



Youth Employment Partnership Strategy

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & WORKFORCE COMMITTEE

APRIL 6, 2026

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Preparing youth today for the opportunities of tomorrow

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New Office to Double Down on the Future

Established FY 2026

The Office of Youth Opportunities connects Charlotte’s young people with paid work experiences, mentorship, leadership opportunities, and safe spaces to learn and grow.

► Focus on:

- Youth ages 13-24
- Youth from low-and moderate-income families
- Youth Living in/attending schools within the Corridors of Opportunity
- Young people at-risk of violence or involvement with the justice system

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Our 3 Strategic Areas

YOUTH SAFETY

Ensuring that young people are supported with prevention, intervention, and alternatives that reduce risks and strengthen community well-being.

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YOUTH CAREER EXPERIENCES

Connecting youth to paid opportunities, career pathways, and skill development that promote long-term economic mobility.

01



YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Creating spaces for leadership, mentorship, and peer-to-peer growth that equip youth with the confidence and tools to thrive.



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Youth Career Experiences

Expand access to education, career pathways, and economic mobility.

- ▶ Mayor's Youth Employment Program
- ▶ ACCESS Program
- ▶ A Seat at the Table
- ▶ Career Readiness Initiatives
- ▶ Envision Academy
- ▶ WinterVision

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Youth Development

Foster civic engagement, leadership, and personal growth.

- ▶ Charlotte-Mecklenburg Youth Council
- ▶ Civic Engagement Initiatives
- ▶ Leadership Development
- ▶ OYO Ambassadors
- ▶ Peer Clubs
- ▶ Youth-Led Social Norms Campaign

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Youth Safety

Support prevention, intervention, and alternatives to violence and justice system involvement.

- ▶ Alternatives to Violence
- ▶ Katie Blessing Center
- ▶ Project BOOST
- ▶ Peer Mediation
- ▶ SAFE Charlotte Grants
- ▶ Youth Diversion Program

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Business Engagement Challenge



GOAL OF
1,000
PAID EXPERIENCES



RECORD
BREAKING
1,200
APPLICATIONS



1,000

415*

*Includes 50 City experiences

Join Us!



OFFICE OF Youth OPPORTUNITIES

BECOME A HOST EMPLOYER!

SCAN THE QR CODE OR VISIT:
https://linktr.ee/Charlotte_Youth

704-336-5577 **youth@charlottenc.gov**

CITY OF CHARLOTTE OFFICE OF YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES **11**

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Youth Employment Partnership Strategy

Council Priority Alignment

- ▶ **Economic Development, Workforce Development, Youth Opportunities**

Purpose

- ▶ Introduce the mayor's referral for Youth Employment Partnership Strategy, highlight best practices and recent successes, and recommend additional approaches to scale impact of the city's youth programs and workforce development strategy

Key Takeaways

- ▶ Youth employment and career exploration opportunities support economic opportunity for youth and strengthen the city's future workforce
- ▶ Delivering meaningful career exploration and employment opportunities for youth depends on strong partnerships with businesses and non-profit organizations, engagement from civic and business leaders, and partner programs that fill gaps
- ▶ Partnership opportunity to expand the pilot with Road to Hire will be proposed as part of the FY 2027 budget

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Policy Referral Summary

Policy Question

- ▶ What strategies and partnerships are needed to increase career experiences and employment opportunities for Charlotte's youth, and create meaningful pathways to education and jobs?

Committee Charge

- ▶ Review best practices for connecting youth employment programs to career pathways
- ▶ Explore opportunities to create and leverage partnerships across the broader business ecosystem to engage employers in youth employment and career exploration opportunities
- ▶ Develop recommendations for leveraging community leaders – including the mayor and city council – to expand youth employment opportunities
- ▶ Assess and recommend additional approaches to address gaps and scale efforts to maximize impact
- ▶ Make any applicable recommendations to Council for consideration

Youth Employment Best Practices

- ✓ Emphasize career exploration and early work-based learning opportunities
- ✓ Ensure “No Wrong Door” access to programs and services
- ✓ Focus on youth with barriers to opportunity
- ✓ Provide flexibility for both students and employers
- ✓ Provide Paid Work Experiences for Meaningful Employment
- ✓ Incorporate skill building, including soft-skill development, industry-recognized certifications, and financial literacy
- ✓ Incorporate mentorship and coaching
- ✓ Create robust partnerships with schools
- ✓ Integrate supportive services such as transportation assistance and provision of technology/equipment and professional attire
- ❑ Implement structured career development pathways and supports to ensure successful journeys from career exploration to sustainable employment

Policy Referral Recommendations

- ▶ **Better engage and leverage civic and business leaders**
- ▶ **Increase community-wide impact by aligning City-County-CMS efforts**
- ▶ **Continue investments in holistic supports for young people**
- ▶ **Create structured pathways to success**
 - Robust systems to track and connect youth participating in city programs with next-step opportunities
 - Connect city programs to CMS Career Pathways
 - Invest in partnerships that support young people's journey along the full pathway from career exploration to sustainable employment

Upcoming Opportunity: Road to Hire

- ▶ **Road to Hire (R2H) is a unique Charlotte model that fills a gap in programming, providing longitudinal support for students progressing from high school career exploration to college to good-paying jobs in Charlotte, on-time and debt-free**
- ▶ **City co-invested in pilot over 3 years with Mecklenburg County and private partners**
- ▶ **Pilot demonstrated strong outcomes for students and promising projections**
- ▶ **Work is aligned with youth program priorities, workforce development strategy, and Corridors of Opportunities**
- ▶ **Road to Hire has submitted a budget request of \$1.5 million per year over 5 years, 10% of an overall community ask**

R2H Public-Private Partnership

▶ \$15M each year for 5-years

▶ 20/80

- City (10%)
 - County (10%)
 - CMS (in-kind)
- } 20%



• Private/philanthropic (80%)



R2H Student Lifecycle

From Title 1 High Schools to Top-Tier Employers

COLLEGE PREP	Spring Junior Year	● Early engagement and application period .
	Summer Before Senior Year	● Paid summer internship focused on college preparedness and career exposure.
	Senior Year Course	● R2H staff teaches tech, professionalism, and college application skills in high school courses, for credit .
	Summer After H.S. Graduation	● "College Thrive:" paid summer fellowship preparing students for college success.
COLLEGE SUCCESS	Freshman-Senior Years	● College enrollment at R2H partner school with tuition/room & board paid. Student Career Coach support for four years.
	Summer Experiences	● "Career Thrive:" paid internships with early exposure to corporate environments and on-the-job learning.
CAREERS IN CHARLOTTE	Post-College Graduation	● DEBT-FREE college completion and transition to high-earning career.

Road to Hire Pilot Outcomes

1,881

Paid Summer Internships

93%

1-year college persistence
(79% NC)

100%

Graduated debt free

\$55K

Minimum salary of participants entering workforce

804

College scholarships awarded

85%

On-time college graduation rate
(43% NC partner schools)

95%

First-year job retention rate
(67% statewide)

25%

Salary 25% above Charlotte market for recent graduates

Road to Hire Recommendation

► **Road to Hire complements the city's youth programs and supports the city's workforce development goals:**

- Programming is embedded year-round in Title I schools located in the Corridors of Opportunity.
- Students participate in meaningful, paid internships over several summers.
- Students who complete the program successfully can earn a four-year degree at no cost.
- Students receive continuous support throughout high school and post-secondary to their first career milestone.

Next Steps

- ▶ **Recruit host employers and business partners for youth career experiences**
- ▶ **Participating employer recognition and celebration**
- ▶ **1,000 meaningful work experiences for youth**
- ▶ **Council will have an opportunity to consider continuation of the Road to Hire partnership as part of the FY 2027 Manager's Budget**

Discussion