

TRANSITIONS TO WORK:

Creating Effective Internship Experiences for Palestinian Youth

The Youth Entrepreneurship Development (YED) program is a five-year, US\$15 million initiative funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) West Bank and Gaza Mission. YED's goal is to improve employability and entrepreneurship opportunities for young Palestinians, ages 14 to 29, by partnering with public, private, and civil society sector institutions. Through strong partnerships with local Palestinian youth-serving institutions, the program supports high-quality, results-oriented, and sustainable livelihood initiatives to address the needs of Palestinian youth.

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The International Youth Foundation (IYF) invests in the extraordinary potential of young people. Founded in 1990, IYF builds and maintains a worldwide community of businesses, governments, and civil-society organizations committed to empowering youth to be healthy, productive, and engaged citizens. IYF programs are catalysts of change that help young people obtain a quality education, gain employability skills, make healthy choices, and improve their communities.

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YOUNG PEOPLE IN PALESTINE ARE HIGHLY EDUCATED YET STRUGGLE

to transition from the educational system into the labor force. In 2012, 38 percent of Palestinians had completed a secondary education and 25 percent had obtained a university degree;¹ yet youth, ages 20 to 24, have the country's highest rate of unemployment at roughly 40 percent. Based on feedback from private sector employers, fresh graduates are finishing school and attempting to enter the job market ill-equipped with the necessary life and technical skills to compete for a limited number of jobs.

In response to this challenge, the International Youth Foundation (IYF) partnered with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in 2010 to launch the Youth Entrepreneurship Development (YED) program. YED supports Palestinian youth-serving institutions (YSIs) to develop and implement projects that provide more effective school-to-work transitions for youth, including applied learning activities such as internships. YED has implemented eight projects through five YSI partners—including universities and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)—that incorporated an internship component, facilitating more than a thousand internships at private and public sector organizations throughout the West Bank.

YED's internships offer youth an opportunity to practice employability skills, to network with employers, to compete for potential full-time jobs, and to identify areas in which they require additional training to be more competitive in the current job market. While internships are an institutional requirement for many university degree programs—and are in demand by private and public sector employers—effective strategies for utilizing internships are still being tested and refined within the Palestinian context. To support this, YED draws upon core Standards of Excellence for Youth Employability Programs it developed based on IYF's global youth development experience and locally-relevant best practices. YED's YSI partners have used the standards to facilitate more effective internship experiences for all parties.

1. UNESCO Institute for Statistics: <http://data.uis.unesco.org/>



YED's Standards of Excellence Related to Internship Programs

Dual-client Assessment: Analyze employers' and youth's needs during the program development phase in order to align training with labor market needs and increase youth's employability.

Life Skills Training: Support youth to develop workplace readiness skills (e.g., effective communication, presentation, conflict management, leadership).

Practical Application of Knowledge/Skills: Establish structured processes to provide substantive internships and on-the-job training opportunities for youth developed through productive relationships with private sector employers.

Job Placement Support and Follow-up: Create formal agreements with employers to hire interns; facilitate access to information on potential job opportunities; and ensure job and internship placements align with youth's existing knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

Post-placement Support: Track youth outcomes; establish alumni networks; and follow up with employers to gather feedback and updated inputs on their emerging needs.

ASSESSING EMPLOYER NEEDS

As a first step in creating effective internship opportunities, YED conducts dual-client assessments (DCAs) to determine the current needs of employers and the interests and competencies of youth seeking employment. Projects are tailored to meet these needs, both in terms of the training provided to youth and the range of internships facilitated to meet youth needs, increasing the

Out of 1,044 YED interns, 39 percent reported finding a permanent job, which is more than double the general employment rate for YED beneficiaries who did not participate in internships (17 percent).

utility of the internship experience for both parties. One YSI partner, Palestine Information and Communications Technology Incubator (PICTI) conducted a DCA to inform the development of its *Path to Career* project, and used the findings to adjust the original project design (see page 3).

While not all YED projects had such clear alignment between the DCA process and the internship outcomes, stakeholders identified the DCA as a key element to ensure that internships meet the needs of youth beneficiaries and potential employers.

TAILORING TRAINING TO EMPLOYER NEEDS

Based on the results of the DCA, YED beneficiaries receive life skills training tailored to employer needs. Training topics are selected based on areas where employers find new graduates to be weak, making them less desirable as employees. Areas of focus include: communications, delivering effective presentations, teamwork, problem solving, CV writing, and job interviewing. In most cases, training is based on IYF's signature life skills program, *Passport to Success*® (PTS). The 80-module PTS curriculum has been successfully adapted in 30 countries—including 8 countries in the Middle East and North Africa—reaching 85,000 young people globally.

All of the YSI partners agreed that the inclusion of PTS life skills training is a crucial element in preparing youth for the working world. Internship providers also agreed that YED-trained interns arrived at the job adequately prepared, but encouraged even more training in communication skills.

Case Study Methodology

Semi-structured interviews with:

- Five YSI partners that organized internships for YED beneficiaries
- Four internship providers (private and public sector organizations)

Focus groups with 60 youth interns

Telephone surveys with 662 YED interns



MANAGING INTERNSHIPS

Formalized internship processes are more effective than less-organized, ad-hoc internships as employers, interns, and project managers have the benefit of working within pre-defined parameters (e.g., official job descriptions, established working hours, set responsibilities for supervisors' and interns', and agreed-upon stipend amounts). In keeping with YED's Standards of Excellence, these elements are defined prior to the start of the internship and formalized with a memorandum of understanding (MOU), which helps to ensure all parties are informed and committed to the internship's terms. During the internship, YSIs follow up with both parties at least once a month to ensure the internship is progressing as expected and to gather information on the internship's outcomes to inform even more productive internships in the future.

While all interns had formal work descriptions and work spaces, set working hours, and performance feedback procedures, a few commented on some initial uncertainty about their responsibilities. Nonetheless, youth reported a highly-productive applied learning experience—96 percent of interns were satisfied with the internship experience, and 95 percent reported strengthened employability skills.

STIPENDS TO SUPPORT INTERNSHIPS

Stakeholders identified stipends as a key component in attracting quality applicants and in motivating youth to excel in their work. YED project funds currently cover

PICTI's Path to Career

Project Dual Client Assessment

- PICTI surveyed 88 new graduates from 8 West Bank communities and 16 IT-focused companies.
- Employers' demand for new employees who were specialized in the technology and management sectors aligned with graduates' area of study but employers' need for strong technical skills in social networks, web design, mobile applications, and communications, were not being developed by university programs.
- PICTI designed the project to include technical trainings on social networks/media, mobile technologies, and web development/cloud computing to match employers' needs.
- Ultimately, 70% of PICTI's interns were placed in permanent jobs.

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stipends of US\$200 per month, per internship, to defray transportation and other expenses. Most respondents recommended the stipends be as large as possible, in order to maximize incentives for youth to participate and to attract higher caliber interns. Said one internship provider from Beit Jala municipality, “We’ve taken many interns but the YED interns were more responsible, had a greater sense of commitment, and possessed better time management skills. They did have the US\$200 benefit, unlike university interns who have no stipend, and so are often less committed.”

In order to maximize stipends, YED encourages internship providers to match the project’s allowance. However, YSI partners indicated it was a challenge to get internship providers to match YED-funded stipends, especially for public sector interns. In addition, other youth-focused projects seeking to recruit quality interns sometimes pay up to three times the YED stipend. While YED encourages quality internships, projects are still working to determine stipend amounts that are affordable for YSIs and providers, and yet remain competitive in the marketplace.

also suggested by providers, as they invest significant time and effort in training and orienting the interns in order to make their experience as productive as possible, and would prefer to keep them longer after they are trained.

However, two YED partners initially organized one-month internships, reaching about 150 youth, before transitioning to 3-month internships. In retrospect, the short-term internships resulted in higher employment rates than the partners’ long-term internships, suggesting that longer internships may not have greater impact.

Other factors may have contributed to this outcome. Shorter internships, for example, may be more appropriate for lower-skilled job placements, such as administrative positions. The short-term internships were also organized earlier, giving youth more time to market their enhanced employability skills. Another contributing factor may have been the relatively small sample size. However, based on study results, it is not clear that longer internships result in more permanent job opportunities, though they were much more desired by YSI partners, internship providers, and the interns themselves, based on qualitative feedback.

Nearly 40 percent of YED interns secured work some six months to one year after participating in the internship.

DURATION OF INTERNSHIPS

While longer internships are in greater demand, they may not enhance outcomes. Most of YED’s 1,100 internships lasted three months. In interviews and focus group discussions, most youth expressed a preference for longer internship experiences, indicating that four-to six-month internships would offer youth more time to build workplace readiness skills. Longer internships were

ALIGNING INTERNSHIPS TO LABOR MARKET NEEDS

Internships aligned with labor market needs through the DCA had greater impact than those aligned to youth’s specializations. Life skills for employability (LSE) projects, which focused on life skills training and internships as experiential learning opportunities, had an 83 percent rating for internships’ alignment to career interests; the employment rate for these internships was around 35 percent. Conversely, ICT-focused projects reported nearly double the post-internship employment rate (66 percent)

Table 1. Duration of Internships

	# of short-term internships	% of short-term interns employed	# of long-term internships	% of long-term interns employed
Partner 1	96	61%	273	32%
Partner 2	55	45%	263	33%



as compared to LSE interns but relevance to career interests was a combined 72 percent. As ICT projects are focused on beneficiaries within a specific skill set, and provide technical training for youth to enter specialized fields, these internships are facilitated with providers that are more likely to offer permanent positions to strong candidates. In addition, the overall employment rates for ICT projects for all trainees (regardless of internship status) were nearly double that of LSE projects, indicating that projects working in close collaboration with private sector companies in high-growth sectors have greater impact on youth employability than general life skills for employability projects.

LESSONS LEARNED

Internships are effective in building youth employability skills. Based on the outcomes of this study, internships were an effective means to strengthen the employability skills of young people seeking to transition into the job market, with nearly 40 percent of YED interns securing work some six months to one year after participating in the internship, compared to the general

employment rate for all YED trainees (interns and non-interns) of around 17 percent. YSI partners also benefitted from the development of institutional partnerships that contributed to internship stipends and encouraged employers to hire YED interns as permanent employees.

Formalized internship agreements facilitate effective learning experiences. Internship facilitation processes should include defined roles and responsibilities for all invested parties (e.g., interns, providers, project implementers) to ensure the internship functions smoothly, that all parties understand and adhere to their commitments, and that the experience is continuously monitored in order to address any issues that may arise to maximize the benefit for all stakeholders.

Outcomes vary based on the type of training and internship. Internships focused on a particular sector had greater impact in youth's transition to a permanent job. While specialized projects are more expensive, tend to reach a smaller number of beneficiaries, and organize a smaller number of internships within an established range

Table 2. Internship Relevancy and Job Placement Rates by YSI Partner

YSI Partner by type	Internships' Relevance to Career Interests	Interns' Job Placement Rate	Overall Job Placement Rate for all YED trainees
LSE Partners	83%	35%	15%
ICT Partners	72%	66%	29%
AGGREGATE	82%	39%	17%*
* For youth of an employable age; beneficiaries below 18 not included in this percentage.			

of providers, job placement rates were about double that of general LSE projects, and four times the employment rate for trainees that did not complete an internship.

While projects that offered general training and internships had half the employment rate of specialized projects, beneficiaries still had about double the employment rate of trainees that did not participate in an internship. LSE internships also resulted in higher rates of satisfaction and alignment with youth beneficiaries' existing skills and interests. LSE-focused internships are also effective strategies to reach a greater number of youth with opportunities to sample the job market, which increases their overall marketability for potential employers.

YED's Standards of Excellence support the development of quality internships. YED confirmed that its Standards of Excellence are valid and internships were enhanced by partners' adoption of international best practice standards. However, based on stakeholders' feedback, stipends to offset associated costs should be added as a standard to facilitate the most productive internship experience for all parties.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FACILITATING EFFECTIVE INTERNSHIPS AND JOB PLACEMENT

Conduct more routine follow up post-internship.

Even after the internship, youth beneficiaries need support to transition to the labor force; projects also benefit from feedback on the outcomes of their training and placement activities. YED should continue to provide tools and resources to beneficiaries and providers, to gather feedback on the internship process overall, and identify potential adjustments to maximize the efficacy of their work.

Invest in more life skills for employability training.

YSI-facilitated work-readiness training prior to the start of the internship greatly enhanced participants' ability to transition successfully to a professional work environment. The continued benefit of this investment was confirmed by all respondents as an essential element in supporting youth's work-readiness skills.

Explore the potential to expand projects with higher placement rates.

While job placement rates were improved by any type of internship, projects that offered cross-cutting and technical skills training based on the needs of existing private sector partners had a much higher employment rate than did general training projects. However, such tailored interventions require a greater resource investment in order to achieve this enhanced outcome; thus, a mixed approach of life skills and technical training projects can maximize the number of internship beneficiaries, while still supporting employability in high-growth sectors.

Continue to work with internship providers to maximize internship quality.

YSI partners should continue to work in a systematic way with private sector companies to institutionalize internships as part of corporate practices, supported by matching funds to increase stipends.

Continue to support the implementation of YED strategies for effective internships.

While many of YED's partners are adopting the Standards of Excellence, the integration of processes and procedures to ensure a quality internship experience on an institutional level can still be expanded to support more effective experiences for youth.

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