



# **The Youth Development Institute's Career Internship Network**

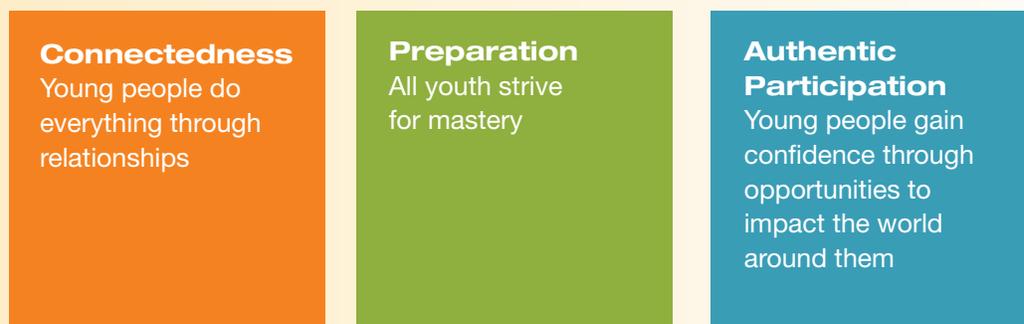
**Building and Sustaining Quality in Youth Internship Programs  
through an Enduring Community of Practice**



## About the Youth Development Institute and the Framework for Positive Youth Development

The Youth Development Institute (YDI) is a non-profit capacity-building organization that works with organizations, public agencies and youth-serving systems to ensure that programs and policies align with best practices in positive youth development and to create strong outcomes for young people. Our mission is to advance the positive development of young people by promoting principles and practices that enable them to thrive. We combine a deep understanding of youth development and the supporting research with expertise in effective organizational development strategies. Our efforts focus on promoting youth development, creating the conditions that make it possible and professionalizing the field of youth work. YDI's Framework for Positive Youth Development is based on decades of research and practical experience, and reflects the universality of young people's developmental trajectories.

**The Framework views practices, programming and policy through three interrelated spheres:**



### **Connectedness**

Young people do everything through relationships

### **Preparation**

All youth strive for mastery

### **Authentic Participation**

Young people gain confidence through opportunities to impact the world around them

## Letter from the Executive Director

YDI has been running the Career Internship Network (CIN) for nearly 13 years, and we are thrilled to be sharing what we have learned with the larger youth development field. The biggest take-away from this work, for me, is the critical importance of communities of practice as a distinct form of professional development. It is within these types of learning communities that practitioners move beyond shifts in awareness or abstract understanding to real applied learning. It is one of the joys of this work to watch practitioners grow their practice in real time as they try out new strategies, rethink their programs and get feedback from their peers about how to improve their programs to deepen impact for young people. Equally as important, I have seen among our CIN members a growing dedication to continuous improvement and the institutionalization of youth development across every aspect of their programs.

Youth development is a transformative practice, but it requires ongoing, intentional efforts to strengthen connectedness, prepare young people for success and give them opportunities to build competence and confidence through authentic participation. The institutions that CIN works with are not designed specifically for young people, yet choose to incorporate young people as part of their mission. This requires a shift in mindset around what young people are capable of and what we trust them with. I am so proud that, through CIN, YDI has been able to help these institutions expand their definition of who they serve, and to do so in a way that both strengthens their youth programming and the institutions themselves.

This network represents what YDI fundamentally believes about creating effective programs—strong practices are grounded in sound research, but that sound research must be informed by real-world experiences. YDI has always been a unique space where those two worlds come together and have a dialog that produces better programs. This document reflects the richness of that dialog, and I look forward to continuing these types of conversations.

*Sabrina Evans Ellis*



# Introduction

**Time is a precious commodity. You don't spend it in spaces where you are not learning and growing. The fact that CIN has been able to maintain a significant active membership for over 12 years is a testament to its value to practitioners.**

Early in 2003, a group of career internship program leaders and staff from institutions across the City gathered together to share resources and information at a meeting arranged by the Pinkerton Foundation. Pinkerton sought to provide these programs with a forum where they could exchange ideas, share practices, support each other in addressing program challenges and, hopefully, raise awareness about the value of career internships so that similar programs could grow and flourish.

In the thirteen years since that first meeting, the Career Internship Network (CIN) has evolved into an essential resource through which career internship providers across the City develop staff, grow and sustain high-quality programs and come together to share resources and build their field. The founding group of 24 member organizations has grown to include more than 40 regularly participating institutions, and half of the original group remain actively involved. Over the course of 13 years, the Network has served over 70 institutions. Not only has CIN been advantageous to career internship practitioners, it has also been a boon for students seeking

## What is a Career Internship?

A career internship is a structured, real-life work experience in an actual work environment. Interns are treated as young employees who are distinguished from the rest of the staff through a systematic introduction to the workplace and its accompanying professional expectations, skills and etiquette. Interns work alongside a caring adult mentor who helps them initiate their career journey on a sure footing. Interns are paid and they earn school credit, or another form of compensation, in recognition of their contribution to the host organization.

internships in some of the City's key cultural institutions and for the institutions themselves. CIN has been instrumental in ensuring that internship programs across the City are well equipped to serve young people and aligned with the missions of their host organizations, making them both effective and sustainable.

As YDI celebrates its 25th Anniversary, it reflects on the successes and challenges from its first quarter-century and looks ahead toward its future. This milestone offers an opportunity to examine one of YDI's longest-standing and most appreciated initiatives. CIN so clearly embodies YDI's mission to ensure that youth in New York City receive the high-quality services they need to transition successfully into adulthood.

# Founding of the Network

**YDI is a natural convener; we know how to bring people together so that others can share what they know.... We create a space where others can innovate.**

CIN came together because of the insight and efforts of Laurie Dien at the Pinkerton Foundation. Through her site visits across the Foundation's various youth grantees, Dien realized that career internship programs operating at a range of institutions across the City were doing important and innovative work, but that they were doing so in isolation. She was the main channel for information flowing among them. At the time, the Foundation was looking for ways to increase young people's exposure to the City's cultural institutions; Dien thought that a network convening the career internship programs at these institutions could serve that aim, while also creating a conduit for these programs to share ideas and challenges. Dien also thought that creating a network among career internship programs could bolster the field as a whole by demonstrating the value of these programs and hopefully increasing their numbers.

Dien along with her colleagues at Pinkerton made two critical decisions during the start-up phase that directly relate to CIN's longevity and success: She hired Abby Remer, a creative, passionate and extremely knowledgeable practitioner to coordinate the Network, and she chose YDI as CIN's institutional home.

As a coordinator with real-world expertise in high-quality career internship programming, Remer was crucial for CIN's early success. She brought vitality and a profound belief in the values that were reflected in the Network: a deep and authentic commitment to peer learning and the desire to cultivate a supportive community where practitioners would have the opportunity to grow their practice through shared reflection and the exchange of ideas.

Situating CIN at YDI was equally critical. YDI was the right fit for the Network for several reasons. Due to YDI's long-standing relationship with schools through the Beacons Initiative, the school-to-work link that career internships embodied made for a natural fit. YDI was also the crucial vector for spreading high-quality youth-

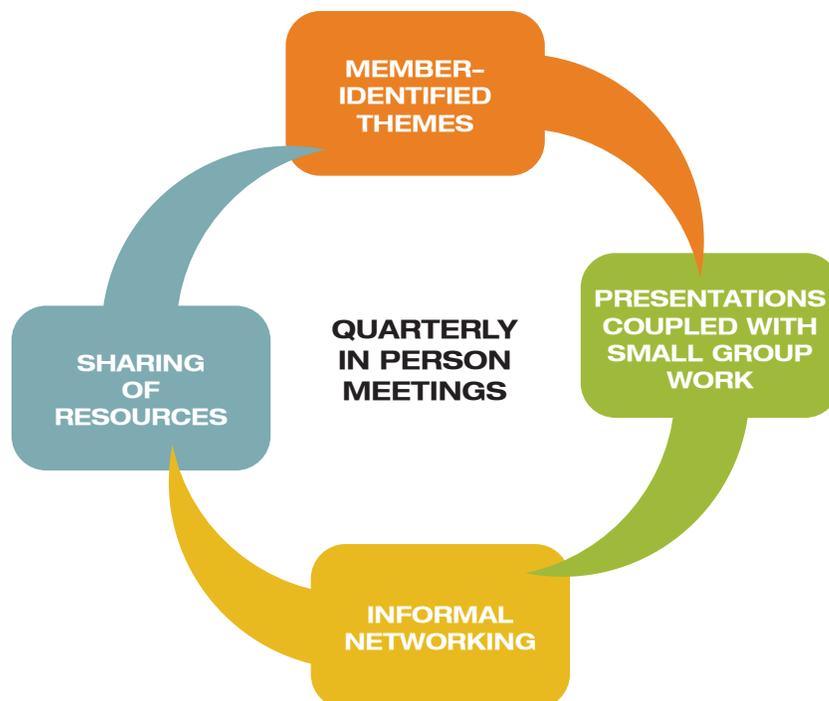
focused programming. YDI ensured that CIN would be grounded in a Positive Youth Development approach, which has become its distinguishing feature. Dien recognized YDI as an organization that had the capacity to identify strong youth development practice, and also understood how to ensure that practice is infused throughout a model or program. This would be a critical element if the network Dien envisioned was to have an enduring impact for youth. Indeed, when a sample of CIN members were questioned as to what comprised best practice in a high-quality career internship program, each stated in one way or another, that a deep commitment to Youth Development was at the heart of their success:

**“How I do my job is through the lens of youth development principles, which I have learned from CIN. This is at the core of what I do. This focus brings everything together. We can meet the needs of the organization, the students and other staff by focusing on youth development principles.”**

—Vanessa Francisco  
*The Central Park Conservancy*

# Structure of the Network

Starting the network required front-end work on the part of Pinkerton to assess interest and convene grantees, identify an organizational host for the network and someone to coordinate that network. A modest grant supported these efforts. While over time CIN experimented with various formats and subgroups, its fundamental structure and approach was established early-on and has remained largely intact. Four quarterly meetings are offered annually. Each meeting is structured as a workshop, based on a theme chosen with participant input. The agenda for each meeting is co-developed and co-facilitated by YDI staff and Remer. CIN also involves member-practitioners as well as outside experts to bring variety and relevance to the meetings. The activities of the meeting focus on a presentation related to the theme, small group work that supports learning and application of theme elements, and sharing of resources, which might be tools utilized by individual programs or practice examples. As a means to cultivate relationship building and informal networking among members, food is served at meetings to ensure a relaxed atmosphere where sharing and trust can develop.



In addition to this core structure, over the years, as time, interest and budgets permitted, CIN has included a range of other types of programming to support participants. Site visits were common during the early years of the network, allowing the coordinator to observe individual programs. Visits were beneficial because they allowed the coordinator to identify practices to highlight during CIN meetings or to connect participating programs to learn from each other. One-on-one technical assistance was an additional service the network provided when funding allowed, and it proved to be extremely useful for participants who had a special concern or a practice gap that required more intensive work to address. Occasional intensive practice institutes, such as those focused on supervision or evaluation, have provided more experienced participants with in-depth coverage of more advanced topics or allowed a focus on a particular cohort within CIN. Special topics groups and affinity luncheons offered various member cohorts opportunities to meet around shared interests or for members who were no longer direct service staff to address strategic issues about the field at large.

The structure of CIN meetings supports its core function as a place where career internship professionals build their practice. To many participating institutions, CIN is a crucial professional development opportunity for staff, who often come to this work without essential skills in youth development. In addition, staff at these programs tend to be young, have few contacts with others professionals doing the same type of work and tend to turn over rapidly. CIN addresses all of these issues, providing staff with skills, contacts, networking opportunities and the ability to see and learn how other organizations are doing the work.

**“I was the only team member working with teens, but I had no experience or know-how about putting together a youth development program or how to assess it. I was learning as I was going, and CIN was incredibly valuable—it shaped me as an educator and shaped my programming...it was a huge part of my professional development”**

—Chelsea Frosini  
*The Opportunity Network  
(formerly of the The New  
York Historical Society)*

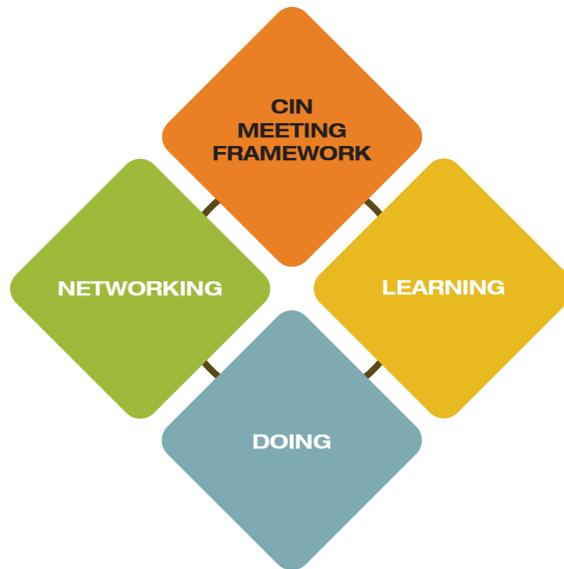
**“I can count on CIN helping me to get my staff to where they need to be to make possible best practice. I can turn to the Network for continuity and for what best practices are at the moment. It’s a great use of staff time.”**

—Allison Day  
*The Brooklyn Museum*

“CIN had a lot to do with my foundational development... it has absolutely impacted the way our programs function day to day.”

—Rugan Lewis  
*The New-York Historical  
Society*

**The framework for all CIN meetings is a straightforward model that combines learning, doing and networking:**



In many ways, this intentional approach mirrors what strong career internship programs do—provide students with opportunities to “learn by doing,” while connecting them with mentors and peers who bolster and extend their learning and provide support and opportunities for growth. It also reflects youth development best practice and aligns with YDI’s Positive Youth Development Framework integrating connection, preparation and authentic participation. By situating CIN at YDI, Pinkerton ensured a through-line between the City’s career internship programs and high-quality youth development practice. CIN started with a simple desire to bring like-minded organizations together to share ideas and challenges. In the hands of a talented and skilled coordinator, the Network became the vehicle for building and sustaining high-quality career internship programs across the City by housing deep expertise in youth development and the complexities of organizational life.

**High-quality internship programs have clear learning objectives and continual adult supervision.**

The experience is guided by a work plan that interns create together with a mentor or supervisor outlining a series of challenging work assignments that are meaningful to the organization. A program coordinator provides ongoing contact and support to both mentors and interns. The internship is built around youth development principles and staff are knowledgeable about adolescent development and positive youth development. The internship provides youth participants a broad understanding of the organization as well as a number of occupational areas. It includes a designated time and method for reflection during which interns have the opportunity to think deeply and internalize their learning. The internship incorporates a carefully planned and embedded evaluation based on sound methods of gathering data, analyzing and interpreting results, and using findings to refine the program.

**CIN has upped the ante for what an internship can and should be. We have sent a clear message to the field about what young people are capable of and what they can be trusted with. People express surprise when they hear that 16-year-olds are leading groups and initiating program ideas. CIN demonstrates that a well-prepared and engaged young person can handle what would typically be done by an adult.**

While the Foundation's goal for CIN was the relatively straightforward purpose of information sharing, once the Network began to meet regularly and coalesce around a shared purpose, a more refined set of aspirations emerged.

As defined by Remer, the Network's goals encompass the following:

- Raise the bar of excellence and sophistication across the field by sharing, promoting and documenting the best practices behind effective internship programs
- Provide a forum to discuss the challenges unique to internship programs and brainstorm solutions
- Share resources
- Help programs embed high-quality practice within their program structure as a bulwark against regular changes in staff
- Raise awareness of the value of career internship programs—within home institutions and among a broader constituency.

These goals reflect a core need the Network served—to help practitioners define a field for themselves within which they could identify and grow as professionals. As several participants mentioned, the capacity to identify as part of a professional community was a key advantage of being part of CIN. Participation brought meaning to their work and helped them develop a sense of pride that translated into a commitment to quality in their programs.

# Essential Attributes of CIN

The Network is grounded in five key strategies that reflect the research on best practice in youth development and communities of practice and resonate with participants as the essence of what makes CIN effective:

## Youth Development Is Omnipresent

Since the foundation of strong programming for young people is a commitment to positive youth development practice, CIN echoes this commitment in both its content and its implementation. [See the principles and practices of high-quality career internship programs in the boxes embedded throughout this report.] YDI's core youth development training, Advancing Youth Development, is regularly offered to CIN members and youth development principles are embedded across all topics. To further ensure that participating programs can develop a solid grounding in strong youth development practice, CIN uses network meetings to demonstrate principles by example and reinforce learning by doing and reflecting. In this way, CIN meetings intentionally mirror key attributes of high-quality youth programs.

**“Through CIN I learned to be mindful of the experience of students, putting their needs first and thinking about the experience that they have.”**

—Vanessa Francisco  
*The Central Park Conservancy*

**“My abilities with group dynamics, building community and creating a space where youth can thrive are wholly from CIN's training.”**

—Rugan Lewis  
*The New-York Historical Society*

## High-quality career internship programs set clear goals and use assessment as a tool for learning

- The internship program is built from clearly articulated learner outcomes and related objectives
- Learner objectives are aligned with measures that demonstrate the outcomes have been achieved
- Program evaluation tools are embedded at the start of program planning
- Whenever possible, evaluation is performance based and the use of surveys is minimized
- The program collects qualitative and quantitative data, and uses these data to improve the program

# HIGH-QUALITY CAREER INTERNSHIP PROGRAM CRITERIA

High-quality career internship program criteria should align with the Youth Development Framework focusing on providing young people with opportunities for Connectedness, Preparation and Authentic Participation.

## Core Attributes that Promote CONNECTEDNESS

Core attributes that promote Connectedness include:

- Interns have consistent one-on-one support from a caring mentor or supervisor
- Mentors share with youth their own personal work experiences
- Mentors provide advice and contacts to help interns initiate a career network
- Staff welcome interns, treat them as part of the organization and invite them into daily routines
- Interns understand clearly where and how to get support
- The internship environment is safe both physically and emotionally

## Core Attributes that Promote PREPARATION

- Expectations for participants' performance is high, and rules and standards are clear and consistent
- Intern assignments are planned to teach both entry- and higher-level work skills, problem-solving, and critical thinking
- The Internship ensures that participants gain the social and emotional learning competencies needed to succeed in the work place
- Learning is engaging and participatory—interns learn by doing
- Interns start to build their career network and develop an understanding of why and how to use it
- Students interact with professionals in a wide range of careers at their host sites and learn about the various pathways available to them
- Interns contribute to the development of a plan that clearly lays out the arc of their upcoming work; identifies required tasks and deadlines; and provides a concrete description of success

## Core Attributes that Promote AUTHENTIC PARTICIPATION

- Interns do work that has real value to themselves and the organization
- Interns participate in defining their role and responsibilities, as well as consequences for underperforming
- Staff make an effort to find out and respond to interns' interests and talents
- Interns have a voice in defining their work in collaboration with staff
- The host organization recognizes interns' contribution either monetarily or through school credit
- Staff employ authentic reflection to help interns transform what they have learned into their own understanding
- Interns have nearly complete autonomy, with staff providing soft support to ensure success

## CIN Is Member-Led and Peer-Driven

While the idea for CIN originated with a funder, the Network is peer led. Remer and YDI are diligent about responding to the requests of network members. CIN identifies topics and plans workshop content through extensive outreach to members to determine needs and interests so that the content of network meetings reflects the full range of participant concerns. Meetings revolve around member presentations; members build presentations around issues of shared interest and supplement them with practical, real-world examples, demonstrations and tools. When funding allows, Remer conducts site visits through which she facilitates connections among members to promote the exchange of ideas and resources. Peer exchanges and co-facilitation keep topics fresh and relevant for members, and ensure that presentations have direct applicability.

**“The expertise of the network members themselves is a real strength. It’s not just people from the outside, but CIN members who are teaching their peers, which makes things connect much quicker since it comes from someone running a similar program.”**

—Terri Carta  
*The Central Park Conservancy*

## Network Meetings Are Experiential

When CIN participants are asked what keeps them involved and invested in the Network, the theme that emerges is the way that Network meetings reflect the experiential nature of high-quality internship programs: Learning is largely by doing. Presentations by members are followed by small group work that engages members in practical, applicable experiences—participants use a tool or resource, or implement a practice with their peers, so that the learning is reinforced and feedback is immediate. It’s the experiential element that provides “a-ha” moments for attendees, demonstrating how all the strategies fit together and make sense as a unique practice or “how-to” for career internship programming.

**“I take away knowledge that I can put into practice right away...we are learning to do something through modeling, actually doing it with the practitioner.”**

—Betsy Gibbons  
*Metropolitan Museum of Art*

**“It’s not just someone telling you the principles and practices; you hear and see examples from others that helps you bring those practices into your program.”**

—Jennifer Correa  
*The Pinkerton Foundation  
(formerly of The New York Hall of Science)*

## CIN Emphasizes Reflection

Reflection is a core practice at CIN, used as a tool for maintaining the quality of the Network as it grows, ensuring that meetings continue to be relevant for all participants, and reinforcing the use of this practice as a key to the success of the internship programs themselves. CIN meetings are reflective spaces; giving members a place to examine and reassess their program practices within a safe supportive community that understands the ongoing challenges faced in running high-quality career internship programs. Members are asked to reflect after each workshop on what they learned and how these lessons can be applied directly to their work. Reflection is used for continuous

**“They ask for a lot of feedback from us—reflection and assessment is a huge part for us—we all have a voice that is heard, it’s not just a token voice.”**

—Chelsea Frosini  
*The Opportunity Network  
(formerly of the The New-York  
Historical Society)*

improvements—members are asked, at the end of each session and annually, how the Network could better meet their needs. Remer regularly revisits the Network’s values and purpose as well, either in partnership with YDI’s executive director, or through meetings with other stakeholders; for a time CIN had an advisory board that served this purpose, but visioning luncheons with long-standing members have also been settings for reflection and network self-assessment.

## CIN Promotes Collaboration and Sharing

CIN employs every tool available to bring members together, encourage collaboration and ensure that resources are exchanged. This is a lesson from YDI’s long years facilitating practice networks: youth workers crave the opportunity to be with peers who understand their challenges. Members provide most of the content and resources, giving them a chance to highlight their program strengths for others

while also showcasing strategies that others can learn from.

Network meetings always include informal time for members to connect and small group activities allow members to work together and build relationships. A website serves as a resource library and regular emails keep members informed about relevant news and upcoming events. When Remer has the resources to do site visits, these also serve as opportunities to connect people based on shared interests or complementary needs.

**“CIN has brought together all these different people and made us aware of all the work we are doing...the personal relationships that you develop are ways to embed practices in a network...and the network persists.”**

—Betsy Gibbons  
*The Metropolitan Museum of Art*

# Outcomes

**YDI was the right place for CIN because we are committed to deepening and broadening youth practice beyond professional development. We look to cultivate curiosity among staff about their own work, to embrace assessment as a core part of being an effective practitioner and to challenge our own assumptions so we can facilitate young people becoming their best selves.**

Plentiful evidence exists that the Network has had a strong positive effect on its members and on the programs they implement. Dien is unequivocal about the impact CIN has had, stating that she “has seen the quality of internships across the five boroughs increase, without a doubt.” Charles Hamilton, former head of the Clark Foundation and an early partner in supporting CIN, agrees: “Virtually every organization’s program was better because of CIN, some much, much better.” The positive outcomes of participating in CIN were reflected in year-end program reports and echoed by members in interviews about their involvement in the network. Five positive outcomes stood out:

## Improved Staff Development

The direct-service staff at career internship programs are often young people. There are many obvious advantages to hiring young adults to staff these programs, but younger staff tend to have limited professional experience and high turnover as young people seek out new and varied experiences. Moreover, the majority of CIN participants come from institutions that are not exclusively, or even primarily, youth-serving, and have little internal capacity to train staff around youth development practice. CIN addresses these concerns, serving as a reliable vehicle for staff professional development. Many organizations regularly send new staff to CIN meetings, effectively building layers of expertise as different “generations” of staff are exposed

**“For all of my staff, CIN has offered invaluable professional development that has remained consistent regardless of the vicissitudes of the economy or our own financial circumstances...my team has had professional development every year because of CIN, and we are the better for it.”**

—Allison Day  
*The Brooklyn Museum*

**“Participating in CIN is automatic for us...its actually written into our job descriptions. Its one of the only avenues where we can get those kinds of skills.”**

—Rugan Lewis  
*The New-York Historical Society*

**“The workshops on youth development are hugely important—my team educators had not had any of this in school.”**

—Patty Machir  
*Futures and Options*

to strong youth development practice as well as a network of new professional peers. Time and again, CIN members indicated that the Network was a way for them and their new staff to adopt a common language around youth development and career internship programming. Young staff members grow professionally from the content at CIN meetings as well as the opportunity to interact meaningfully with peers from other programs, to gain the support of other young professionals and share in problem solving with them. Moreover, the expectation that CIN members present and showcase their program practices offers young staff the critical opportunity to build public speaking and presentation skills and increase their professional confidence. For more experienced staff, CIN provides the ongoing learning opportunities needed to stay fresh and engaged in their job.

## Enhanced Program Quality

**“I got a green light to develop more programming because of the success of the program that I worked on with CIN.”**

—Chelsea Frosini  
*The Opportunity Network (formerly of the The New-York Historical Society)*

Learning in a supportive environment that intentionally and continually focuses on best practices has been key for many institutions in enhancing the quality of their programs. New techniques are regularly introduced and the experiential focus makes for an easy transition between learning and implementation. Programs report improvements because of tools they discovered through CIN and because CIN thoughtfully curates practices to highlight, ultimately defining for practitioners what high-quality career internship programs look like. When practitioners experience practice examples from other programs it provides an impetus to experiment with new programming ideas and see what might work in their own settings. CIN’s emphasis on strong youth development practice has made positive youth development the lens through which internship programs are conceptualized and defined for staff and students. The application of these principles has also enabled many CIN-involved programs to expand. At the Central Park Conservancy, for example, staff members connect their success—higher application and program retention rates, and increases in repeat participation—directly to their involvement with CIN. At the Brooklyn Museum, working with CIN gave staff members the impetus to more fully integrate youth development principles so that authentic student feedback was captured and acted upon, leading to substantive improvements in the depth and breadth of the program. At the New-York Historical Society, a young internship coordinator was able to not only create exponential growth in the museum’s least successful program through her involvement with CIN, but also to demonstrate to museum leadership that

**CIN has encouraged practitioners to become more intentional, thoughtful and innovative about the way they implement internships. We’ve encouraged them to embrace the internship not just as a program activity, but as a part of their mission and core belief system.**

young people could be a target audience for the museum, leading her to develop an entire teen program department. The museum now regards teens as a target audience and continues to expand its youth offerings.

## Stronger Field Identification

CIN has also helped create a field that many feel did not exist before. For many practitioners, CIN gave them a set of best practices that helped define career internship practitioners as a profession, and gave them a professional affiliation that was missing. For young people in staff positions at career internship programs, CIN demonstrates that the work is part of something larger and points to growth opportunities. CIN provides the chance to work with professionals at many levels, the opportunity to see best practices in action at a diverse set of institutions that may differ dramatically from one's own and engage in careful thinking about current practice and the future of the field.

**“Before CIN it was difficult to find a place to identify professionally; often, my profession is not listed, there is nothing to ‘click.’”**

—Vanessa Francisco  
*The Central Park Conservancy*

**“We are now a field...we have begun to think of ourselves and treat ourselves as a field... it's a professional identification.”**

—Abby Remer  
*CIN Coordinator*

**Through CIN, practitioners found a home among people who were doing what they were doing...they realized they were not the only one of their kind!**

## More Sustainable Programs

Since the Network's inception, participating career internship programs have grown and thrived—matching and even exceeding Dien's founding hopes. As she notes, when the economy went into recession in 2008, “not one of these programs was defunded...without the support of the Network, these programs would have been cut.” Clearly one element of this is that CIN has been crucial to building program quality, supporting well-trained staff and providing a set of dependable and effective resources. But more than that, participants make clear that CIN has enabled them to ensure that their career internship programs become essential to their home organizations. By developing the ability and the language to demonstrate program effectiveness and by learning how to frame their programs as institutional assets that align with the home organizations core mission—whether it's growing an audience for the institutions' offerings or building a future workforce—home institutions begin to see the career internship program as a defining one. Once the connection to core mission is made, support from both the institution and the philanthropic community becomes stronger and more committed.

**“CIN enabled us to build program quality to the extent that we were able to make the case that the [career internship] programs were core to the mission of the organization and should be retained, even as other educational programs were being cut during the economic crisis.”**

—Terri Carta  
*The Central Park Conservancy*

## Better Collaboration and Support

**“We work with many of the organizations in CIN and have built relationships with and learned from them.”**

—Patty Machir  
*The Opportunity Network*

**“CIN helps cultivate networking relationships...it promotes sharing and exchange that would not happen otherwise.”**

—Terri Carta  
*The Central Park Conservancy*

**“Others in the professional world I work with have the same problems...its like a little self-help community.”**

—Rugan Lewis  
*The New-York Historical Society*

CIN has clearly achieved its initial goal of providing a forum where practitioners could share their ideas and challenges. It has broken down the silos between programs operating in isolation and promoted professional relationships that now exist beyond the CIN structure. Through CIN, participants have built relationships with colleagues whom they can turn to for advice and resources as well as for partnership. Members rely on each other to supplement their program offerings as well. For example, The Park Avenue Armory, Opportunity Network, Riverdale Neighborhood House, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and The New-York Historical Society, employ each others' intern groups to practice their museum tours. Members offer each other career advice, and the Network has in fact become an informal career ladder, as practitioners become known by different institutions across the City and are often the first to know about—and get tapped for—job openings when they are ready to move to the next phase of their career.

# Closing Remarks

**CIN has demonstrated that a community of practitioners with a clear vision can come up with innovative high-impact programs if they are supported with confidence, time and resources.**

One of the key lessons to emerge from a close examination of the Career Internship Network is the crucial importance of placing strong youth development practice at the center of staff and program development. The core practices of positive youth development are foundational elements of career internship programs that effectively engage young people, meet their developmental needs, and successfully prepare them for the real challenges of college and career. Time and again, when asked about best practices for high-quality career internship programs, program staff indicated that the essence of a strong program was that positive youth development principles were embedded and reflected across all program elements.

Not only was youth development essential to the quality of career internship programs, it was also a key factor in program sustainability. High-quality programs that regularly attracted young people became an important force at host institutions, positively embodying the institution's mission, extending its reach to new audiences and creating a pipeline for well-trained and dedicated staff. When the host institution benefits, its commitment to sustaining the internship program deepens.

A second key lesson of this work is that a sustained and well-supported professional learning community can strengthen practice and build professional identity across a sector. Most of the internship programs involved in the network rely on CIN to provide professional development in youth development practice to their internship staff; CIN has become the go-to for training and expertise on building staff capacity and program excellence for program providers and their staff. Indeed, when CIN began in 2003, internship professionals had few formal opportunities to build their skills or to even identify as a field. CIN, through its embodiment of YDI's core mission, has become the conduit for professionalization

of youth service workers in internship settings, and successfully makes the case that professional youth work requires a specialized and high-value set of knowledge and skills.

Lastly, CIN's long and successful history makes clear that supporting professional learning communities is a worthy investment to build quality among youth-focused programs. All of the original funders involved in supporting CIN including Pinkerton, The Clark Foundation and The Altman Foundation recognized that the quality of career internship programs across the City grew as a result of CIN. Programs improved in quality, deepened their scope, better served their home institutions and provided hundreds of young people with the rich connections, deep learning and opportunities for authentic participation required to make the successful transition into adulthood. That is a pretty remarkable return on investment.

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Vanessa Francisco  
Chelsea Frosini  
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