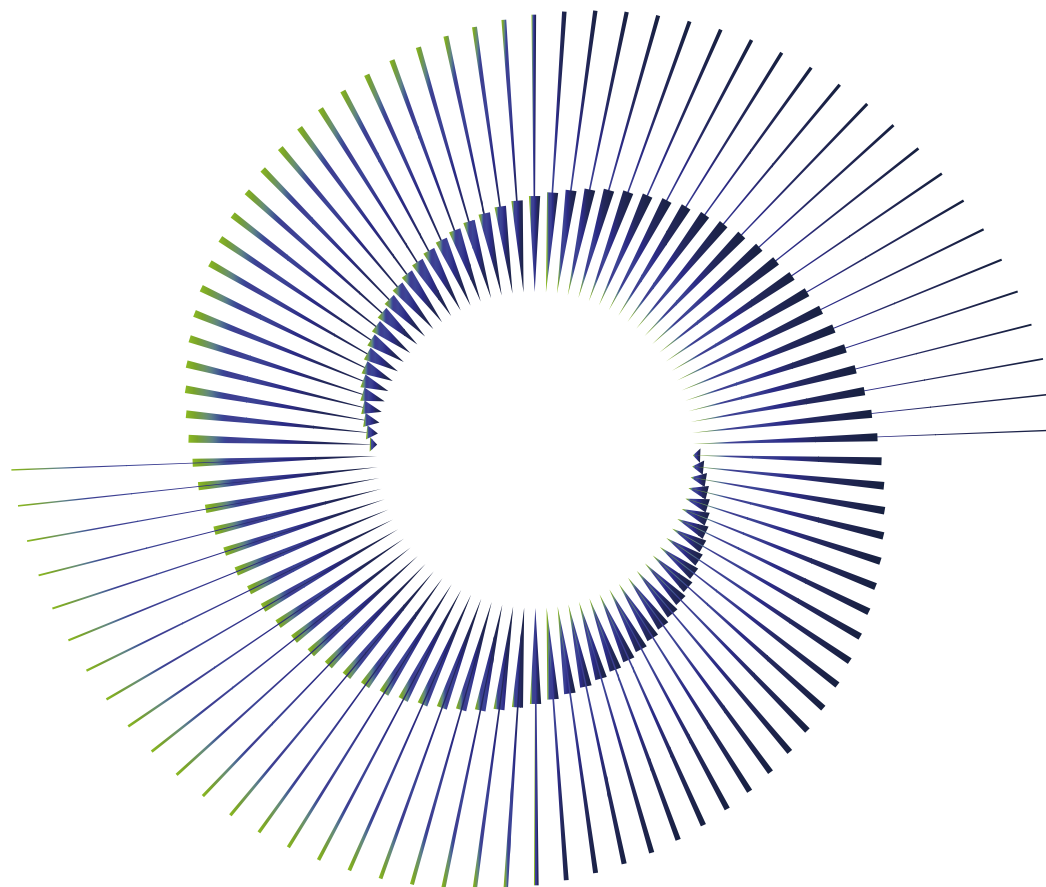




**Monitor  
Institute**

by Deloitte



## **'Playbook' for Engaging Gen Z**

Supporting Gen Z in the Workforce

by Jennifer Holk, Alegria Ruseler-Smith, Allan Ludgate & Manan Mehta



**This brief focuses on solutions to more effectively engage and support Gen Z with barriers in NYC as they navigate the workforce.**

It shares the outputs from extensive desk research and conversations with 40+ individuals—from program staff at workforce development (WFD) nonprofit, to employers of Gen Z, to low-income Gen Z in NYC. It was initially written to prepare a community of workforce development organizations for a workshop held in March 2024 focused on challenges and emergent solutions.

**CONTEXT ON THE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE**

Our Community of Practice (CoP) is designed around a shared question: how to support and engage NYC Gen Z in the workforce. The work as a community kicked off in January 2024 and extended through May 2024. The organizations in the CoP were all workforce development nonprofits in NYC who serve young people experiencing barriers to access jobs that provide opportunities for economic mobility. The group was brought together by the Robin Hood Foundation.



A collaboration between Monitor Institute by Deloitte and the Robin Hood Foundation

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**ROBIN HOOD**

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## APPENDIX

# WHAT IS GOING ON WITH GEN Z?

Gen Z are experiencing the world differently than previous generations, encountering various “layers” of challenges that shape their experience.

## The cost-of-living in NYC continues to outpace wages for low- and middle-income communities



## Gen Z has a different orientation toward work than older generations

- Less than half of Gen Z says their job is central to their sense of identity <sup>2</sup>
- Gen Z are switching jobs at a rate 134% higher than before the pandemic in 2019. Comparatively, Millennials changed jobs 24% more, and Boomers switched 4% less<sup>3</sup>

## COVID-19 dramatically altered educational experiences and early career for Gen Z, having a significant impact on their mental health

1 in 6 New Yorkers age 16-24 were out-of-school and out-of-work (OSOW), a 23% increase relative to pre-pandemic levels<sup>4</sup>

## Being a young person with barriers has always been difficult

- While half of all individuals from high-income families have a bachelor's degree by 25, only 1 in 10 individuals from low-income families do<sup>5</sup>
- Individuals whose highest degree is a high school diploma make about \$1.2 million less over the course of their lifetime than those with a bachelor's degree<sup>6</sup>



# OUR PLAYBOOK

**The purpose of this playbook is to help workforce development organizations...**

...craft programs where Gen Z feel heard and supported, demonstrate agency in shaping their career trajectory, and are able to enter the job market, feeling empowered and prepared to take the next step.

# WHAT IT IS AND IS NOT

**This playbook provides a set of solutions that came out of research and conversations with members of a Community of Practice (CoP) of NYC-based workforce development nonprofits, employers, Gen Z individuals, and subject-matter experts. It is intended to support organizations as they look to implement programmatic changes to effectively engage Gen Z in the workforce.**

## WHAT THIS PLAYBOOK IS...

- A set of solutions that organizations can pick and choose from
- A resource to better understand low- and middle- income Gen Z
- A tool to spark thoughts and support organizations ahead of action planning

- A complete list of things all organizations should do
- Every possible solution an organization could adopt to engage Gen Z
- A synthesis of research on behaviors or challenges of Gen Z

## WHAT THIS PLAYBOOK IS NOT...

The solutions in this playbook all require additional staff time, and for many, direct expenses. Attempting to tackle all of these ideas would not be feasible. Some of these ideas would change day-to-day roles and responsibilities or require additional staff or support from third parties. The operational considerations included later in this document provide a rough ballpark estimate of the resources required provide a rough ballpark estimate of the resources required. They are directional and imprecise, but we heard that some estimate would be helpful. It's up to each organization to determine what makes sense given capacity.

# CATALYSTS FOR ENGAGING GEN Z

The five 'catalysts' can help individuals in this CoP develop the right formula for engaging Gen Z.



## EMBEDDING CHOICE

Empowering Gen Z to personalize their learning experiences and career paths based on their interests



## BUILDING CONNECTION

Creating a supportive environment where Gen Z can connect and share experiences with peers and program staff and build their network in the field



## BRINGING CANDOR

Bringing transparency around job market expectations and realities, and encouraging openness and honesty so that Gen Z feel comfortable advocating for themselves



## FOSTERING CONFIDENCE

Cultivating participants' belief in themselves and in their ability to be successful in their chosen careers



## HOLISTIC SUPPORTS

Ensuring Gen Z have the necessary wrap-around supports to productively engage in programs



# CHOICE

**n. An act of selecting or making a decision when faced with two or more possibilities.**

Empowering Gen Z with choices can help them chart careers more aligned with their values and cultivate a sense of enthusiasm and ownership around participating in programs.

## What can organizations do to embed Choice?

- During program recruitment, provide Gen Z with information about the different programs available, and where possible, provide onramps and offramps throughout programs so they can revisit choices
- Design activities for Gen Z to identify their values and what motivates or energizes them and apply that self-reflection to selecting a career pathway that provides them purpose and fulfillment
- Co-create a longer-term plan or career path, building in achievable, bite-sized milestones along the way
- Provide choice in how and when Gen Z can complete requirements of a program (e.g., asynchronous learning, sick or personal days)

## GEN Z WE SPOKE WITH...

**39%** of Gen Z say they have turned down employers that do not align with their values?

**"Doing work I'm passionate about** is a top priority."

"I want to feel like **I have control** over what happens in my life."

"I want to be sure I can **learn and grow** (...) I'm a big planner, the **next step has to be clear.**"





# CONNECTION

**n. a relationship in which a person, thing, or idea is linked or associated with another.**

Providing opportunities for Gen Z to build connection can promote belonging within programs, strengthen engagement over time, and create a stronger support system for individuals.

## What can organizations do to embed Connection?

- Provide forums for Gen Z to connect and share experiences with a cohort of peers in their program
- Identify program staff to serve as a mentor/coach to Gen Z as they complete the program
- Facilitate networking events or offline introductions that allow Gen Z to connect with program alumni and industry professionals and provide pathways for Gen Z to remain engaged after they graduate from the program

## GEN Z WE SPOKE WITH...

"They're at home, not having coffee at the office. There's **no path for organic mentorship** without the coffee."

A national Harvard study conducted in 2022 found that the **most powerful predictor of economic mobility** isn't education, zip code, or industry—it's your **friends**.<sup>7</sup>

**73%** of Gen Z report in-person connection has a positive impact on mental health.<sup>2</sup>



# CANDOR

**n. The quality of being open, honest, and sincere in speech or expression.**

Acknowledging the realities and expectations of the workplace can prepare Gen Z for what their first job will require as well as learn how to effectively advocate for themselves.

## What can organizations do to embed Candor?

- Make a strong case to Gen Z around the benefits of participating in a program and set the expectation that what they put into the program will determine what they get out of it
- Calibrate expectations and prepare individuals for the reality of a program or role, by emphasizing the difficult parts instead of the best parts of an opportunity

## ORGANIZATIONS WE SPOKE WITH...

"They haven't seen behind the veil of social media.  
They don't see the work or struggle...they **think things should be easy**."

A national Harvard study conducted in 2022 found that the **most powerful predictor of economic mobility** isn't education, zip code, or industry—it's your **friends**.<sup>7</sup>

**10%** increase in one-year retention and significant increase in job satisfaction from *brutally honest* recruitment<sup>8</sup>





# CONFIDENCE

**n. A feeling of self-assurance arising from an appreciation of one's own abilities or qualities.**

Equipping Gen Z with the necessary technical and durable skills\*, alongside providing holistic supports, can help them believe they are capable and feel ready to start a new career.

## What can organizations do to embed Confidence?

- Provide information and resources to access holistic supports, in particular mental health supports, to help Gen Z build the foundation to take the next step in their careers\*\*
- Develop a growth mindset by both celebrating participants' achievements and milestones as well as building comfort with feedback and making mistakes
- Offer programming that simulates getting and maintaining a job, as well as models positive workplace habits

## ONE WORD ON WORKFORCE EXPERIENCE FROM GEN Z...

"Overwhelming"

"Stressful"

"Unsure"

**80%** of Gen Z cite mental health support as a top factor when considering potential employers<sup>2</sup>

**39%** of Gen Z feel stressed or anxious all or most of the time<sup>2</sup>

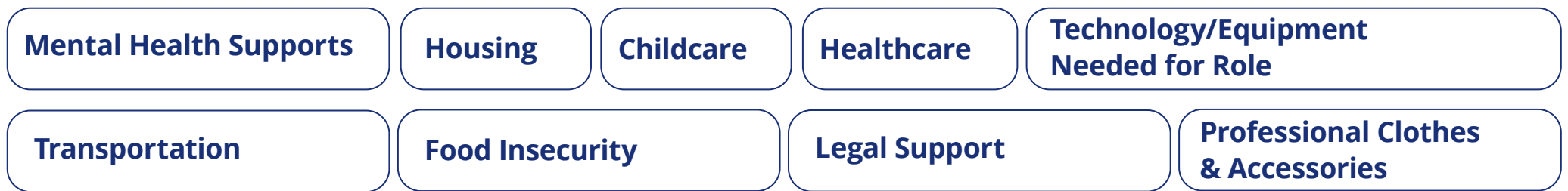
*Durable skills, also known as soft skills, are skills we use to engage with others, like critical thinking, collaboration, or communication, as well as character skills like fortitude, professionalism, and leadership.<sup>9</sup>*

*\*\*For additional information on the holistic supports highlighted in this work see Page 11 of this document.*

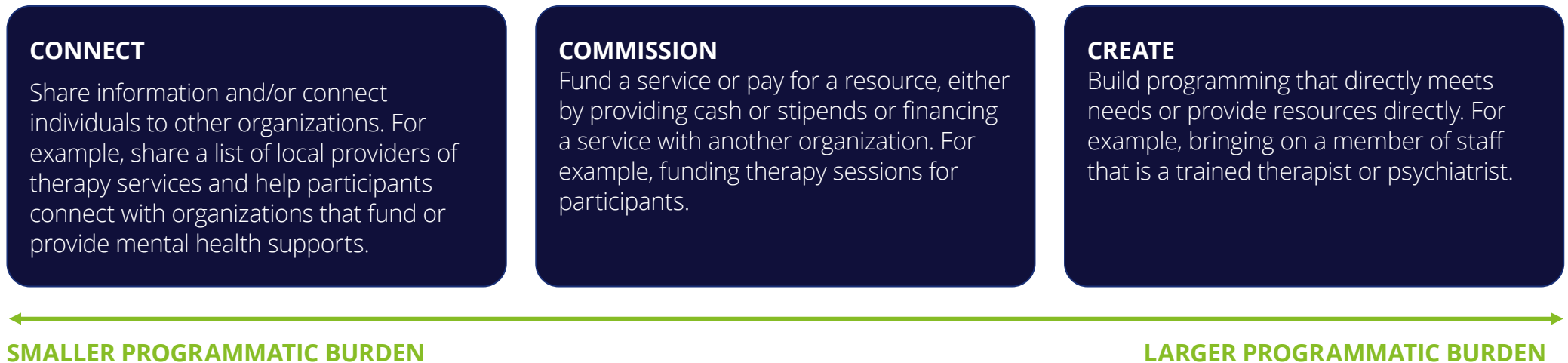


# HOLISTIC SUPPORTS

Many Gen Z in NYC are seeking greater stability as they take the next step in their careers. Those we spoke to expressed a need for holistic supports as a pre-requisite to engaging productively in programs to support their career growth. In acknowledgement of this, below are a list of holistic supports. Organizations can choose three strategies to help Gen Z access these supports: connect, commission, or create.



## STRATEGIES FOR PROVIDING HOLISTIC SUPPORTS



*Program staff who build candid relationships with individuals are well positioned to identify and provide the holistic supports. See Page 10 for solutions under 'Confidence'.*



# CHOICE



# CHOICE



We need systems that support people on their journey. If not, they **fall through the cracks.** “

## Bright Spot in the Field...

Salesforce Pathfinder offers participants two paths: developer or administrator. The developer track is more technical. However, if as aspiring developers go through the program and realize it's not for them, there are natural points where they can “offramp” to the administrator track. Similarly, after participants complete the administrator track, they have the option to “onramp” and take additional training to get a developer certification.<sup>10</sup>



**During program recruitment, provide Gen Z with information about the different programs available, and where possible, provide onramps and offramps throughout programs so they can revisit choices**

### What does it mean?

Giving participants the information and ability to **select between multiple programs** and/or designing programs such that there are **natural points in the process where participants can exit or switch programs.** Program staff share options and pathways; participants are empowered to guide their program journey.

### What are some different approaches?

During program recruitment, this could look like...

- **Taking the time to learn what individuals are interested in** and working with them to identify which programs and/or tracks may be beneficial given their existing skills and experiences. [Skill and interest diagnostic](#) online tests can be a useful tool for this exercise.

Providing onramps and offramps during programs could look like...

- **Sequencing program curriculum** where the first batch of program content is less program-specific (e.g., core competencies, durable skills) allowing participants to more easily switch tracks without repeating training
- **Identifying how different programs can be ‘stackable’ or where there is overlap,** for instance if a participant has already completed a significant portion of a program but a different program is now better suited to their interests, providing a path for them to enter halfway through the new program

### Where might it show up in the program?

While these approaches may not be feasible for every organization, they can show up in program recruitment as well as at points throughout the program.

## Operational considerations

### Staffing implications

- Sharing different program options: low time for 1-2 staff to communicate as part of ongoing program recruitment
- Designing programs with onramps and offramps: significant time for 3-4 staff to re-structure programs to create natural onramps and offramps for participant

### Direct expenses

This solution is unlikely to have hard dollar costs.

### Level of effort



### Anticipated expenses



# CHOICE



The whole priority is to get the 9-5 job, but **these jobs aren't as exciting** to young people."

## Adjacent Bright Spot...

Worcester Polytechnic Institute provides a project-based learning track that gives students technical skills, alongside durable skills like empathy, leadership, confidence, collaboration, and critical thinking. Students are given the space to think more deeply about what they want out of their professional life. Studies of alumni of this program found that the projects affected their professional outcomes, character development, and global perspectives.<sup>11, 12</sup>



**Design activities for Gen Z to identify their values and what motivates or energizes them and apply that self-reflection to selecting a career pathway that provides them purpose and fulfillment**

### What does it mean?

Guiding participants through a **process of self-reflection and exploration**. Program staff facilitate exercises to help participants gain clarity about what matters most and the career pathways that align with their values.

### What are some different approaches?

Activities to facilitate reflection on purpose-driven work could include:...

- **Conducting a values exercise** that allows participants, in small group sessions with program staff, to begin to identify their core values and ultimately the criteria for narrowing in on a set of career pathways among those available to them
- **Encouraging self-reflection** for participants to regularly evaluate their priorities, make

adjustments based on shifting priorities, and share those reflections with peers, mentors, and/or program staff

- **Providing a skills assessment and/or career diagnostic test** that helps participants identify how they can use their existing skills to build toward a fulfilling career and what career pathways may be a fit for their skills and values

### Where might it show up in the program?

Some organizations could look to incorporate these activities in the latter half of programming before post-program job recruitment, while others would benefit from incorporating these activities before a more technical workforce development program is selected.

## Operational considerations

### Staffing implications

- **Facilitating a small group values exercise and exploration of career paths:** moderate time for 2-3 staff to design and execute sessions
- **Conducting skills assessments:** moderate time for 1-2 staff to design and communicate

### Direct expenses

There may be expenses associated with accessing pre-built skills assessments or career diagnostics.

### Level of effort



### Anticipated expenses





# CHOICE



If you can show [Gen Z] **different paths, then you get** buy-in.”

## Bright Spot in the Field...

### Education Nonprofit

A national education nonprofit hosts facilitated cohort level sessions towards the end of their program experience where participants learn about different careers; cohorts are segmented based on participants' educational background (e.g., high school graduates, college graduate) and learning sessions explore different career paths. For those seeking individual support, the organization also provides one-on-one coaching.



## Co-create a longer-term plan or career path, building in achievable, bite-sized milestones along the way

### What does it mean?

**Actively including participants** in the career planning process. Program staff share examples of different viable options; participants define and articulate their goals based on their skills, interests, and circumstances.

### What are some different approaches?

**Facilitating 2-3 small group learning sessions and/or a one-on-one session** to share specific tools/resources that participants can leverage on their own (e.g., goal-setting template). Facilitated sessions with program participants could involve:

- **A focus on goal-setting** to identify short-term and long-term career objectives, encouraging participants to articulate SMART goals (specific, measurable, achievable,

relevant, and time-bound). [Worksheets](#) that guide individuals through the exercise can be a helpful starting point and accountability mechanism.

- **Outlining actionable steps and milestones** that mark progress towards their goals—breaking down larger goals into smaller, manageable milestones with clear timelines (i.e., explaining their trajectory in monthly or quarterly intervals and making space to celebrate small wins)

### Where might it show up in the program?

Most organizations could look to incorporate career planning sessions in the latter half of programming, but prior to participants beginning recruitment for post-program employment.

## Operational considerations

### Staffing implications

- Facilitating small group sessions: low to moderate time for 1-2 staff to design, schedule, and execute sessions
- Conducting one-on-one sessions: moderate time for 2-3 staff to design, schedule, and execute sessions and then follow up with individual participants

### Direct Expenses

This solution is unlikely to have hard dollar costs

### Level of effort



### Anticipated expenses





# CHOICE



It's critical to **learn how to take time off professionally**. We empower them to call out."

## Bright Spot in the Field...

NPower offers remote, part-time programs which allow individuals to keep another job and/or meet caregiving responsibilities. Even in a remote environment, they maintain professional standards (i.e., video on, timeliness). They have a formal process for trainee time off requests, where participants can request time off and personal days as needed. This allows for flexibility, but also accountability in their programs.



## Provide choice in how and when Gen Z can complete requirements of a program

### What does it mean?

**Building in flexibility around delivery and timing of** program curriculum. Program staff provide multiple methods of accessing training and resources, as well as completing tasks; participants choose the methods best suited to their circumstances and learning preferences.

### What are some different approaches?

Providing choice in how/when program requirements are completed could include offering participants...

- **Part-time and full-time options to complete the program where participants can select the time commitment** that is manageable for them based on their circumstances and other commitments
- **Recorded sessions and asynchronous assignments** so that participants can learn

and complete program requirements on their own time and at their own pace

- **A clearly defined number of sick and personal days that allows participants the flexibility to** prioritize their mental and physical health and other competing responsibilities as needed during the program, while also modelling the level of flexibility and accountability of a future job

### Where might it show up in the program?

Organizations could look to incorporate these approaches throughout the program trajectory; however, organizations will want to communicate the various options with participants during program recruitment so that individuals are aware of the choices available to them as well as the expectations.

## Operational considerations

### Staffing implications

- **Providing options for program completion:** significant time for 3-4 staff to adapt existing programs, with moderate continued administrative burden to offer those models
- **Offering sick and personal days:** low time commitment for 1-2 staff to communicate and monitor

### Direct expenses

There may be some hard dollar costs to acquire or maintain technology for asynchronous programming.

### Level of effort



### Anticipated expenses



# CONNECTION

The background of the slide is a stylized, digital representation of a city skyline at night. The city is composed of numerous skyscrapers, some of which are brightly lit with yellow and orange lights. Overlaid on this cityscape is a complex network of thin, glowing lines in various colors (blue, green, red, purple) that connect different points across the image, creating a sense of global connectivity and data flow. The lines are most prominent in the foreground and middle ground, with some extending towards the horizon.

# CONNECTION



Making space for them to share—**giving them an outlet and community**—is really important.”

## Adjacent Bright Spot...

Bunker Hill Community College uses ‘Learning Communities’ to give students a support system as they navigate entering the job market. A key goal of the ‘Learning Community’ is to build strong relationships among students that they can carry forward into their early careers. These ‘Learning Communities’ are structured around students with similar career ambitions and include peer mentors as well as interdisciplinary learning experiences.<sup>13</sup>



## Provide forums for Gen Z to connect and share experiences with a cohort of peers in their program

### What does it mean?

Providing forums for Gen Z to connect with their peers involves creating **structured and unstructured opportunities** to interact. Program staff design cohort programming; participants leverage those opportunities to build deeper relationships and community.

### What are some different approaches?

**Organizing program participants into cohorts** based on where they are in their program journey and/or similarities across their career or learning interests. Cohorts of program participants can connect with each other through...

- **Regular, unstructured cohort meetings and/or social events** where participants can get to know each other, share reflections and open questions, and provide mutual support
- **Technology-enabled communication channels** (e.g., group chats, online discussion

forums) where participants can connect with each other outside of formal meetings

- **Peer accountability buddies** that are assigned to each participant at the start of a program. Peer buddies can connect with each other to share progress, set goals, and provide encouragement.
- **Cohort-based projects** that allow participants to work closely with one another, reinforce their learning by collaborating with peers, and demonstrate the teamwork skills necessary for the workplace

### Where might it show up in the program?

Organizations could look to incorporate cohort-based programming **early on and throughout the program trajectory** so that participants have a group of peers that can be helpful in navigating the program and supporting each other.

## Operational considerations

### Staffing implications

- **Providing options for program completion:** significant time for 3-4 staff to adapt existing programs, with moderate continued administrative burden to offer those models
- **Offering sick and personal days:** low time commitment for 1-2 staff to communicate and monitor

### Direct expenses

There may be some hard dollar costs to acquire or maintain technology for asynchronous programming.

### Level of effort



### Anticipated expenses





# CONNECTION



Developmental relationships are super important. Gen Z were most affected by COVID—they **need more stewardship to succeed.**”

## Bright Spot in the Field...

Year Up structures their programs to allow participants to build a relationship with a ‘coach.’ Coaches meet 1:1 with their coachees twice a week and help them navigate challenges inside and outside of the program and provide feedback. These relationships often last beyond the program, serving as a launching pad for a professional network. One unique component of Year Up’s model is that being a coach is part of every employees’ role across the organization.



*\*If programs have case managers (see Page 25), they likely do not need a coach and vice-versa. Whether a case manager or a coaching relationship would be more beneficial depends on the nature of the program.*

## Identify program staff to serve as a mentor/coach to Gen Z as they complete the program

### What does it mean?

**Dedicated support for individuals** as they navigate the program as well as responsibilities/barriers outside of the program. Program staff provide meaningful guidance and resources; participants have a strong support system within the program.

### What are some different approaches?

Building mentor/coach relationships within the program could involve

- **Identifying whether a participant of a program would be best served by a mentor, coach, or both**, acknowledging that not every participant will have the same needs to complete a program (e.g., participants at risk of not completing a program may benefit more from the structure a coach provides)
  - **Mentor relationships cover a range of personal** and professional development needs that are often broader than the

coaching relationship and are centered around providing guidance and support based on shared experiences

- **Coaching relationships** are more tactical in nature; coaches facilitate goal-oriented development and work with the participant to identify gaps between the expectations of the program and what participants may need to be successful in the program\*

- **Allocating staff time** to serve as a mentor/coach to participants and acknowledging this responsibility as an expectation of their role (e.g., 5% of staff time on a monthly basis is dedicated to being a mentor to participants)

### Where might it show up in the program?

Organizations could look to assign mentors/coaches at the **beginning of the program**, with mentorship and coaching touchpoints taking place **over the course of the program and potentially beyond it.**

## Operational considerations

### Staffing implications

- **Dedicating staff time for mentorship/coaching: moderate** to significant time for program staff to provide one-on-one support to participants on a monthly basis

### Direct expenses

This solution is unlikely to have hard dollar costs.

### Level of effort



### Anticipated expenses





# CONNECTION



In NYC, **connections are key**. Know someone who knows someone? You're halfway there."

## Bright Spot in the Field...

Braven partners with employers to allow program participants to build the necessary networks to transition to a strong first job. In doing so, employers develop talent, give back to communities, and show commitment to expanding opportunity and a belief in diverse leaders. Through this mentorship, Braven program participants are equipped with the leadership coaching, career guidance, and professional contacts to be successful in the workforce.<sup>14</sup>



**Facilitate networking events or offline introductions that allow Gen Z to connect with program alumni and industry professionals and provide pathways for Gen Z to remain engaged after they graduate from the program**

### What does it mean?

Providing opportunities for Gen Z **to build relationships in their field of interest**. Program staff make introductions; participants expand their network of professional contacts.

### What are some different approaches?

Facilitating connections with industry professionals and program alumni could involve the following:

- **Hosting networking events** with industry professionals and/or local employers for in-person connection
- **Organizing panels with program alumni** where participants can hear about alumni career trajectories and build relationships for formal or informal mentorship
- **Maintaining an alumni directory** which program staff can leverage to:

- **Share alumni information with program participants**
- **Offer programming for alumni** so they can remain engaged with the program after they graduate (e.g., as a mentor, in events, and in recruitment); specific touchpoints could involve getting alumni testimonials for program recruitment as well as regular 'alumni nights where program staff and alumni can stay connected and alumni can meet other alumni

### Where might it show up in the program?

Organizations could look to embed these activities **throughout the program trajectory**—in recruitment and throughout the program—**as well as after program completion**.

## Operational considerations

### Staffing implications

- **Facilitating events/programming with industry professionals and program alumni:** moderate time for 2-3 staff to plan and execute on a regular basis
- **Gathering alumni data for an alumni directory:** low time for 1-2 staff to collect, maintain, and share

### Direct expenses

There will be hard dollar costs associated with hosting events or gatherings.

### Level of effort



### Anticipated expenses



A low-angle, first-person perspective shot of a person's legs and feet standing on a rocky, uneven trail. The person is wearing dark-colored hiking pants and sturdy brown hiking boots. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow that fills the sky and casts long, soft shadows. The foreground shows the texture of the rocks and some dry grass. The overall mood is one of adventure and tranquility in nature.

# CANDOR

# CANDOR



‘Show me **the money**.’ We hear that all day.”

## Adjacent Bright Spot...

Volunteer-based education nonprofit have piloted highly transparent—borderline transactional—recruitment. In recruitment, they outline the requirements and expectations alongside what participants will get out of it financially and otherwise if they meet the expectations. In this pitch for the opportunity, they emphasize that if you don’t meet the requirements, you won’t reap any of the benefits of being a ‘volunteer’.



**Make a strong case to Gen Z around the benefits of participating in a program and set the expectation that what they put into the program will determine what they get out of it**

### What does it mean?

**Having a ‘pitch’ for why Gen Z should do a program** and being transparent about the outcomes of a program. Program staff share compelling, and where possible customized, information and set expectations; participants have more clarity on how a program will benefit them.

### What are some different approaches?

Making a case for the program and bringing upfront transparency could involve the following activities:

- **Preparing a presentation or talking points** that program staff can leverage to highlight the key supports and benefits of a program and clearly map for participants what they should expect to get out of a program. This could include sharing...
  - Alumni stories
  - Potential career trajectories

- Salary ranges
- Program culture and supports

- Assess if a program has differential outcomes depending on participant engagement. If it does, **emphasize that outcomes are calibrated to participants’ engagement/effort** and clarify what the different outcomes are in recruitment.
- Where possible, have **differential outcomes based on performance in a program** (i.e., different job opportunities) aligned to a rubric of expectations to create accountability. For best practices on building rubrics and example templates, see this [resource](#).

### Where might it show up in the program?

Most organizations could look to incorporate these activities in **program recruitment** and/or at **key milestones** to share how a participant is progressing through a program.

## Operational considerations

### Staffing implications

- Pitching participants on a program: low additional time for 1-2 staff to prepare and communicate
- Tailoring next steps to performance in a program: low to moderate time for 3-4 staff to build a rubric and communicate performance against it to participants

### Direct expenses

This solution is unlikely to have hard dollar costs.

### Level of effort



### Anticipated expenses





# CANDOR



Realistic job previews trigger our coping mechanisms (...) we don't just think about tough situations: **we think about how we'll respond when we encounter them**"

## Adjacent Bright Spot...

Analyzing 40 different studies of realistic job previews, researchers found that the practice consistently reduces job turnover and improves job satisfaction. Interestingly, improvements in retention don't occur because only those very committed stay, but instead because of something they call the 'vaccination' effect. By exposing people to the reality of the organization, you 'vaccinate' them against shock and disappointment once they're in a role.<sup>8</sup>



**Calibrate expectations and prepare individuals for the reality of a program or role, by emphasizing the difficult parts instead of the best parts of an opportunity in recruitment**

### What does it mean?

**Brutal honesty about expectations and requirements** of a role and program at the start. Program staff **share the worst aspects of a role**—the early start times, three-strike policies, lack of paid leave—with individuals before or during the application process to set expectations.

### What are some different approaches?

Embedding **information and simulations of the most difficult requirements** of a job or program into the recruitment process and program. Building in this brutal honesty could involve:

- **Leading with the expectations and requirements** of a program in recruitment,

either digitally or in interviews, and requiring those recruiting to verbalize their continued interest in the opportunity

- **Running 'strategic pessimism' sessions focused on the most challenging parts** of a role or career track and simulating experiences that individuals will need to navigate: constructive feedback, different management styles, long or atypical working hours, or other expectations that may be novel to individuals prior of job recruitment.

### Where might it show up in the program?

Organizations could look to incorporate this concept into **program recruitment** or as an integrated component of programming **prior to job recruitment**.

## Operational considerations

### Staffing implications

- **Including materials and information in program recruitment:** low time commitment for 1-2 staff to design materials
- **Conducting strategic pessimism sessions:** moderate time for 2-3 staff to design, schedule, and host sessions

### Direct expenses

This solution is unlikely to have hard dollar costs.

### Level of effort



### Anticipated expenses





# CONFIDENCE

confidence



# CONFIDENCE



Real life happens. With **supportive care in the interim**, they could stay in the role they worked so hard to get.”

## Bright Spot in the Field...

St. Nicks Alliance has a partnership with Rising Ground—a non-profit in Brooklyn that provides holistic supports—to connect individuals in their programs to mental health services. Program staff (case managers) at St. Nicks identify what supports individuals need alongside understanding their professional and personal goals. The case manager can then directly connect individuals to mental health or other supports.



*\*\*If programs have coaches (see Page 19), they likely do not need a case manager and vice-versa. Whether a case manager or a coaching relationship would be more beneficial depends on the nature of the program.*

**Provide information and resources to access holistic supports, in particular mental health supports, to help Gen Z build the foundation to take the next step in their careers\***

### What does it mean?

**Providing resources and programming focused on getting participants the supports they need to stay in a program or role.** Program staff incorporate strategies into programming and connect participants to resources; program participants build their toolkits and access direct supports.

### What are some different approaches?

Identifying what’s needed, offering programming to meet needs, and/or connecting Gen Z to resources could involve the following:

- Providing information, referrals, or direct resources for participants to **access mental health supports\*** (e.g., therapy, counseling)
- **Assigning case managers\*\*** to program participants **and creating avenues for them to connect in-person and asynchronously** (text, call, etc.). Some programs may benefit from requiring participants to connect

on a regular cadence and/or maintain communication after the program ends.

- **Training program staff on interpersonal communication and trauma-informed approaches** so they have the tools to build trust-based relationships with individuals. For a roundup of resources on how trauma impacts young people and trauma-informed teaching see this [article](#). For a longer webinar and toolkit on trauma-informed SEL education, see this [resource](#).
- **Reduce the stigma** in seeking mental health supports by **sharing the stories of alumni, program staff, or others** who have accessed them. This could be done as a separate event or embedded into regular programming.

### Where might it show up in the program?

Most organizations could look to incorporate these activities in **throughout a program and potentially beyond it**.

*\*For additional information on the holistic supports highlighted in this work see Page 11 of this document.*

## Operational considerations

### Staffing implications

- **Dedicating staff time for case management:** significant time for staff to provide one-on-one support and receive training to be prepared for the role
- **Building forums to share other’s journeys:** low to moderate time to build into programming (1-2 staff) or run an event (2-3 staff)

### Direct expenses

Paying for external mental health supports could be a significant cost, though often there are avenues to cover these expenses.

### Level of effort



### Anticipated expenses



# CONFIDENCE



The most important thing I got [from a program] was personal transformation... **throwing my limiting beliefs out the door**"

## Bright Spot in the Field...

BUILD's entrepreneurship program provides students with the experience of running a real business. Through project-based learning, students demonstrate increased proficiency in six critical competencies: communication, collaboration, problem solving, innovation, grit, and self management. BUILD students also develop an entrepreneurial mindset around resilience and adaptability, as well as a growth mindset.<sup>15</sup>



**Develop a growth mindset by both celebrating participants' achievements and milestones as well as building comfort with feedback and making mistakes**

### What does it mean?

**Designing programming that enables Gen Z to build important durable skills:** comfort with feedback, a willingness to make mistakes to learn, and belief in their ability to improve. Program staff facilitate programming and sessions focused on these skills; participants build skills in a safe environment.

### What are some different approaches?

Programming that builds a growth mindset in Gen Z and supports them in building comfort with feedback and mistakes could involve the following:

- **Emphasizing growth and improvement as participants move through a program** and making space for participants to reflect on their trajectory and celebrate themselves. Some programs may benefit from a project or presentation at the end of the program where participants articulate how far they've come.

See [here](#) for a resource on coaching/teaching a growth mindset as professional development for program staff and [here](#) for a resource with more tactical tips on how to embed this in programming.

- Combat anxiety and 'all or nothing' mindsets by structuring programming so that participants **can 'fail' and try again by** building pathways to taking assessments or requirements multiple times if needed
- **Hosting regular feedback sessions** where participants give and receive feedback to build comfort with having things to work on and not taking feedback personally

### Where might it show up in the program?

Organizations could look to incorporate this programming **throughout the program trajectory and prior to program completion** so that participants are confident about taking the next step in their career.

## Operational considerations

### Staffing implications

- **Building in reflection/feedback sessions and putting on an end-of-program event:** moderate time for 2-3 staff to design and facilitate sessions, and prepare participants
- **Structuring programs with second chances:** moderate time for 1-2 staff to design and communicate pathways

### Direct expenses

This solution is unlikely to have hard dollar costs.

### Level of effort



### Anticipated expenses





# CONFIDENCE



Many roles **aren't flexible** in when and how you work. Programs have to **set expectations to model that.**"

## Bright Spot in the Field...

KindWork runs a 'capstone' where individuals do a 'day in the life' of a support specialist. They answer tickets, take phone calls, and have customer support conversations. This activity is powerful in resetting expectations of what the job will look and feel like. Ahead of graduating from the program, individuals do a job application 'practice project' which simulates applying for, interviewing for, and accepting a role.



## Offer programming that simulates getting and maintaining a job, as well as models positive workplace habits

### What does it mean?

Providing opportunities for program participants to **practice and hone their skills** through exercises that mimic workplace interactions. Program staff facilitate activities; participants prepare for and partake in exercises that build their confidence over time.

### What are some different approaches?

Programming that simulates professional experiences and models positive habits could involve the following activities:

- **Mock interviews** where participants can practice answering common interview questions for their field of interest and ultimately improve their interviewing and interpersonal skills. See this [resource](#) on the STAR method that can help coach individuals in advance of behavioral interviews, as well as this [sample worksheet](#) for individuals to complete.
- **Role-playing scenarios** where participants can take on different roles and practice handling various situations that may arise

in the workplace (e.g., resolving a conflict, interacting with a client/customer)

- **On-the-job exposure** where participants can gain practical experience in an industry (e.g., shadowing)
- **Designing program norms to reflect the job** (e.g., for an office role, require participants to take meeting notes, write professional emails, and/or submit timesheets)
- Volunteers (e.g., alumni, industry professionals) could be engaged here to facilitate simulated activities (i.e., mock interviews) with program participants.

### Where might it show up in the program?

Organizations could look to incorporate these activities **throughout the program trajectory and prior to job recruitment** so that participants have multiple opportunities to work on their skills while incorporating feedback they receive along the way. Participants are confident about taking the next step in their career.

## Operational considerations

### Staffing implications

- **Simulated exercises and job exposure:** significant time for 2-3 staff to design, schedule, and execute programming that simulates an individual's future role
- **Integration of workplace norms with program:** low time for 1-2 staff to design, communicate, and monitor norms

### Direct expenses

This solution is unlikely to have hard dollar costs.

### Level of effort



### Anticipated expenses



# REFERENCES 1/2

**Below are the sources referenced in this document. This does not reflect all research done in this effort, simply the papers cited throughout this brief. In addition to this, our team spoke with 40+ individuals including nonprofit staff, employers, Gen Z individuals, and subject-matter experts.**

<sup>1</sup>MIT. (2024). **Living wage calculator**. Living Wage Calculator. <https://livingwage.mit.edu/>

<sup>2</sup>Deloitte. (2023). 2023 **Millennial and Gen Z Survey**. <https://www.deloitte.com/global/en/issues/work/content/genzmillennialsurvey.html>

<sup>3</sup>Bank of America. (2022, May). **US Labor Market: changing for the better?**. Bank of America Institute. <https://institute.bankofamerica.com/content/dam/bank-of-america-institute/economic-insights/who-is-benefiting-from-the-us-labor-market-may-2022.pdf>

<sup>4</sup>Moncrease, S. (2023, October 30). **New York City's labor force participation has largely recovered, but out-of-school/out-of-work rates are higher, particularly among young black New Yorkers**. Center for New York City Affairs. <https://www.centrernyc.org/reports-briefs/new-york-citys-labor-force-participation-has-largely-recovered-but-out-of-school/out-of-work-rates-are-higher-particularly-among-young-black-new-yorkers>

<sup>5</sup>National Institutes of Health. **Individuals from Disadvantaged Backgrounds**. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://extramural-diversity.nih.gov/diversity-matters/disadvantaged-backgrounds>

<sup>6</sup>APLU. (2024, March 4). **How does a college degree improve graduates' employment and earnings potential?** <https://www.aplu.org/our-work/4-policy-and-advocacy/publicvalues/employment-earnings/#:~:text=College%20graduates%20are%20half%20as,million%20more%20over%20their%20lifetime>

<sup>7</sup>Richard V. Reeves, et al. (2022, August 2). **Seven key takeaways from Chetty's new research on friendship and economic mobility**. Brookings. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/7-key-takeaways-from-chettys-new-research-on-friendship-and-economic-mobility/>

<sup>8</sup>Heath, C., & Heath, D. (n.d.). **Prepare to be Wrong: Bookend the Future. In Decisive: How to Make Better Decisions in Life and Work**. essay, Random House

<sup>9</sup>Durable Skills by America Succeeds. **Durable Skills in Action**. <https://durableskills.org/>

<sup>10</sup>Salesforce. **Trailhead Programs Portal**. Salesforce Pathfinder. [https://pathfinder.salesforce.com/s/?language=en\\_US](https://pathfinder.salesforce.com/s/?language=en_US)

# REFERENCES 2/2

**Below are the sources referenced in this document. This does not reflect all research done in this effort, simply the papers cited throughout this brief. In addition to this, our team spoke with 40+ individuals including nonprofit staff, employers, Gen Z individuals, and subject-matter experts.**

<sup>11</sup>Worcester Polytechnic Institute. **Project-Based Learning in Higher Education**. <https://www.wpi.edu/project-based-learning>

<sup>12</sup>David Deming, Joseph B. Fuller, Rachel Lipson, et al. (April 2023). **Delivering on the Degree: The College-to-Jobs Playbook**. Published by Harvard Kennedy School.

<sup>13</sup>Bunker Hill Community College. **Learning Communities**. <https://www.bhcc.edu/learning-communities/>

<sup>14</sup>Braven. **Employer Partners**. <https://braven.org/employer-partners/>

<sup>15</sup>BUILD. **BUILD Offerings**. <https://build.org/offerings/>





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