

Seattle Youth Employment Program

Overview

The Mayor's Youth Employment Initiative helped launch a pilot for an expanded Seattle Youth Employment Program (SYEP) at Seattle Public Utilities. During the summer of 2017, SPU hosted 15 SYEP interns across all department branches and its three lines of business. SPU is growing its recruitment to host up to 20 SYEP summer interns each year with a goal of hiring a total of 100 interns from 2017 to 2021. An SYEP program at SPU:

- Exposes local high school and college students to careers at SPU
- Meets employment needs of underserved youth and young adults in our community
- Builds long-term partnerships with local schools, other external partners and City departments.
- Enhances department capacity for youth development and workforce pathways that strengthen SPU's workforce into the future

Why is it important for SPU to partner with SYEP?

Despite Seattle's economic gains in recent years, many youth still lack economic opportunities. Youth unemployment in Seattle is 13 percent overall and a disproportionate 28 percent for young people of color. The Utility plays a key role in delivering essential services directly correlated to the health and quality of life of people in Seattle and beyond. An SYEP program that leverages SPU's needs and resources promotes work readiness and strengthens career development while supporting underserved youth to grow skills, preparing them for real-world jobs in a competitive market.

Background

The Seattle Youth Employment Program partners with private, non-profit and public employers, such as SPU. In 2017, City departments expanded participation in the program with a goal of continued, robust implementation moving forward. SPU's plans include:

- Setting annual program goals
- Identifying SYEP internship opportunities at SPU
- Planning SPU facilities tours, training, project-based learning opportunities, and other educational opportunities
- Strengthening partnership with the Human Services Department, which administers SYEP

Quotes from intern exit interviews:

"It was very eye-opening. I learned what they check for in the water, what's in it, how they filter it, where it comes from and how to sustain it. And that's relevant to Seattle because everyone needs water." – Jessica.

"If I were to work with [the same supervisor] again, that would be awesome because everyone is very friendly. They make sure I understand why I'm doing the work I'm doing. For example, historical data. They want to see how they can replicate natural flows of the lake if a dam wasn't there. From what I've seen, SYEP really cares about this program." – Calvin.

“I feel like this was a peek into what SPU really does and I feel like if I come back next year it would be expanded. This was just a quick six weeks and you can always learn something new.” – Isaac.

“My supervisor checks in with me regularly and asks what she can do to be a better supervisor. I’m impressed by her because she’s really good at her job and speaks with passion about her work.” – Kahlia.



Additional information

For over 20 years, SPU has had varying levels of capacity for working with youth. From 1995 to 2002, SPU’s EcoTeam Summer Youth Program employed up to 5 youth per year to build and maintain demonstration gardens, trails, stairs, and compost systems. EcoTeam paired youth with SPU mentors who helped them transition to working for a large utility. They also received SYEP academic support and life skill classes on budgeting, personal care, etc. During this period, SPU also collaborated with City Light and SYEP to create Utility U. Utility U was a year-round program that provided math, reading and writing instruction with a focus on preparing youth for job opportunities with these City departments.