

CASE STUDY

Redesigning Oakland's youth employment program for a new generation

City of Oakland – Economic & Workforce Development · Oakland, CA · January 2015 – November 2015

Program Management

Public Sector

Community Partnerships

Event Production

SITUATION

For 48 years, the City of Oakland had operated a summer youth employment program — but by 2015, the infrastructure and approach had not been meaningfully updated since the 1970s. The program, now branded Classrooms2Careers and operating under the Mayor's Cradle2Career initiative, served at-risk youth ages 16–24 across Oakland and the East Bay. Despite its long history and strong community need, the program lacked the modern framework, employer relationships, and candidate pipeline necessary to maximize its reach and impact.

The city needed a program manager who could rebuild the program's operations, forge new business partnerships, and create a more dynamic, real-world experience for young participants — one that went beyond job placement and gave youth genuine exposure to professional life.

APPROACH

Jacqueline was hired as Program Manager to lead the revamp from the ground up. Working with a two-person core team — herself and one partner from Workforce Development — she coordinated across an ecosystem of more than 15 community-based organizations, city departments, and private sector employers to redesign the program end-to-end.

Her approach had three pillars:

Employer outreach

Built relationships with Oakland Independent School District and the Workforce Development Board to create a qualified candidate pipeline. Recruited 100+ local businesses as participating employers, negotiating job placements for youth across city departments, nonprofits, and private companies.

Job fair production	Produced the city's first-ever Youth Career Expo — a large-scale job fair held with support from the Chamber of Commerce and the Mayor's Office. The event drew more than 1,000 participants and gave young people their first experience navigating a real hiring environment.
Career readiness	Designed and delivered a pre-employment curriculum covering resume writing, interview skills, professional communication, workplace conduct, and money management. Introduced a "Speed Dating" interview event at Oakland City Hall — pairing youth directly with hiring managers for rapid-fire practice interviews in a real civic setting.

“The goal was never just to get the kids employed for a summer. It was to expose them to what a real job search looks like — the interview, the resume, the handshake — so that this experience became a launchpad, not just a paycheck.”

RESULTS



The 2015 Classrooms2Careers program exceeded all expectations. More than 2,500 young people — over 99% of them Oakland residents — were placed in paid work experiences across city departments, nonprofits, and private businesses. Participating employers ranged from AC Transit and the Port of Oakland to local Oakland businesses, community centers, and arts organizations.

The program was formally reported to the Oakland City Council as a model for citywide youth workforce development, with documentation submitted by the City Administrator's Office. Major corporate sponsors including Bank of America, JP Morgan Chase, Kaiser Permanente, and The Clorox Company contributed to the wage pool alongside city funding sources.

The Speed Dating interview event at City Hall was received with particular enthusiasm by both youth participants and employers, demonstrating that with the right design, civic infrastructure can serve as a genuine equalizer for young people entering the workforce.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- A two-person team can coordinate a city-wide program serving thousands when relationships, systems, and community partners are built intentionally

- Job readiness curriculum alongside placement transforms a summer job program into a career development platform
- Creative event formats — like the Speed Dating interview event — make professional skill-building accessible and engaging for first-time job seekers
- Cross-sector partnership (city government, school districts, workforce boards, private employers) is the multiplier that makes public programs scalable

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