



Creating Pathways to Professional Success





When Roxanne Cano moved from Seattle to Washington, D.C. in early 2011, she brought two large suitcases and \$600, taking a big leap of faith to find an opportunity for a brighter future. Roxanne was about to turn 24, but she struggled to find solid footing for her future in Seattle. Through her late-teens and early twenties, she held a series of fast food and retail jobs, but they all seemed to lead to dead ends.

Raised by a single mother, Roxanne has always had a strong sense of independence. "My mom taught me that if you don't risk anything, you aren't going to get anything in return," recalls Cano. "She wanted me to learn how to take care of myself."

Roxanne's best friend had recently moved to D.C. and was in a career-training program called Year Up, so she encouraged Roxanne to apply. Roxanne made the cross-country move without knowing whether she had gotten in, but was determined to jump start her future in the nation's capital regardless. Shortly after she arrived in D.C., Roxanne found out she was accepted into Year Up's National Capital Region program.

For the first half of the year-long program, Year Up provided Roxanne with technical skills related to the IT field as well as professional skills to help her succeed in a corporate environment, such as learning about proper attire, time

management, public speaking, networking and effective communication. She then applied those skills during the second half of the program at an internship with New Signature, an IT consulting firm.

Roxanne joined New Signature as a full-time IT consultant in early 2012 and about a year later, the company offered her a remote position so she could move back to Seattle to live closer to her family and work from home. A few months later, Roxanne earned a promotion to assistant team lead, where she now plays a leading role in developing new projects and monitoring the progress of her team composed of six people who work remotely from locations across the country.

"I can't imagine where I'd be right now without my experience in Year Up," says Cano, who now has an infant son. "The program isn't just about getting you a job ... it truly sets you up for a career and a lifetime of security and success."

The Investment Partner: Year Up

Year Up is a national nonprofit organization that provides young adults in urban areas with the skills, experience and support they need to maximize their potential. Founded by Gerald Chertavian in 2000, Year Up strives to close our country's Opportunity Divide: the gap between the six million young adults with unrealized talent who lack stable pathways to work and the millions of quality jobs employers struggle to fill.

Chertavian's inspiration for Year Up originated after he graduated college and mentored a 10-year-old from New York City through the Big Brothers Big Sisters program in the late 1980s. Through this experience, Chertavian realized how strongly factors such as zip code, school system and skin color determine the opportunities that young people have to excel. Chertavian saw that what many of these youth needed was a "year up" – a year during which they received the training, support and education they needed to be successful.

Year Up provides young adults, ages of 18-24, with just that: a one-year intensive training and education program that offers a combination of hands-on skill development, college credits and corporate internships. For the first half of the program, students develop technical and professional skills in the classroom. Students then spend the second six months at an internship in fields such as IT and financial operations with one of Year Up's corporate partners. Participants also receive a weekly stipend, earn college credits and benefit from career guidance from advisors and mentors.

Now with 11 sites across the country – including one in the National Capital Region – Year Up has put more than 9,000 young adults on the path to academic and professional success.



YEAR UP INVESTMENT SNAPSHOT (2009-2013)

- \$3.5 million in National Capital Region
- \$1 million in national influence strategy
- \$270,000 pre-investment for planning and strategy development





The Challenge

About six years into Year Up's existence, staff began to see that while the organization had developed an effective model for targeted interventions, Year Up alone could not serve the millions of young people in this country that were disconnected from stable career opportunities. At the same time, Year Up National Capital Region (NCR) – the newest site at the time – was at a critical juncture. Year Up NCR had emerged from its start-up phase and was running full-speed ahead toward being fully operational, raising questions about programmatic growth, leadership transitions, board development and financial sustainability.

Additionally, Year Up realized that to significantly move the needle on closing the Opportunity Divide, the organization would need to address broader, systemic issues that limit access to opportunity while at the same time scaling the impact of its proven model. For Year Up's national organization, this meant developing a focused strategy to change the way our country intervenes in the lives of urban young adults. For Year Up NCR, this meant effectively managing its long-term sustainability, strengthening its staff capacity and building more relationships with local partners and employers to ensure the organization could reach as many youth as possible.

The Action

The dual challenges facing Year Up NCR and the national organization led Venture Philanthropy Partners (VPP) to make an out-of-the-box investment in Year Up's regional and national needs.

In 2009, VPP launched its work with Year Up to scale and strengthen the impact of Year Up NCR while also providing Year Up's national headquarters in Boston with the capacity to engage employers, the federal government and other stakeholders on the importance of closing the Opportunity Divide.

"We saw a game-changing opportunity in Year Up, and the organization's model of focusing on career readiness and future employment really appealed to us," said Carol Thompson Cole, president and CEO of VPP. "We saw amazing potential in Year Up's national and local leaders – both were passionate, inspiring and poised to advance systems change."

Before the partnership kicked off, VPP brought in a social change consultancy to conduct a four-month planning process with Year Up NCR to set the strategy for the organization's expansion in the region. The planning process helped create the blueprint for the investment and also ensured the work ahead was realistic, since the goal was for Year Up NCR to own and implement the business plan.

Over the course of the four-year partnership, VPP invested \$3.5 million in building the capacity of Year Up NCR to serve more youth and ensure that those who entered the program completed it successfully. As Year Up NCR established itself in the D.C. region, VPP provided financial assistance and strategic guidance to help the organization navigate a successful leadership transition and build overall staff capacity to help forge partnerships that would be critical to its success in the National Capital Region.

VPP also invested \$1 million in Year Up's national influence strategy, which began with a comprehensive planning process. The influence strategy focused on changing the national perception of youth who have limited access to opportunity, influencing employers to rethink their hiring practices, changing federal policies, developing a program model that could scale rapidly, and increasing engagement with Year Up alumni. This represented a new type of investment for VPP, which in the past had focused almost exclusively on investments in programs serving the National Capital Region.

"The impact of VPP's investment in Year Up exceeded our wildest expectations. We are serving more young adults and putting them in livable wage careers. VPP approached the investment as true partners and were always willing to roll up their sleeves and get into the trenches with me."

RONDA THOMPSON
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
YEAR UP NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION





NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION HIGHLIGHTS

The Results



John Owusu immigrated to Alexandria, Va. from Ghana at the age of 20, determined to make a better life for himself and his family. However, without as much as a high school diploma, his path forward was unclear. While enrolled in a local GED program, John heard about Year Up and jumped to take advantage of the opportunities the program offered. Through the program, John gained the technical skills he needed for his IT internship at the law firm Williams & Connolly LLP, along with critical soft skills like effective communication and time management.

Looking back at his January 2014 Year Up graduation, John reflected that the program “opened so many doors for me and has changed my life.” John aspires to work in cybersecurity and is working to complete his associate’s degree in computer science at Northern Virginia Community College so he can continue on and earn a bachelor’s degree.

VPP’s investment in Year Up has not only allowed the organization to scale its program locally so that more people in the region have stories like John’s, it has also empowered Year Up to influence national changes to the way our country ensures equal access to opportunity.

LOCAL SUCCESS, NATIONAL MODEL

VPP’s broad goal for its investment in Year Up National Capital Region was to build the organization’s capacity at the site level. The investment achieved this several times over, resulting in significant increases in the number of young adults served annually, retention rates, employer partners, staff capacity and public funding, among other successes.

But the investment also served as a regional laboratory to test and create innovative models and ideas that would benefit other Year Up sites – and influence broader systems change – across the country. This was particularly true in the areas of staff development and partnerships.

Developing Leaders

The impressive outcomes for the region’s young adults that took place over the course of the investment period would have been unattainable if Year Up NCR had not increased its staff capacity and successfully managed its first leadership transition. VPP’s assistance helped Year Up NCR realize that leadership transitions are inevitable and navigating them effectively requires a transition plan – and a second-in-command position. With the assistance of VPP, Year Up NCR created a deputy director position, establishing a viable plan for future transitions.

With VPP’s guidance, Year Up NCR determined that Ronda Thompson, who served as program director in 2009, was the ideal staffer to serve in the deputy director role. Thompson’s organizational knowledge, intellect and natural leadership skills made for a smooth transition to executive director in 2011 after the organization’s founding leader, Tynesia Boyea-Robinson, moved on from Year Up NCR.

In addition to providing strategic assistance to guide Year Up NCR’s leadership transition, VPP’s investment also funded four positions on the organization’s development team to focus on public funding, individual gifts, foundations and employer partner engagement.

Building Partnerships

At the beginning of VPP’s investment, Year Up NCR had already built solid relationships with corporate and philanthropic partners in the region. Year Up NCR had a lot to gain both programmatically and financially by increasing its number of employer partnerships, strengthening existing relationships with employer partners – including the federal government – and developing new relationships with academic partners.

Given the organization’s location in the nation’s capital, it made sense for Year Up NCR to connect with the federal government, the region’s largest employer. In 2009, VPP invested in Year Up NCR’s Director of Federal Sales and Partner Relations who worked to open paid internships with the federal government to youth without postsecondary credentials. In 2011, the General Services Administration added Year Up to the GSA Schedule. Now all Year Up sites can place Year Up interns in the federal government and with federal contractors. Currently, the agencies that have placed Year Up interns include the departments of Agriculture and Commerce, as well as NASA, FDIC and the White House.

VPP’s investment was also instrumental in introducing Year Up NCR to the region’s top community colleges: Northern Virginia Community College and Prince George’s County Community College. These partnerships focus on credit-earning agreements, internship opportunities and – most significantly – a national model that will help substantially reduce the cost of delivering Year Up’s program model.



HUMAN CAPITAL:
73 percent increase in staff capacity.



REACH:
760 youth enrolled in Year Up NCR during the investment.



ENROLLMENT/GRADUATION:
67 percent increase in enrolled students and a 95 percent increase in graduates.



STUDENT RETENTION:
30 percent increase in the number of students who stayed in the program.



COLLEGE AND CAREER SUCCESS:
On average, 83 percent of Year Up NCR graduates secured full-time employment at \$15/hour or enrolled in full-time postsecondary studies within four months of graduation.



EMPLOYER PARTNERS:
92 percent increase in employer partners.



PUBLIC FUNDING:
50 percent increase in public funding from local, state and federal governments.



“VPP’s investment in Year Up’s influence strategy was truly innovative. It took our partnership beyond incremental change to going deeper: changing systematic policies and perceptions and ensuring employers aren’t missing out on the extraordinary talent of our nation’s opportunity youth.”

MARIO MORINO
FOUNDING CHAIRMAN
VPP

CATALYST FOR BROADER CHANGE

Year Up’s influence strategy – a comprehensive plan detailing how Year Up can proactively influence the national environment to improve outcomes for young adults – served as a roadmap for the national component of VPP’s investment in the organization.

To impact large-scale systems change, Year Up sought to change national perceptions, employer practices and public policies relating to disconnected opportunity youth. Additionally, VPP’s investment helped Year Up develop partnerships with community colleges to increase graduation rates and help young adults successfully transition into the workforce.

Perception: Changing Mindsets about Opportunity Youth

Through its influence strategy, Year Up sought to shift national perception so that young urban adults are seen as assets rather than liabilities. This is what drove Year Up to establish a unique partnership with the Ad Council on a

campaign to drive employer demand for opportunity youth. The campaign will capitalize on the work Year Up has already done to ensure more employers engage in mentoring and hiring initiatives that focus on opportunity youth.

Additionally, Year Up was profiled on the CBS show *60 Minutes* in early 2014 about successful employment pathways for disconnected youth. Business leaders such as American Express CEO Ken Chenault and JPMorgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon, among others, emphasized Year Up’s positive impact on young people and in the business community.

Practice: Driving Employer Demand

From the beginning, Year Up knew that to close the Opportunity Divide, more businesses would need to see young adults who are out of school and out of work as assets rather than liabilities. With VPP’s guidance, Year Up has become a leader among organizations working to ensure that talent sourcing, hiring and retention strategies are inclusive of all motivated young people, including opportunity youth. From President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama to LinkedIn CEO Jeff Weiner and Accenture CEO Bill Green, leaders in the political and business sectors have recently acknowledged Year Up as one of the country’s leaders on workforce development.

Thanks in part to Year Up’s work, businesses are increasingly recognizing that hiring opportunity youth is beneficial for their bottom line. As Christopher Hertz, CEO of Year Up NCR corporate partner New Signature stated, “Engaging with Year Up has given my business access to impressive talent, allowing us to grow more rapidly and improve our profit margins.”

Policy: Influencing the Federal Government

In addition to changing business practices, federal policies also play a critical role in shaping workforce development, which is why Year Up has been increasingly active with and through others at the federal level. During the VPP investment period, Year Up launched its Capitol Hill Day program, bringing together employers, alumni, and Year Up’s staff and board to engage members of Congress around the Opportunity Divide.

Year Up has also formed strong partnerships with allied organizations advocating for improved federal policies. These collaborative efforts led to the inclusion of a pay-for-performance authority in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014, reflecting successful earlier efforts to have such an authority included in bipartisan legislation in both chambers of Congress.

Year Up’s work on national legislative and regulatory activity has positioned the organization to play an increased and vital role in ensuring that federal legislation makes closing the Opportunity Divide possible.





Expansion: Incubating Partnerships and Engagement Opportunities

VPP's investment also allowed Year Up to formally explore the development of the Professional Training Corp (PTC), a community college partnership that strengthens the pipeline of low-income young adults to college and/or employment. By capitalizing on the best part of Year Up – the impact the program has on the lives of youth – and the best part of community colleges – the number of young adults they serve – this new model is able to lower costs and increase the number of youth Year Up is able to serve.

In 2011, Year Up successfully launched its first Professional Training Corp pilot site program at Baltimore City Community College. Since then, the organization has launched additional pilot partnerships with Miami-Dade College, the largest community college in the nation and Peirce College in Philadelphia.

Year Up NCR plans to launch a fourth PTC pilot site within the NCR at Northern Virginia Community College, the second largest community college in the nation, in 2014. Dr. Bob Templin, Jr., president of Northern Virginia Community College and member of VPP's board and Year Up's national board, played a leading role in helping to develop the PTC partnership. "This is the leading edge of an education reform movement that will focus on at-risk youth, demonstrating that they can gain marketable skills and credentials that will allow them to progress in their career and continue their education."

In addition to setting students up for continued education and employment, Year Up also explored how its alumni could play a role in driving broader systems change. In 2011, Year Up administered its first national survey and achieved a 61 percent response rate from over 2,000 alumni. The organization also built its alumni movement by hosting two National Alumni Summits – with a third slated for fall 2014 – to cultivate a national network of engaged young adults in their communities.

"VPP doesn't impose their thinking on organizations but allows sufficient time and space for organizations to do it their way. From a program perspective, VPP is not afraid to invest in closing the Opportunity Divide for young people in this country. They get it!"

GERALD CHERTAVIAN
FOUNDER AND CEO
YEAR UP

Setting the Stage for Continued Transformation

Roxanne Cano describes her experience in Year Up as a launching pad that changed the course of her future and allowed her to redefine what success meant for her career path. Venture Philanthropy Partners' investment also set in motion considerable progress by pairing Year Up NCR's direct service work (to nearly double the size of the program) with Year Up's influence strategy on the national level to achieve systemic change for our nation's opportunity youth. "This was truly a precedent-setting investment since we invested so heavily in both the national and local site," added former VPP Partner Shirley Marcus Allen. "While at times it was challenging to achieve a balance – in terms of the overall expectations for the investment – we are extremely pleased with the impact and the path this work has paved for future success."

In many ways, the full transformation catalyzed by VPP's investment is yet to come. As the Professional Training Corp takes hold across the country, it will dramatically lower Year Up's cost and extend the reach of community colleges to impact tens of thousands of young people. And as Year Up continues to set its sights on addressing root causes of inequality by influencing policies and perceptions to build demand among our nation's employers, this transformative work will help close the Opportunity Divide for good.

"VPP truly lived and breathed the organization — it wasn't about writing a check and hoping for the best. They came to operational meetings, board meetings and were actively involved every step of the way to help us grow."

JOHN KING
CHAIR
YEAR UP NCR LOCAL ADVISORY BOARD



