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## MEMO

**TO:** South Bend Common Council Members  
**CC:** Mayor's Office, Controller's Office  
**FROM:** Aaron Perri – Executive Director, VPA  
**DATE:** September 27, 2019  
**RE:** Youth Employment Program Pilot

### BACKGROUND

Following our budget presentation in August, I received some questions about our youth employment strategies. This is an area of mutual passion. I took the opportunity to provide a written response, which I'd like to reiterate as context for our ongoing conversation.

We share the vision for having more meaningful employment for youth and we're working towards this within our current budget and through new partnerships.

#### Greater Impact / Mentored Mowing Lawn Care

We're working with this organization to continue to grow and expand its partnership. We hope to add additional properties in 2020. This non-profit organization was founded by Kory Lantz, who's vision is to see the next generation of South Bend youth better equipped, trained and mentored to be great employees or business owners, and positive members of our community. In addition to mentoring, the youth are also taught invaluable life skills such as the importance of remaining positive, being proactive, provide quality work, timeliness, and integrity. Some of the services provided are mowing, weed trimming, fence installation, clean-up and landscaping. The goal was to help relieve some of the financial and economical stains that face the South Bend communities. Roughly four years ago, we heard about this mission driven organization and found it imperative to build a bridge by reaching out to offer additional opportunities to further the progression of the youth. The crew goes out into the community and help us maintain over one hundred of the city's vacant properties. This added a sense of value to the workers and the community, to see the beautiful fruits of their labor. "Change Your Lawn, Change Your City." We intend to continue expanding the scope of work provided by Greater Impact Lawn Care.

#### Juvenile Justice Center & COSB Diversity and Inclusion 2020

We have started preliminary conversations with the COSB Office of Diversity and Inclusion to help place up to four "high potential but at potential risk" juveniles in the Facilities & Grounds 2020 summer workforce. Here we can provide solid work experience, a positive environment, and an opportunity for financial benefit to our community's young adults.



### Drucker Institute – High Potential Employee Program

We've developed a delightful partnership with the Drucker Institute. This is an organization devoted to helping the most underserved and economically vulnerable community members acquire skills so that they may find employment. We work as ambassadors to their High Potential Employee program. By employing four participants of this program we're strengthening our organization and the community simultaneously. We attended a workshop on Bridges Out of Poverty/Workplace Stability. This was a chilling, eye opening experience. A glimpse into poverty through the lens of economic class at the individual, organization, and community level. Awareness through this view helped us identify and remove barriers as well as gain understanding in the resources, sustenance, and strategies needed to help the High Potentials succeed in life and work.

### Community Center Youth Interns / I Have a Dream Leadership Academy

The Charles Black and Martin Luther King Jr. Centers have recently started a summer youth internship program by employing 25 minors (across both centers) for 8 weeks this summer. Besides receiving compensation for their work, they also took part in mentorship and leadership development. One example of this was at the MLK Center where we hired four college students to help lead our first ever I Have A Dream Leadership Academy. This was an extensive 8 week mentorship and leadership training program for 7th and 8th grade boys and girls. A partnership with Beacon Health System that sprouted through the My Brother's Keeper initiative, it's something we hope to extend to other areas of youth employment.

All this employment and programming remains fully in the 2020 budget. In total, VPA employs approximately 60 youth annually internally, not including those who are employed through contractors such as Better Impact Lawn Care. I'm proud of the safe, professional, and mission-driven work environment we provide for these students. To further improve and expand our impact is something we can do, however, we cannot do it with our existing resources. It is my recommendation that we institute a Youth Employment Pilot Program in 2020 that includes a full-time salaried coordinator with a modest expense budget. A draft outline of this inaugural program is included below. Exhaustive of salaries, benefits, administrative, and program costs, the total budget request for this pilot program, is \$80,000.

### **PROPOSAL CONTEXT & RESEARCH**

The job market is more competitive and challenging now than in previous generations. Employers have high expectations and an increasing demand for more education and skills. As a result, young people — especially those lacking access to quality education and reliable job training — find it hard to gain access to jobs, let alone thrive in the workforce.

Large disparities in education and economic outcomes persist for youth from different parts of the nation, and the same is true for some youth in South Bend. Youth employment programs can help close these gaps by providing income for youth and their families and opportunities for on-the-job training and mentorship that serve as the critical "stepping stone" youth need to increase their ability to compete in today's job market.

[Venues Parks & Arts Current Strategic Plan \(2017-2021\)](#) includes a strategic focus area on Employee Development with a specific objective (5.5) to introduce a comprehensive Youth Job Development Program. In addition to the efforts outlined above, VPA staff initiated research on has initiated research on various youth employment programs around the country. These programs are popular and provide many strategic outcomes that are aligned with our key impact drivers. Saint Louis, Missouri runs a youth employment program, called STL YOUTH JOBS, that is among the best in the country and provides some of the following research:

### **Higher Earnings**

Early employment opportunities translate into higher earnings in adulthood. [LEARN MORE →](#)

### **Improved Graduation Rates**

Youth who work are more likely to graduate high school and attend college. [LEARN MORE →](#)

### **Financial Inclusion**

Youth having access to money, bank accounts, and learning how to manage their money has dramatic impact. [LEARN MORE →](#)

### **Stronger Communities**

Youth who work become contributors to their communities. [LEARN MORE →](#)

### **Decreased Youth Violence**

Youth who work are less likely to contribute to juvenile crime. [LEARN MORE →](#)

### **Taxpayers Save**

Investing in youth employment is a proactive way to create productive citizens and reduce the burden of unengaged youth on society. [LEARN MORE →](#)

Additional high-impact, first-principled programs to benchmark include:

#### **One Summer Chicago**

<https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/fss/provdrs/youth/svcs/youth-employment.html>

#### **Little Rock Summer Youth Employment**

<https://www.littlerock.gov/city-administration/city-departments/community-programs/summer-youth-employment-opportunity/>

#### **Kansas Youth Employment Project**

<http://workforce-ks.com/yep/>

#### **Summer Works PDX (Portland)**

<https://www.worksystems.org/summerworks>

#### **Madison Summer Team**

<https://youthsos.org/programs/youth-development/madison-street-team>

#### **Pittsburgh Learn & Earn**

<https://www.partner4work.org/learnandearn/faqs/>

## **SOUTH BEND PILOT PROGRAM CONSIDERATIONS**

Venues Parks & Arts (VPA) seeks funding to hire a full-time Youth Employment Program Coordinator to run a pilot program within VPA, develop basic structure and curriculum, identify partners and initiate scalable solution for future years. Considerations when developing this program could include, but not be limited to the following:

- Work-based learning programs with full pre and post assessments to measure impact.
- Creation and dissemination of information on summer and year-round Work-Based Learning programs to employers, parents, teachers, students, and staff with a focus on active recruitment of at-risk youth.
- Create a comprehensive curriculum that includes:
  - Building professional networks
  - Exploring career opportunities
  - Developing essential job and leadership skills
  - Diversity & inclusion training
  - Civility & discourse in the workplace
  - Job essentials (dress, timeliness, handshakes, correspondence, etc.)
  - Community service
  - Financial literacy
  - Resume writing
- Oversee South Bend Youth Task Force.
- Connect youth to mentorship opportunities.
- Develop list of business partners willing to employ successful SBYEP youth to “pipeline” jobs. Actively refer youth to these jobs.
- Leadership training.

### Considerations for Future:

- Program & curriculum available to all city departments.
- Extend the program offerings to partner businesses who employ youth. Partner businesses would pay a fee to participate - helping to support and sustain the program.
- Research the possibility to offload the program to Department of Community Investment (as part of a comprehensive workforce development program).
- Research the possibility to transfer the program to an outside community partner, such as the Chamber of Commerce, South Bend-Elkhart Regional Partnership, a higher-education institution, or another community youth center.

This draft list is meant to be reflective of the type of work we envision a Youth Employment Program Coordinator performing. This newly created position would work alongside our a cross-divisional Venues Parks & Arts’ Leadership team to develop the program and institute the pilot in 2020. We look forward to discussing this opportunity with you as we continue to advance our shared goal of more intentional youth employment and engagement.

