

# STEP UP

Think **BIG** and take control  
of your future now

This Career Planning Guide for Young Adults was produced by Seedco.

# Overview

In 2006, the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development provided funding to Seedco to update the In-School Youth Work Readiness Curriculum. Seedco is a national nonprofit organization that develops, operates and learns from model programs that move low-income families toward financial self-sufficiency. Seedco's technical assistance and financial services complement these programs by building the capacity of community partners.

The curriculum was designed to prepare youth to enter the workforce with the tools and skills needed to make good work-related decisions and to build successful careers. The activities offer participants a chance to understand the realities of the job market and to develop concrete skill sets required of most, if not all, workers (e.g., reading, research, communication, prioritizing, professionalism, etc.). Most importantly, the exercises encourage participants to 'dream big' about their futures and map out education and employment-related opportunities they have as young adults. The guide aims to (1) provide practical, sound advice that will enable participants to secure employment and succeed on the job, and (2) empower youth to take control of their long-term careers.

There are four modules in the curriculum:

- **What Matters to Me:** The activities in this module are designed to provide an opportunity for self-reflection and to encourage participants to consider how a career fits into their values, priorities and life goals. Participants will understand situational conditions and consider how personal choices impact future opportunities for success.
- **My Career:** Participants will learn about the career planning process, assess their strengths and interests, learn about careers and the job market, and develop a career plan.
- **Preparing to Work:** This module includes the nuts and bolts of work readiness and securing a job. Participants will learn about the job application process, resume and cover letter writing and job interviews.
- **Success at Work and Beyond:** Too often young adults are able to secure jobs but they cannot retain them. Participants will reflect on good work habits and teamwork, and explore ways to continue growing in their career and towards their long-term goals. Additionally, there is a money management section that will help participants make sound financial decisions and provide tips on career advancement.

## Guiding Principles

The curriculum and its accompanying activities were developed based on research on best practices in youth employment, recommendations from workforce contractors who either contacted Seedco or participated in focus groups, observations of job readiness classes, Seedco's experience in workforce development, and input from DYCD staff.

Principles that guided the development of this curriculum include:

- **Work Readiness:** The goal of the curriculum is to help every participant obtain employment while also building transferable skills and viable careers. Thus, the curriculum and its exercises emphasize job readiness principles that aim to prepare participants to interview, land an employment offer, and succeed on the job. It also incorporates hands-on activities that will help participants develop the 'soft' skills associated with being a professional (e.g., mock interviews with peers and exercises that build effective on-the-job problem solving skills).

- **Youth Development:** Transitioning out of high school is a critical step toward adulthood. At its core, this curriculum encourages participants to reflect on their values, strengths, and communities as well as how work fits into their lives. As much as possible, facilitators are encouraged to use the curriculum to provide opportunities for peer learning, leadership, and self-reflection. More information on youth development is included on page 11.
- **Competencies:** The curriculum is structured around a set of core competencies—skills and attitudes found through research to be necessary for young people to succeed in school, career and life. These competencies are intended to provide the facilitators and participants with an overall framework and direction to learning. Each exercise was developed with these core competencies in mind to ensure that instructors can maximize participant learning opportunities. Thus, as the class moves through the curriculum and completes exercises, makes journal entries and builds portfolios, it is important for both instructors and participants to ask, “How am I/is the class doing in acquiring these competencies?” By continually asking this question, facilitators and participants will focus on helping participants build careers—both in the short and long-term. A chart of the primary competencies is included on page 10. The Table of Contents also indicates the specific competencies each exercise develops.
- **Approaches to Learning:** Activities are designed for different types of learners and should encourage each participant to draw on his or her individual strengths. While there are common threads throughout the curriculum (e.g., building communication skills), each activity offers participants an opportunity to take ownership for their own success. As much as possible, facilitators should provide participants with opportunities to learn in his or her preferred way, and highlight each individual’s strengths. Additional information on types of learners is included on page 15.
- **Life-long Learning:** Gone are the days in which participants were able to use what they learned in school for their entire career. Life long learning is now an essential part of being a successful adult. In order to succeed in the new economy, each participant must commit to continually upgrade their skills and knowledge. The curriculum provides ample opportunities for self-assessment, goal-setting, and exploring how education (through post-secondary training or college) can impact earnings and advancement.

## Curriculum Design

Following is a description of the curriculum’s features which were designed to provide facilitators with greater flexibility and opportunities to customize the curriculum for their programs and participants.

- **Four Distinct Modules:** The curriculum includes four distinct yet interconnected modules. The module format was designed to be user-friendly and adaptable to suit the objectives of each program as well as to meet contractual goals and objectives. The four modules—What Matters to Me, My Career, Preparing to Work, and Success at Work and Beyond—allow facilitators to customize the curriculum according to participants’ needs and interests as they progress through the program. At any point, instructors can have participants work on exercises from different modules rather than require that all participants complete the same activities at the same time. This provides greater room for participants to advance at their own pace while also allowing instructors to use common topics/themes for the class.
- **First and Second Year:** While all exercises have been designed to be as effective, engaging and meaningful as possible for participants, regardless of whether they are new to the work readiness program or not, recommendations have been included to allow instructors to determine which activities are better suited to address the needs of first or second-year participants. Guidelines are provided to help instructors adapt and customize the activities and to better understand which exercises may be most appropriate for different audiences and skill levels.
- **Individuals and Groups:** As work readiness programs are structured in a variety of ways, a menu of activities has been provided for individuals and groups. The curriculum clearly identifies the exercises that are best suited for independent work (or for participants to take home and complete) and those that are

designed for group work. There are also alternative ways of presenting each activity that instructors may find helpful.

- **Visual Design:** The visual design of the curriculum was developed with the intent of having a young, fresh, urban feel that would be engaging for young adults. The layout of the participant activities is presented less as a traditional workbook and more akin to a magazine format. Learning about work and exploring life goals should be exciting. Thus, the design of the guide aims to appeal to and inspire youth.

Below is a graphic representation of the approach to the curriculum.



