

# Survey finds youth in Boston summer jobs program gain job readiness skills, higher academic aspirations

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Credit: Luis Delgado/Northeastern University

After youth participated in Boston's summer jobs program, a greater number reported having increased job readiness skills, higher academic

aspirations, and improved connections with their neighborhoods—with the largest gains in some areas among minority groups—according to a new report co-authored by Northeastern's Alicia Sasser Modestino.

Modestino, associate professor with joint appointments in the School of Public Policy and Urban Affairs and the Department of Economics, studies youth labor market dynamics and is a visiting scholar at the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, which supported the research project. She co-authored the report with Trinh Nguyen, director of the city's Office of Workforce Development.

"What we basically found is that the summer jobs program does what it intends to do in the short term," Modestino said.

About 10,000 teenagers, primarily ages 14 to 18, participate in Boston's Summer Youth Employment Program, whose goal is to provide young people with their first job experiences while exposing them to the workplace. Youth are placed in both public and nonprofit jobs throughout the city for six weeks, working about 20 hours a week at minimum wage. They also participate in skill-building workshops and can attend college tours, financial literacy training, and other programming.

Last summer, Modestino and Nguyen surveyed about 1,550 youth—split pretty evenly between a treatment group that was randomly assigned to the program and a control group that applied but did not receive jobs. Modestino said that overall in the U.S., there has been a significant drop in teen employment rates since 2000, particularly among inner-city, minority youth. Summer jobs programs like Boston's have sought to address this issue, and she said this study was launched to help measure its impact.

## **The survey results**

Youth who participated in the summer jobs program were surveyed both beforehand and afterward, and they reported notable increases in several job readiness skills. These included having a resumé (40.9 percent to 70.1 percent); having a cover letter (23.4 percent to 43.7 percent); and practicing interviewing skills with an adult (54.8 percent to 64.8 percent).

After the program, more than 63 percent said they felt connected to the people in their neighborhoods, compared to 47.1 percent beforehand. And 73 percent reported afterward their desire to go to a four-year college, compared to 63.8 percent beforehand. Among African American youth, the increase was from 71.2 percent to 79 percent.

Hispanic youth also showed marked improvements in practicing interviewing skills with an adult (from 54.2 percent to 62.9 percent) and developing answers to interview questions (62.5 percent to 76.5 percent).

They also compared the survey data between youth who participated in the program and those who didn't. Overall, youth who participated reported always feeling safe walking around their neighborhoods, connected to the neighbors, and contributing to their family and community significantly more than youth who did not participate. Also, a higher rate of participants indicated they plan to attend a four-year college and have prepared a cover letter and resume than did those who didn't participate.

## **The next steps**

Modestino said the report provides important data for helping to understand the short-term successes of the Boston summer jobs program while underscoring the need to now evaluate the program's long-term impact. In the next phase of their study, the researchers will aim to

answer this question by linking these survey results to administrative data from employment, academic, and criminal records.

As Modestino and Nguyen noted in their report, "It is unclear whether the self-reported improvements in job readiness, academic aspirations, and social engagement will result in increased employment, greater academic achievement, or reductions in delinquent and criminal behavior down the road."

They added that policymakers are increasingly looking at [summer jobs](#) programs to help disadvantaged youth long after their employment experiences, and that better understanding the effectiveness of these programs can inform how best to direct resources to maximize the number of [youth](#) who are positively impacted.

**More information:** The Potential for Summer Youth Employment Programs to Reduce Inequality: What Do We Know?  
[www.bostonfed.org/commdev/issu ... 016/cdbrief32016.pdf](http://www.bostonfed.org/commdev/issu...016/cdbrief32016.pdf)

Provided by Northeastern University

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