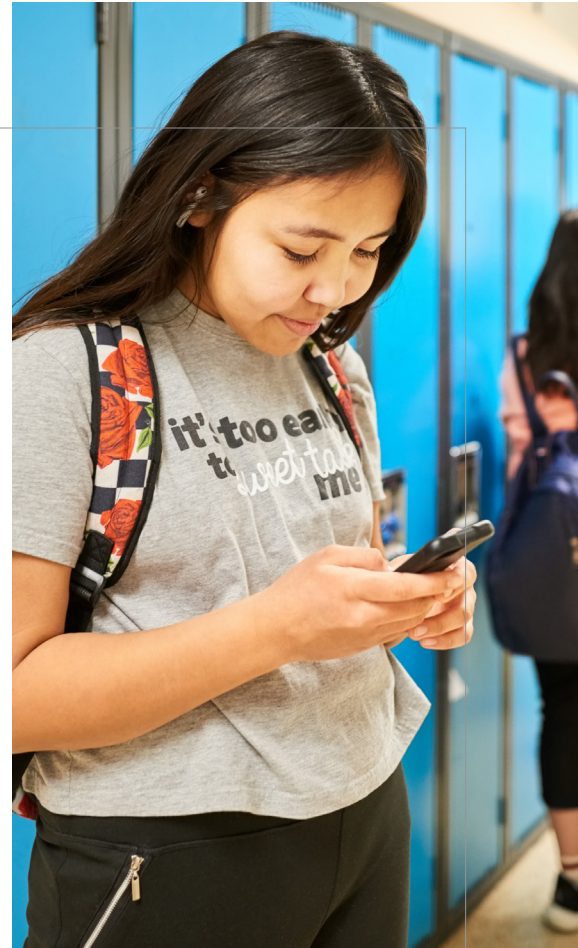
> ❝ IT'S ALSO IMPORTANT TO BE AWARE OF THE **PREFERRED COMMUNICATION METHODS** OF YOUR PARTICIPANTS TO ENSURE THE HIGHEST ENGAGEMENT POSSIBLE. ❞

Levels of Engagement

In OBF's program, female youth can identify and select the program activities and experiences that are most important to them. Here are three examples of participating youth and their engagement in the program.

INFORMED ENGAGEMENT

▶ *MICHELLE, 20 - Single parent home, oldest of two, currently enrolled in a two-year program at Northern Essex Community College studying journalism*

▶ *Worked with OBF staff once every two weeks on strengthening leadership skills, securing a paid internship, and finding career exposure opportunities.*

▶ *During coaching sessions Michelle was encouraged to take on more leadership opportunities, so she joined our Junior Advisory Board (JAB) and chaired a committee. That leadership role challenged her to set an example in peer spaces. She also signed up for a film workshop with one of our program partners, FreshFilms, to learn more about video journalism. Ultimately, Michelle was offered a paid internship through a board member.*

INVOLVED ENGAGEMENT

▶ *KEJSI, 17 - Two parent home, current senior at Boston Latin Academy, interested in studying law*

▶ *Did not sign up for career coaching but engages with the program through the leadership component, the Junior Advisory Board (JAB). Reviews the newsletter for opportunities.*

▶ *Kejsi became involved in OBF after attending the info session for the JAB in June 2020. She applied for the position of VP for the Board, which she currently holds. She has been an active member and has taken advantage of the opportunities offered through the OBF program. One of these opportunities was Hatch Lab (connects NextGen female-identifying youth and young adults to a global network of thought-leaders and "out of the box" experts from a broad array of disciplines focused on solving large-scale challenges) over the summer of 2020.*

COLLABORATIVE ENGAGEMENT

▶ *STACEY, 17 - Two parent home, oldest of two, currently a senior in high school with an interest in attending UMass Boston to study psychology*

▶ *Met with an OBF staff member monthly for the first three months of enrollment, receiving coaching directly around finding employment and conducting an informational interview with a psychologist of Haitian descent.*

▶ *Stacey was connected to Dr. Charmain Jackman, who sits on our Diversity Board. Dr. Jackman then recommended her for the Strong Women Strong Girls (SWSG) employment STEM program. Now that Stacey is employed through SWSG, her engagement with OBF has shifted to low. Program staff checks in with her every 2-3 months to see if she is still employed and offers her additional resources around college readiness.*

Online Resources

Program designers should plan for the utilization of various in-house and/or third-party tools and resources that can promote better communication among youth and increase program efficacy. However, planners need to be selective about which programs or products to use. Taking on too many resources at once can be overwhelming and difficult to execute. Some of the tools OBF has used include:

ONLINE COMMUNITY PLATFORM

An online community platform software is essential to establishing and maintaining communication with youth. The virtual community serves as a hub of information that is readily accessible to youth, ideally serving as a robust catch-all for sharing resources and opportunities in an effective and streamlined manner, making program announcements, publicizing events, and building connections between community members. For programs with limited budgets, free or low-cost platforms can be an option. Example: OBF initially used the free [CREW app](#)*, meant for frontline staff, and then switched to the* [SisterSource](#) *platform, powered by* [Graduway](#)*, which is more suited to communicating with students, alumni and volunteers. A low-cost option might be* [MightyNetworks](#)*.*

TRUE COLLEGE COSTS

Youth will benefit from a digital tool that helps bring transparency to college costs and money matters so that all students are equipped to invest in their future. Example: [MoneyThinks](#)

CAREER QUIZZES/ASSESSMENTS

Online career quizzes can help female-identifying youth and young adults start thinking about what careers might be the best fit for their unique skills and character traits. OBF staff members often use this tool in our first coaching sessions to start conversation around career and educational aspirations. Example: [Futurescape](#) *by American Student Assistance*

Building a Network

Through Strong Partnerships with Stakeholders

In addition to the career coaching and mentoring outlined previously, impactful education and career readiness programs, like OBF, provide work-based learning experiences and real-world connections through community partners and local employers. These partners can help create a pipeline of youth to participate in the program, develop and deliver expert programming, or provide valuable job opportunities to program participants.

How to Find and Cultivate Partner Connections

When building a portfolio of professional connections who can serve as mentors or provide experiences for youth, start with your organization's personal and professional connections. Develop an outreach and engagement plan, using emails and newsletters, to share what your program is doing and what opportunities there are. In this messaging, explain the value for employers to engage in programs with youth.

> "PARTNERS CAN HELP CREATE A PIPELINE OF YOUTH TO PARTICIPATE IN THE PROGRAM OR **PROVIDE VALUABLE JOB OPPORTUNITIES** TO PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS."

Building a Network

Types of Partnerships

▶ *SERVICE PROVIDERS:*
Nonprofits who are serving the same demographic can provide supplemental skills workshops or provide support services that your program may not be able to carry out on your own. For example, OBF partners with Invest in Girls to provide financial literacy workshops and WRITEBoston to support members with their college essays. Utilizing organizations who are serving the same demographic in their area of expertise is a great way to leverage your community network and provide a robust number of resources to participating youth. You can also tap into these partners' contact lists to spread the word about your program. Larger nonprofits in particular may have expansive networks that allow you to reach new populations you may not have targeted in the past. Remember—you don't have to do everything on your own. Sometimes it's best to partner with others.

▶ *CORPORATE PARTNERS:*
Businesses and experts in specific fields can provide vital opportunities necessary to the advancement of youth participants, such as paid internships, work-based learning experiences and career-exposure events. Employers with multiple locations and abundant, different entry level positions are ideal, as are employers with experience in dealing with youth in their first jobs. They should understand that these are young people trying to figure out what professionalism is and value

the opportunity to train future talent.

If employers do not typically employ young people, program administrators should look to provide guidance and instruction on overcoming common obstacles in young adults' employment, like nontraditional schedules that must accommodate schooling, transportation issues, or concerns

over liability and insurance. Employers should also be advised on the cultural issues that may make youth feel awkward or uncomfortable in their first job. Things like how to help youth navigate cultural differences in the workplace, how to respond to common workplace procedures like having to show identification

HOW TO IDENTIFY PARTNERS

▶ *Ask your organization's board, leadership, and program staff and develop an initial list.*

▶ *Seek out organic introductions from community members and families who have youth involved in programming.*

▶ *Start a conversation with a local Chamber of Commerce, workforce board or other type of business association. They may be able to direct you to businesses who have experience or interest employing youth.*

▶ *Create a wish list of industries and organizations and send out communications (flyers or emails) to seek out connections. Attend community events or go directly to local companies to introduce yourself or share your program.*

▶ *Cold call or email large organizations. OBF administrators have generally had success with cold calls or emails that briefly describe the program's goals and overall organizational mission statement.*

▶ *Use social media.*

▶ *Find the right person. For example, when dealing with a large corporation, just tracking down the right person who handles community outreach or corporate social responsibility, or who coordinates internships, can make a difference.*

▶ *If serving female youth or another specific group of youth, identify organizations or professionals with similar backgrounds or identities.*

Building a Network

regularly, or how various departments can help facilitate getting a job done, are often issues that are overlooked by employers who are used to having job-ready employees. The program administrator may also have to work together with the employer to instill in youth the essential workplace skills that come with learning by doing on a first job, like timeliness, professionalism, and teamwork.

Often, focusing on fewer quality partnerships is preferable to trying to maintain relationships with a large quantity of organizations or employers. Partnering with one large employer, for example, may offer multiple opportunities to youth and may provide resources your program can utilize, such as a large human resources department. Working to steward a relationship with that one company, or handful of companies, and making sure they're connected to the work you're doing, your mission and your young adults, are more important than having multiple companies who know your organization or program on a surface level. You can always expand over time but start small.

Often the biggest challenge to employer engagement is that an employer believes a program will be too much work for them to execute, and they don't have time in their day to do another thing. Your job is to remove those barriers and make it easy for an employer to say yes to offering an experience for your students. You are the intermediary that makes it all possible, so your job is to do all you can to break down as many barriers as possible.

Staffing and Partner Support

Maintaining partner relationships is key to the success and stability of career readiness programs. Programs should look to have one or more dedicated staff members in place to provide support to employer partners when challenges arise. Hiring a staff member who has strong advocacy and interpersonal skills, and who can identify, cultivate, and steward relationships with stakeholders interested in providing opportunities for program participants, will be important to the success of your program.

Regular newsletters and periodic check-ins can help maintain good partner relations. Additional successful strategies for stewardship include having multiple touchpoints in your program and ways for partners to plug in to your work. For example, in addition to providing job opportunities, representatives from employers can participate on career panels or help with fundraising and be strong advocates for other employers to engage in your program.

Your organization should also find ways to align with a partner's work and make the partnership mutually beneficial. In other words, your organization doesn't always have to be on the receiving end, but instead should look to ensure that both parties are getting something out of the relationship.

> " YOUR JOB IS TO REMOVE THOSE BARRIERS AND **MAKE IT EASY FOR AN EMPLOYER TO SAY YES** TO OFFERING AN EXPERIENCE FOR YOUR STUDENTS. "

Building a Network

Employer Example: The Handle Bar and OBF Partnership

The Handle Bar, a Boston-based cycling studio, is a model OBF partner that provides paid positions for female-identifying youth and young adult participants.

Our Big Futures was connected to The Handle Bar through one of their cycling instructors who is also a Big Sister. She wanted to connect the agency with the HB to provide an activity/space that Big Sisters and their teen matches could share. The HB participated as panelists for an OBF Career Week within the High School Mentoring Program. This brought up conversations around the HB potentially hiring teens from the OBF program and they offered us two open positions to share. The HB worked directly with us throughout the hiring process by sharing interview questions ahead of time to appropriately coach our female-identifying youth and young adults. Once hired, the communication continued with them sharing updates on how our participants were doing and conducting check-ins. Additionally, they ran a fundraising campaign on our behalf and were able to raise up to $3,260 for OBF programming. We continue to look at The HB as a model partner.

YOUTH TESTIMONIAL

SYANN, AGE 17, OBF PARTICIPANT SINCE 2020

> *I have been working at The Handle Bar for about six months before writing this and I'm here to tell you some of the great things I have experienced so far! First off, the "HB" has always been so welcoming and helpful to me as I transition to my first business job. I have never had a business job before and mostly worked remotely. The managers here and workers helped ease me into the new atmosphere AND having my friend there also made it easier to learn the skills quickly and create a routine. The one thing I love at The HB are the regulars and just the people overall. The amount of networking I have done and the amount of people I have met from The HB who have given me advice and love on my hard days have increased dramatically since I have applied. This job is generally straightforward and great for people who don't want to work long, excessive six-hour shifts. Some difficult things I have had to experience at The HB are difficulty balancing school with the shifts and lack of organization at times. If you plan on applying, keep in mind that you may have trouble with customers and you must think well on your feet! Also, do not take more shifts than you can handle and listen to yourself. The HB is flexible, so do what you need to do. Lastly, the HB is a great place to make memories, so please remember to enjoy this community, even if it is a job."*

Tips for Engaging Partners

Soliciting employer participation in your program and then building and maintaining those relationships can be difficult and time consuming. Here are some tips to make the process easier:
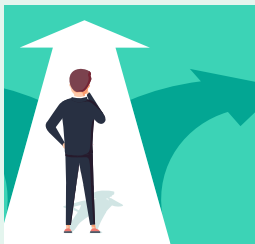
GIVE EMPLOYER PARTNERS FLEXIBILITY

▶ *Some employers may want to offer paid internships, while others may want to start off slowly, with a job shadow day or career panel appearance at first, and then build up to providing youth with employment opportunities. Providing a menu with clearly defined time and/or resource commitments and levels of engagement can provide a busy partner with a faster way to get to a yes.*

▶ *Give employers the option to host female-identifying youth at their own facility or join activities at yours.*

▶ *Assuring employers that it won't be a heavy lift for them upfront, and that they can ramp up to full participation, can go a long way to ensuring their participation.*

CLEARLY DEFINE THEIR ROLE

Provide training and resources for those who haven't typically employed or worked with female-identifying youth and young adults before. Employers are by-and-large eager to get involved in internship programs, but many do not know how. Present clear, detailed, step-by-step instructions on exactly what's required on their part and if manpower is an issue, fill in any resource gaps (if possible) with program staff or volunteers from your own organization.

IDENTIFY WHAT'S IN IT FOR THEM

▶ *Employers are concerned about a talent pipeline and want to do good in their community, but they are also juggling a number of other business priorities and resource pressures. You need to convince them that there is something in it for them.*

▶ *See the appendix for a sample business letter that highlights the positive impacts and importance of paid opportunities for youth and the benefits to their employers.*

Reporting
Outcomes, and Learnings

Program evaluation is key when learning what programming is working for young adults. Evaluations are systematic approaches for measuring program effectiveness, learning what works, and highlighting potential areas for improvement. As you develop your plan for program evaluation and data collection, consider these two questions: why are we providing this program to youth and what do we hope to see as a result?

Data collection should include a combination of qualitative and quantitative mediums to build a robust reporting system. Quantitative data, which expresses a quantity or range, includes participation numbers, demographic data, and youth surveys. Qualitative data focuses on descriptive findings, including youth interviews, event observations, and open-ended feedback. Our Big Futures uses a combination of data collection methods to measure impact.

Partnership evaluations should also be a part of program measurement. Interview participating employers and resource providers about their experiences in the program, gather testimonials, and ask for their feedback on future improvements.

Program developers should design outcomes measurements based on short- and long-term goals, for both participating youth and the organization itself. While it may be difficult to draw a straight line between your program and long-term outcomes like increased post-secondary or career success, it is important to keep some of these long-term goals in mind when building a data strategy. For example if success of your program will be measured by these long-term goals, you will need to build a data strategy that allows you to track your student outcomes after they leave your program. This might mean ongoing alumni engagement that will allow you to check in with them years down the road so you can link some outcomes back to your program.

DATA-COLLECTION METHODS

Our Big Futures uses a combination of data collection methods to measure impact

Skills assessment (Template)	Pre & post intervention surveys	Interviews/ conversations with youth	Youth testimonials	Observations

Reporting

Given that participants in OBF engage with the program to access resources and to get support accomplishing a specific goal, OBF has adopted a more dynamic model of data collection.
▶ OBF administers a skills assessment to all registrants. The skills assessment is used to inform inputs, helping to determine what resources are needed.
▶ Pre- and post-survey data is captured during the first and last sessions of a coaching engagement intervention. This streamlines processes and increases responses, creating a more robust set of data when combined with tracking progress toward goals.

OBF Key Learnings:
The key learnings from OBF will help assist in creating more direct, effective, and useful programming for our young people. Through data collection, OBF has been able to learn more about the topics and types of programming most utilized and by whom, as well as what incentivizing tactics work best when engaging young adults in this program.

Program Findings
▶ OBF saw an increase in 14- to 18-year-olds' engagement when using the CREW app, downloadable directly to their phones with push notifications. E-mail has not proven to be a successful way to connect, track or share resources and opportunities.
▶ As an organization, Big Sister has served a higher percentage of younger teens (ranging from ages 14 to 18), the majority of whom tend to engage around the community aspect of the program, attending and getting involved with enrichment activities like the Junior Advisory Board. Older members (ages 19 to 24) gravitate toward specific opportunities or resources, like applying to a job or receiving needed coaching around a specific scholarship.
▶ Monetary incentives are an important aspect of the program; OBF decided early on that any internship offerings would be paid and that Junior Advisory Board leaders would receive stipends, which OBF hopes to increase in the years to come.
▶ Recruiting diverse specialized coaches, mentors, and professionals who reflect the demographics of the female youth being served is crucial. Youth who may be impacted by societal messaging and cultural biases around "gender-appropriate" occupations need to see themselves represented in a variety of career pathways.
▶ OBF learned to not be afraid when asking employers if they could provide specific staff resources and environmental support to meet our participants' needs.

SHORT- AND LONG-TERM GOALS

As BSAGB designed the OBF program, these were the determined goals:

SHORT TERM:
Program participants build strong connections to the Big Sister community, leveraging the network, shared opportunities and resources to achieve their educational and career goals

LONG TERM:
Program participants are financially independent, growing into competent, caring adults who continue to be actively engaged with the Big SisterBoston community as Big Sisters themselves.

> HAVING A STEADY FUNDING STREAM IS **PARAMOUNT FOR DEVELOPING YOUTH-SERVING PROGRAMS** THAT SUSTAIN AND GROW OVER TIME."

Program Funding
and Sustainability

Ultimately, the goal of program managers should be to build a sustainable program that adapts and grows. Budgeting, funding, and grantmaking are often crucial components of building and growing programs, but aren't the only features of program sustainability. Recruiting and retaining talent is also necessary. Additionally, adapting programs to include digital resources and building out plans to engage and communicate with the surrounding community are pivotal to staying culturally relevant and equity focused.

Budgeting & Funding:

Having a steady funding stream is paramount for developing youth-serving programs that sustain and grow over time. To do this, program managers should develop clear budget and grantmaking plans. Prioritize spending on items and programs that are necessary for programmatic success and growth. Consider the following areas of funding during grant writing and financial planning:

STAFF FUNDING & HIRING

▶ Identify what positions to prioritize for programmatic success.
▶ List out position responsibilities and compare to program goals. Remember, you will be looking to find staff who not only have a strong commitment to youth development, but who can manage employer relationships as well. It is important to prioritize both aspects of the job.
▶ Create a timeline for when each position should start. Determine whether one or two positions can launch a program and additional positions can be hired over time. OBF is run by two positions; see the descriptions here.
▶ When requesting grant funding for staffing, stress your ability to sustain

Program Funding

FINDING THE RIGHT-FIT GRANT AND MAKING SURE TO FOLLOW DIRECTIONS THROUGHOUT THE APPLICATION PROCESS IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF GETTING YOUR PROGRAM FUNDED."

and retain employees beyond initial recruitment. Many funders don't want to fund staff positions for fear the program will go away as soon as their funding commitment ends.

TOOLS & RESOURCES:

▶ Try to locate free or low-cost options for activities, resources, and tools for program staff and youth to use.

▶ Curate a collection of digital tools for youth: ways for them to connect virtually with program staff and each other, engage in events or activities, and connect and network with community members and professionals. OBF uses Sister Source designed by Graduway.

FINANCIAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARTICIPANTS:

▶ Many young adults have incredibly busy schedules, between juggling family and peer commitments, schoolwork,

extracurriculars, and jobs. Incentives, whether they be credentials, badging, prizes, or monetary, should be considered by program staff as they determine their budgets.

▶ Oftentimes, youth must decide between program involvement or part-time work. As part of OBF's social justice commitment, incentives are financial in nature, which increases program accessibility. Some incentives used are:

✧ VISA gift cards to be raffled off during events and activities

✧ Funds and stipends awarded for internship participation

✧ Paid part-time positions for youth advisory board members

Additionally, you could make a strategic decision to ONLY coordinate paid internship opportunities for students and seek partnerships with employers willing to pay.

Grant Writing Tips

Writing a successful grant application starts with a well-thought-out program. Below we will provide some tips for putting together a successful grant application for your youth-serving program:

▶ Finding the right-fit grant and making sure to follow directions throughout the application process is an important part of getting your program funded. There are several online resources to find grant opportunities, from Grants.gov to FoundationCenter.org to Grantwatch.com and Guidestar. org. You can also try local and state government, checking with the departments relevant to your organization's mission. Additionally, your organization's board members are a potential resource, as well as other like-minded nonprofits in your mission space – check their annual

Program Funding

reports for lists of funders. A traditional search with Google or another search engine, using relevant and specific keywords, may also provide results.

▶ Understanding what the funder wants and meeting their requirements is central to the grant writing process. If your program does not meet their needs, it will not be funded.

▶ If your program does not yet exist, consider seeking a grant to help fund the strategic planning and program creation process. Be prepared to outline how funds will be used to facilitate the planning process (i.e., staff resources, outside consultants, stakeholder meetings, etc.).

▶ If your program and strategic plan already exist, provide information on how it meets the needs of your community. You want to write your proposal with your community in mind. Is this a program that will meet the needs of youth? What is the need for a program like the one you are proposing and how will your community benefit from this?

▶ When writing your proposal, start with a mission statement that tells the funder the purpose of your program. Make sure that you specify what your program entails, what it looks like on the ground with your participants, and what you hope to change and accomplish with your program. The more details you can provide, the better. You want the funder to have all the information needed to visualize what your program aims to accomplish and how impactful it will be.

▶ It is important to have background information and data to back up why your program will be successful. The most successful grant applications are those that demonstrate an understanding of the outcomes they would like to see in their students based on existing data and research.

▶ Create a timeline for your program to indicate to the funder that you have a plan for implementation. Indicate how your program will be scaled. Will the program be fully implemented right away or is there time needed to scale the program?

▶ Understand and have a plan for how you want to assess your program. Identify what outcomes you want measured and how you hope to measure progress of your program.

▶ Some questions to ask yourself when thinking of program assessment:

✧ Will you be measuring participant impact? If so, how?
✧ What skills would you like youth participants to gain from your program?
✧ How will you be able to tell that participants have gained these skills?

▶ Your program budget and budget justification should provide information on all program costs, including materials and resources, such as curriculum and personnel costs if applicable. Be intentional with your spending as funders want a clear picture of how you plan to get the most out of your funding.

▶ Program sustainability and scale are crucial to funders! Be sure to include details of how you plan to maintain your program's stability and expand benefits to more female-identifying youth and young adults.

> **"**
> YOU WANT TO **WRITE YOUR PROPOSAL WITH YOUR COMMUNITY IN MIND.** IS THIS A PROGRAM THAT WILL MEET THE NEEDS OF YOUTH?**"**

Developing Your Own

Career Readiness Program

When designing a program like Our Big Futures, administrators and educators should follow three phases: (1) Planning, (2) Design & Implementation, and (3) Sustaining and/or Scaling. Ultimately, every program should be developed with sustainability in mind, which involves buy-in from program leadership and engagement from community stakeholders. This section of the toolkit serves as an initial brainstorming document. When used, program staff should take their initial thoughts and build out their own program plans.

STEP ONE: PLANNING

STEP TWO: DESIGN & IMPLEMENTATION

STEP THREE: SUSTAINING & SCALING YOUR PROGRAM

Step 1: Planning

This stage is often skipped or not carefully considered, as many organization staff are pushed to start a program as quickly as possible. While launching a program in a short span of time may seem ideal, the planning stage is crucial when building a career readiness program that will last and grow. Use the planning table below to begin:

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER	NOTES
Answer these key questions before starting a program plan: ▶ What problem are you trying to solve? ▶ What is the current need for a career readiness program in the community or among the population you serve? ▶ What is your end goal?	....
Consider WHO you are serving: ▶ Who will benefit from the program? ▶ How many youth will this program serve? (Both at the outset and with vision of scale) ▶ What resources/opportunities should they have access to? ▶ Be specific: consider age range and grade.	....

Step 1: Planning

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER	NOTES
Complete a Needs Assessment:	
▶ Now that you answered these key questions, ask the youth in the community or at the organization for feedback. This is an important step—including young adults in the planning process can ensure programs are designed based on their specific interests and needs. Think about how to include youth in all stages of this process.	
▶ Explore what other career readiness programs exist in the greater community. How will this specific program complement or expand on the community's offerings for young adults?	
▶ Review and analyze current program data.	
▶ Is there business and community interest in a career readiness program? Starting conversations with community members early can help you start building a portfolio of professional connections or potential investors in the program.	
Create target outcomes and goals:	
▶ What outcomes, competencies and skills will youth gain from this program?	
▶ How will these outcomes be measured? (Use Section 5 of this toolkit to guide this planning process.)	

Step 1: Planning

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

NOTES

Determine what activities will be offered:

▶ What services are required and central to this program to meet youth need?

▶ What research and best practices support this list of services?

▶ Develop a tentative annual timeline of activities and services.

▶ Use Section 3 to determine which services to provide.

Decide who the champions of this work will be:

▶ Who internally can spearhead this effort?

▶ Will additional staff need to be hired? What positions are needed and when should they be hired?

▶ Which services will be provided by program staff versus external partners?

▶ Build an initial list of community partners who can provide experiences for youth.

Step 1: Planning

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

NOTES

Build a plan for leadership buy-in:

▶ Who do you need to convince to get this off the ground?

▶ Are there internal stakeholders that could be a hindrance to success if not brought in early?

▶ Share your ideas with organizational leadership and your board, as well as other community leaders as necessary.

▶ Make sure everyone has a clear understanding of program goals and objectives so they can be champions of the program.

Depending on your individual program needs, this may be the initial step in planning. Presenting a clear plan detailing the overall program, its goals, the community needs, and a tentative timeline and list of partners can sway organizational leaders to support and buy in to the development of a career readiness plan.

Step 2: Design & Implementation

Once you have determined who the program is serving and what the primary programmatic goals are, start to build out the program's design. Much of these elements should be designed before program launch, but they should also be adapted based on your program's success and growth.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER	NOTES
Build a budget and plan for funding: ▸ Determine what funding you have already and how much funding is necessary for program launch and implementation. ▸ Build an initial budget and submit for leadership/board approval. ▸ Begin identifying potential funders and grants (see section 6 for more information).	
Create marketing and communications plans: ▸ Develop communications plans for each audience: youth, families, funders, community members, and other organizations. ▸ Determine which tools to use: newsletters, online community platforms, social media, emails, and/or texts, etc. ▸ Decide who will be responsible for executing these communications plans.	

Step 2: Design

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER	NOTES
Develop youth outreach and recruitment methods: ▶ Determine how you will conduct initial outreach for youth to learn about your program and how to engage youth who may be involved in other programs in your organization. ▶ Build ways to re-engage young adults who participate in activities or events and then disengage for a period of time. ▶ Consider incentives to grab youth's attention and determine a means of securing these incentives— scholarships, internship opportunities, and contests are all options.	
Build processes for outcomes measurement and program evaluation: ▶ Select and plan methods for gathering feedback and measuring both qualitative and quantitative data. ▶ Decide how to evaluate the efficacy of your program and the resources you use and implement. ▶ Use Section 5 of this toolkit as you design outcomes measurement and program evaluation.	

Step 2: Design

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER	NOTES
Select tools and resources that complement and support your program: ▸ Based on the services your program will provide, decide what virtual and in-person resources are needed. Resources could include curriculum, out-of-the-box activities, and digital platforms. ▸ Seek out low-cost or free options or include tools and resources in your budget. ▸ Consider a community platform to post resources, provide coaching support, and share messaging.	
Consider trainings and professional development: ▸ Determine the topics and skills program staff will need to support this program. Topics can include coaching and relationship building; improving instruction methods; diversity, equity, and inclusion; and program management. ▸ Develop training for professional volunteers and employers who serve as mentors and offer them throughout the year. ▸ Create a timeline and budget for staff professional development.	

Step 2: Design

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER	NOTES
Create a portfolio of employer and community partnerships and a plan for involvement and outreach: ▶ Build a list of connections and assign someone the responsibility of maintaining connections. ▶ Develop plans for continued outreach and recruitment as well as involvement in programs. ▶ Create resources to share opportunities, like newsletters, flyers, and events. ▶ See Section 4 for more information.	
Provide opportunities for youth to voice their program interests and feedback: ▶ Give youth the space to share their ideas and feedback to inform program activities and changes. Feedback sessions should be in addition to outcomes measurement practices. ▶ Use youth advisory boards or design sessions to bring youth into the decision-making process. ▶ Provide paid opportunities for young adults to design and build parts of programs themselves, either through stipends or internships.	

Step 3: Sustaining & Scaling

Throughout the planning and implementation phases, sustainability of impactful programming should be the ultimate goal. Additionally, program managers may consider scalability of programming, by either expanding services for more young adults or replicating programs in other locations. When thinking long-term about the success of your career readiness program, prioritize creating goals and making connections that focus on sustainability. Read through Section 6 to gather more information about this topic.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER	NOTES
Create 3- or 5-year goals: ▶ What goals will continue to remain a focus of your program? What are some new goals for your program over a longer period of time? ▶ What are some long-term outcomes you hope to see? How will that be measured? ▶ What budget is needed to support these long-term plans?	
Develop processes and plans for long-term funding or financial stability: ▶ Who will be responsible for locating funding or fundraising for new initiatives? ▶ Seek out additional sources of funding and keep a list of potential grant applications or funders.	

Step 3: Sustaining

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER	NOTES
Network with community leaders and other organizations: ▶ Join coalitions and committees to become more active in your community, make broader decisions, and learn from other organizations. ▶ Building connections is crucial to establishing your program in your community, connecting to additional funders, or onboarding new employee partners.	
Share programmatic best practices so others can learn from your work: ▶ Present at conferences or plan events that showcase your program. ▶ Publish resources and learnings, either on your organization's website or collaboratively with external connections, to further share best practices.	
Create opportunities for program alumni: ▶ Build an alumni program for youth to continue to connect with program staff and each other. ▶ Share opportunities so alumni can return as professionals to support current youth participants.	

Looking Ahead

A Note from Deborah Re, BSAGB President & CEO

> **"** WE KNOW WITHOUT CONSISTENT ADULT SCAFFOLDING, GIRLS CAN EASILY END UP IN **JOBS BY DEFAULT AND STRUGGLE FOR THE REST OF THEIR LIVES** TO GAIN FINANCIAL FOOTING.**"**

Our Big Futures has given Big Sister the opportunity to give our Little Sisters the extra support needed to craft a post-secondary plan. Through partnerships and personalized, customized coaching, girls are given the chance to map out a future based on their skills, interests, and competencies. Our dedicated program staff have both the lived experiences and the practical work experience to form trusting relationships with Little Sisters to provide the individualized support the girls need. In addition, many girls also have the support of a Big Sister mentor, allowing the OBF coach and the Big Sister to collaborate on ways to keep girls on the track of their choosing. We know without consistent adult scaffolding, girls can easily end up in jobs by default and struggle for the rest of their lives to gain financial footing. Big Sister has been given the opportunity to change this trajectory through ASA's funding. We are hoping to expand this program by having coaches focused on careers, college, vocational training and providing girls with the in-depth knowledge and experience to take the track of their choosing.

Testimonial

Justic, Age 17, engaged with OBF resources since 2020

"Initially, I joined Our Big Futures to get the ball rolling for myself. I was 14, I had no idea what I wanted to do, and quite frankly, all I wanted to do was lie on the couch and eat chips. I had always felt a desire to do something more, be productive, work towards a goal. However, it's quite a hard thing to do when you don't know what you should work towards. So, I took the responsibility to enroll myself into OBF, but I didn't expect much. Maybe a passive email, something

I could easily ignore. To my surprise, I was met with support and help with planning my future. Ariel helped me by taking the time to understand who I was and navigated how she could best help me. It took quite a while, but eventually I landed a job with 826 Boston with her behind me. Through her support, I learned how to create a resume, succeed in an interview, and how to conduct myself professionally. Shortly thereafter, she presented me with the opportunity to apply for a well-credited writing program. This writing program allowed me to explore various writing styles and genres, become a published author, and get paid. This would show to be the turning point in the development of my career.

As I settled into my new responsibilities, Ariel was there every step of the way. She supported me in my personal and professional development, which was the foundation for my newfound love for writing and attitude towards my life. Rather than eating chips on the couch, I was actively developing my writing skills, and found a deep love for it. In the span of two months, I was officially a published writer online and in actual books. As I continued to take my professional life seriously, Ariel never stopped supporting me."

> "I DIDN'T EXPECT MUCH. MAYBE A PASSIVE EMAIL, SOMETHING I COULD EASILY IGNORE. **TO MY SURPRISE, I WAS MET WITH SUPPORT AND HELP** WITH PLANNING MY FUTURE."

A LIST OF BOSTON-BASED AND NATIONAL FEMALE YOUTH-SERVING ORGANIZATIONS

Name of Organization	Location	Reach	Programs/ Services Offered	Mission Statement
Chica Project	✧ Massachusetts	✧ More than 3,000 chicas served, 6 school partnerships, 250 matched mentors, and 50+ funding and community partners	✧ In-school programs and workshops ✧ Community-based programs ✧ Chica Challenge bootcamp ✧ Summer Village	✧ To close the opportunity gap for Latinas and other Women of Color by empowering them with the skills, confidence, and network necessary to thrive personally and professionally. ✧ Serves girls ages 11-18.
Girl Up	✧ 120 Countries ✧ All 50 US States	✧ 85,000 female-identifying leaders with 4,500 clubs across the world	✧ Training in advocacy, fundraising, storytelling and community organizing around gender inequities ✧ Teen Advisory Boards ✧ After-School Clubs ✧ Leadership Summit ✧ WiSci (a STEM centered summer camp)	✧ We commit to supporting our young leaders in their Passionate Action for social change and seek feedback from our Global Community to ensure Accountability in maintaining our values.
Girls Empowerment Network	✧ Austin, TX ✧ Houston, TX	✧ 15,000+ participants served annually ✧ 6,500+ hours of community service by volunteers	✧ Pathfinder Leadership Summit ✧ Girl Connect (curriculum to build life skills) ✧ Girls Empowerment Network's Summer Day Camp ✧ We Are Girls Conference	✧ We ignite the power in girls by teaching them the skills to thrive and believe in their ability to be unstoppable. This mission comes to life in our programs through a curriculum designed to increase each girl's self-efficacy (her belief in her ability to succeed). ✧ Serves grades 3-12.

A LIST OF BOSTON-BASED AND NATIONAL FEMALE YOUTH-SERVING ORGANIZATIONS

Name of Organization	Location	Reach	Programs/Services Offered	Mission Statement
Girls, Inc.	✧ 1,500 locations across the US and Canada	✧ 350 cities with over 130,000 participants	✧ Evidence-based programming that provides academic support and enrichment, life skills and mentoring	✧ We focus on the development of the whole girl. She learns to value herself, take risks, and discover and develop her inherent strengths. The combination of long-lasting mentoring relationships, a pro-girl environment, and evidence-based programming equips girls to navigate gender, economic, and social barriers, and grow up healthy, educated, and independent. Informed by girls and their families, we also advocate for legislation and policies to increase opportunities and rights for all girls. ✧ Serves girls ages 5-18
Girls on the Run	✧ Canada ✧ All 50 US States (including the District of Columbia)	✧ Available in over 12,000 locations across North America ✧ Serves over 200,000 female-identifying youth annually	✧ After school programming that culminates in completion of a 5K ✧ Curriculum that fosters healthy relationship building & creatively using physical activity as a way to learn life skills and engage female-identifying youth	✧ We inspire girls to be joyful, healthy and confident, using a fun, experi-ence-based curriculum that creatively integrates running.

A LIST OF BOSTON-BASED AND NATIONAL FEMALE YOUTH-SERVING ORGANIZATIONS

Name of Organization	Location	Reach	Programs/ Services Offered	Mission Statement
Girls Who Code	✧ USA ✧ Canada ✧ UK ✧ India	✧ Over 450,000 female-identifying youth served	✧ After-school clubs ✧ Summer series ✧ College & career prep	✧ We focus our work not only on gender diversity but also on young women who are historically underrepresented in computer science fields (low income, lack of exposure to computer science).
Strong Women, Strong Girls (SWSG)	✧ Boston, MA ✧ Pittsburgh, PA	✧ 1,200 youth participants with 525 female-identifying college mentors across 13 colleges with 80 programs	✧ Mentorships ✧ Networking events with local female-identifying college students & young professionals	✧ Empower girls to imagine a broader future through a curriculum grounded on female role models

Business Advocacy Letter
for Paid Youth Opportunities

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Dear BUSINESS CONTACT,

Thank you again for your continued engagement with the students at SCHOOL /DISTRICT /ORGANIZATION. As you know, work-based learning experiences are wonderful ways for students to build their work-place identity, develop a professional network, and expand their career skills. But these programs also have a powerful impact on the employers who have foresight to see the benefit these young people can bring to their business. More and more employers are looking to a high school workforce to begin to address the skills gap and develop a pipeline of workers prepared for jobs in high-demand industries.

As valuable as attaining these skills are for youth, it's important to be aware of the financial barriers that unpaid internships force young people to face, often disproportionately affecting people of color or those from low-income areas who cannot afford to offer free labor in exchange for job training and career advancement opportunities. We at ORGANIZATION NAME are asking you to join us in our growing efforts to link our area's high school students with paid work-based learning experiences.

If you want to encourage a diverse pool of interns who take the work seriously, you must treat an internship as a job and pay interns for the work they do. This will ensure accountability—that the student intern will show up on time, do what's expected of them, be part of a team, and not treat this as a volunteer experience.

Please see the attached list for positive impacts of paid internships on businesses.

Consider partnering with us to bring a paid work experience to a young person eager to learn more about your business. We hope to make this as easy as possible by assisting in setting up stipends, scholarships, or visa gift cards for students if adding them to a traditional payroll proves to be too complicated.

Sincerely,

First, Last Name
Title, Organization

Business Advocacy Letter
(Attachment Page)

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Page 2

Here is a list of positive impacts of paid internships on businesses that you may want to consider:

1. *Young people bring a new perspective to the issues facing your organization and a talent set you may not have.* Can a student help you reach younger customers with their knowledge of the demographic? Do they know the best ways to communicate on social media that could improve your marketing efforts? There are many assets to having a youth perspective that could improve your business.

2. *Build leadership within your organization.* Leaders often learn by doing, and supervising an intern is the perfect way to give your employees additional responsibility and management experience.

3. *You can expand your brand recognition to a younger audience.* Many young people may not even know your organization operates in their community or what you do. Having a high school intern can go a long way to expanding your brand recognition among younger audiences.

4. *You can receive community recognition for the good work you are doing.* Many businesses take on interns simply because it's a way to give back to their community. But often, that also comes with community recognition and a changed view of a business's reputation as a good corporate citizen.

5. *You can begin to train your future workforce and build talent for your industry—trained to meet your specific needs.* Employers across the state are feeling the pinch of a labor shortage and dwindling workforce pipeline, and yet there are young people in our community eager to train for open opportunities. Taking on a high school intern is a wonderful way to grow a pipeline of workers for your business and train them early to be strong employees in the future.

You need employees, students need work experience. Help to solve both challenges by taking on an intern.

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