



CITY OF NEW YORK

**MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR**

330 West 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, 26<sup>th</sup> floor New York, NY 10036  
tel: 212-736-4536 fax: 212-947-9512  
[www.nyc.gov/mcb4](http://www.nyc.gov/mcb4)

**LOWELL D. KERN**  
Chair

**Jesse R. Bodine**  
District Manager

June 11, 2020

Hon. Bill de Blasio  
Mayor, City of New York  
City Hall  
New York, New York 10007

Bill Chong  
Commissioner  
Department of Youth & Community Development  
2 Lafayette St., New York NY, 10007

**Re: Summer Youth Employment Program**

Dear Mayor de Blasio and Commissioner Chong,

This letter includes comments from the Arts, Culture, Education & Street Life (ACES) Committee of Manhattan Community Board 4 (MCB4) about the necessity of preserving funding for the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) so the program can provide both income and work experience to young people in our district and across the city. The comments were approved at the June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020 Full Board meeting with 49 in favor, 0 against, 01 abstaining and 0 present but not eligible to vote.

**Background**

Manhattan Community District 4 (MCD4) encompasses the neighborhoods of Chelsea, Hudson Yards, Hell's Kitchen/Clinton. The board conducted a community needs assessment in March of this year with numerous and diverse stakeholders. The assessment identified connecting young people with more employment opportunities as one of four top priorities for our district. The unemployment rate for teenagers age 16-19 in our district's neighborhoods is 59%, the second highest rate in the city and about double the city-wide average of 29%. The community needs assessment specified three areas of need to address this issue: 1. Job readiness programming 2. Jobs/paid internships 3. Connections with local employers.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [MCB4 Community Needs Assessment, March 2020](#)

SYEP provides young people around the city with job readiness training and paid employment, two of the areas of need identified in MCB4's recent needs assessment. The program is the nation's largest youth employment initiative, providing nearly 75,000 young people around the city with job training and employment. Participants range in age from 14-24, with 79% between the ages of 16-24 and 21% ages 14-15. The 14-15 year-old participants engage in job training. 16-24 year-olds secure employment and earn the New York State minimum age for six weeks during the months of July and August. In recent years, participation of vulnerable youth (e.g. young people involved in the foster care system, experiencing homelessness, living in areas with high crime) has increased. According to data from 2019, over 80% of participating young people identify as people of color.<sup>2</sup>

Ensuring our city's young people have the opportunity to participate in SYEP benefits our whole community. At a time when many are struggling to make ends meet, SYEP is a key source of income to thousands of New York City families who are experiencing or at risk of poverty. Longer term, participation puts our city's young people on a positive career trajectory by connecting them to employers, helping them develop the skills needed to succeed in the workplace and building their resumes, all of which make it easier to secure future gainful employment. For those reasons, it is alarming and unacceptable that the funding for SYEP is potentially going to be eliminated.

Now more than ever, as the city continues to experience the devastation caused by the COVID-19 crisis, young people from our district and across the city need and deserve SYEP. Due to the pandemic and the fact that New York has been its global epicenter so far, families in our district and across our city are experiencing job losses, income reductions and – most tragically – many have lost family members, a great number of whom provided some or all of their family's income. This horrific circumstance is exacerbated by the fact that the COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted people of color and households with less wealth and income before the crisis began.

MCB4 understands the reality that budgets cuts will have to happen as tax revenue declines for the city and the state, potentially in multiple waves for years to come. However, we believe that investing in our young people is too important a priority, both in our district and citywide, to eliminate the funding for SYEP. Ensuring the city's youth have the requisite training and experience SYEP provides to obtain gainful employment in the future is our moral responsibility. Protecting SYEP will also be critical to the recovery of our city's economy after the COVID-19 crisis has abated. Because, among other things, employers will need young people with workplace skills and experience. Initially to help save as many businesses as possible from folding and eventually to regrow them. Therefore, our board encourages the Mayor's office to keep funding for SYEP in place this year, and in the future. Either by finding other places to cut the budget, or by identifying new sources of revenue that can be dedicated to the SYEP program specifically. We also encourage the Department of Youth & Community Development (DYCD), which administers the SYEP program, to take the steps we outline below. Because for SYEP to

<sup>2</sup> SYEP Annual Summary, 2019

be successful this summer, DYCD will have to prepare young people for an economy and labor market that are very different from previous years.

### **Recommendation for the Department of Youth & Community Development**

MCB4 recommends DYCD take the following steps in order to implement SYEP during a time when the city's economy and labor market are changing rapidly and substantially:

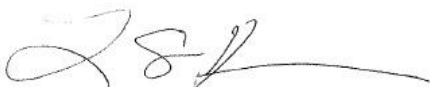
1. **Landscape Analysis** – Since many employers in the city have reduced their workforce due to COVID-19 and likely will continue to do so, hiring needs will be fewer and different than anticipated. MCB4 encourages DYCD to engage in a landscape analysis to determine where there will be opportunities for young people to work.
2. **COVID-19 Strategy Planning** – Based on the results of the landscape analysis we recommend DYCD undertake, MCB4 also recommends DYCD modify its strategy for both job training and job placement. Changes to the SYEP strategy should reflect the changing needs in the labor market and prioritize safeguarding young people from exposure to COVID-19. Therefore, job training, paid internships and jobs should all be remote. To the greatest degree possible, young people participating in SYEP should also be provided with opportunities to work in roles that contribute directly or indirectly to the city's public health initiatives and economic recovery efforts.

### **Conclusion:**

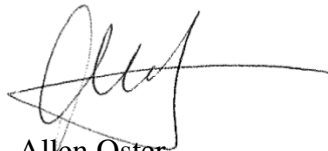
MCB4 believes SYEP is an invaluable program and that the COVID-19 crisis only amplifies its necessity. We strongly encourage the Mayor's office to find other places to cut the budget or a new way to secure the revenue needed to protect and continue SYEP.

Thank you for considering these comments and for the critical work being done by the Mayor's office and the Department of Youth & Community Development during this tragic and challenging period for our city, the country and the world. We also look forward to continued engagement with the Mayor's office and the department on this topic, and with others related to their work in our district.

Sincerely,



Lowell D. Kern  
Chair  
Community Board 4



Allen Oster  
Co-Chair  
ACES Committee

[signed 6/11/20]  
Kit Tollerson  
Co-Chair  
ACES Committee

cc: Hon. Corey Johnson, Speaker, City Council  
Hon. Gale A. Brewer, Manhattan Borough President  
Hon. Helen Rosenthal, City Council