



Employing Youth. Inspiring Excellence.



Kyara Salmon participated in Urban Alliance Northern Virginia in 2014. She was a 17-year-old senior at T.C. Williams High School, and her reason for signing up for Urban Alliance was simple: she wanted a job.

Kyara would be the first to tell you that, in the end, she got way more than a job. Her Urban Alliance experience started with several months of invaluable training. Kyara describes it as “professionalism boot camp.” This is where she learned to look people in the eye, show up on time, and always do her best. “It’s not obvious how we need to act at work. Someone has to teach you that. I’m grateful to Urban Alliance for coaching me to succeed in my first job at the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.”

Kyara’s mother, Sharita Salmon, immediately noticed the change in her daughter during her internship. “Kyara became a planner. She just developed all of this focus. It was amazing to watch the transformation.” Kyara’s focus and professionalism paid off. She is studying mass communications at Virginia State University in Petersburg, Virginia, and in the spring she will return to the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office for another job and another priceless experience.

The Investment Partner: Urban Alliance

Founded in Washington, D.C. in 1996, Urban Alliance is building tomorrow's workforce today. They empower under-resourced youth to aspire, work and succeed through paid internships, formal training and mentorship.

Urban Alliance was founded by a strongly-committed group of people. Veronica Nolan, former executive director, tells the story this way:

It all started with a gentleman by the name of Andrew Plepler, who was a lawyer with the Department of Justice. He had the pleasure of attending an event at Anacostia High School to speak on a panel.

During the question and answer session, Andrew asked the students, 'What is it you're not getting during the regular school day that you need to succeed in life?'

One student looked him up and down and said, 'I need a job.' And without skipping a beat, Andrew said, 'Well, I'm going to hire you.' This young man was savvy enough to push Andrew harder, and responded, 'Well, how about you get five of your friends to give five of my friends jobs, too?'

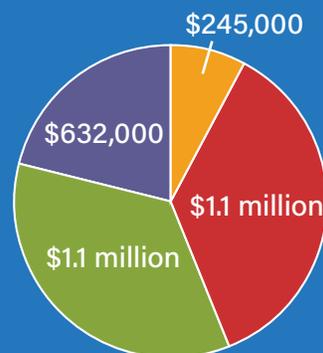
Andrew took on the challenge, and the rest is history. He asked five of his closest friends, who became five of the six founders of Urban Alliance, to each host one high school student to work at their respective companies for a year.

"When I think of the Urban Alliance investment, the two things that come to mind are a strong leadership team and a culture that is all about continuous improvement. That is why we were led to making an investment in Urban Alliance. They are passionate about improving young people's lives. They meet them where they are and adapt appropriately to deliver programs and services that will result in their success. It's also why Urban Alliance will continue to make a difference in the lives of young people for years to come."

CAROL THOMPSON COLE
PRESIDENT AND CEO,
VENTURE PHILANTHROPY
PARTNERS

\$3.1 MILLION TOTAL INVESTMENT FROM 2012 - 2016

- \$245,000 in business planning (8%)
- \$1.1 million in Northern Virginia expansion (36%)
- \$1.1 million in internal capacity growth (35%)
- \$632,000 in developing an external presence (21%)





It was especially remarkable, because these internships were at places like the World Bank, Morgan Stanley, Bank of America and Marriott.

It just clicked. It was a very grassroots effort. Friends of these students got their friends jobs with these six founders, and it blossomed from there.

Urban Alliance serves students on the verge of graduating high school who are at risk of not progressing to further education or employment. The program is unique among high school youth employment programs in that it provides training, paid internships, mentoring and case management to vulnerable youth year-round. Urban Alliance uses technical and soft skills training, access and exposure to direct work experience and meaningful adult relationships to help young people connect to pathways that lead to self-sufficiency. The program adds significant value, not only to the youth it serves, but also its partner businesses.

Operating in four regions nationally, Urban Alliance has worked with over 500 businesses to place over 3,000 high school seniors in professional internships, and has trained more than 15,000 youth (14-24 years old) in workforce skills. The organization is ensuring that these young people, no matter where they are from, can access the opportunities they need to live healthy and productive lives.

The Challenge

Before the investment by Venture Philanthropy Partners (VPP) in 2012, Urban Alliance had already developed an outstanding program that was successfully connecting hundreds of vulnerable youth in D.C. to paid internships, year-round training and mentoring. Additionally, Urban Alliance had begun to expand its reach within the District through its unique college and work readiness curriculum and a budding alumni services program.



Urban Alliance also aspired to reach underserved youth in other areas of Greater Washington. The organization's leadership understood that if they wanted to make a sizable difference in educational and career outcomes for vulnerable students, the organization would need more resources and capacity in order to serve more young people without diluting the high-quality services Urban Alliance was already providing.

Urban Alliance realized that to make significant progress in connecting more youth to opportunities in Greater Washington, it would need to address broader, systemic challenges in youth employment policy. Urban Alliance needed to highlight its effective work in youth employment and seek to call attention to youth employment needs at the local and national level.

The Action

The VPP and Urban Alliance partnership began with a business planning process that guided Urban Alliance's strategy for the future and clarified the organization's aspirations for growth and improvement. During the investment period, which ended December 31, 2016, VPP invested \$2.8 million in Urban Alliance to support expansion to Northern Virginia, build capacity within its Washington, D.C. headquarters and develop an external presence.

"VPP brought a collaborative and debate-oriented spirit to all of our interactions. The engagement had a positive impact on the board and the staff. There was an undeniable value add of VPP asking tough strategic questions during both our planning and execution stages."

MARY ZIENTS
FOUNDING MEMBER
AND BOARD CHAIR,
URBAN ALLIANCE



The Results

Expansion: Taking the Urban Alliance Model to Northern Virginia

VPP's investment enabled Urban Alliance to launch its High School Internship Program (HSIP) in Northern Virginia in 2013. The Northern Virginia site has served more than 160 Alexandria and Arlington youth since inception. In the current year, Urban Alliance is on track to secure 70 job placements for youth, exceeding the end-of-investment milestone. This includes a robust partnership with the U.S. Patent and Trade Office, which will host 25 interns.

Urban Alliance's Northern Virginia Executive Director, Alessandra Colia, provided the strong leadership needed to make the expansion a success. Her focus on cultivating relationships with both the business and civic communities, while also providing Urban Alliance's comprehensive programming to increasing numbers of youth, helped to earn Urban Alliance a positive reputation among key Northern Virginia stakeholders.

VPP helped Urban Alliance refine its message and image for a Northern Virginia audience, and added VPP's well-respected presence to Urban Alliance events in Northern Virginia. "It was like a seal of approval—a kind of validation for potential job partners. For example, at our kickoff event, I would go out of my way to introduce someone from the Arlington Economic Development organization to a Partner from VPP, and

I could count on VPP to champion Urban Alliance and vouch for our work because VPP so intimately understood our model and our successes," said Alessandra Colia.

Forging Strong Partnerships

Northern Virginia Community College (NVCC) has been a strong partner, streamlining the admission process for Urban Alliance participants, offering course credit for Urban Alliance's High School Internship Program (HSIP) participation and guaranteeing HSIP graduates admission to NVCC's competitive Pathway to the Baccalaureate program, which provides extra advising and support for students who plan to transfer to one of Virginia's four-year public colleges.

NVCC's partnership was game-changing for Urban Alliance. Now, Urban Alliance high school interns can be dual enrolled at NVCC, receiving college credit for their participation in Urban Alliance.

To make this possible, Urban Alliance held multiple conversations with faculty and staff at NVCC, and then created a syllabus that aligned NVCC and Urban Alliance content. It was a natural fit. Now instead of repeating these lessons as first-year students at NVCC, Urban Alliance interns get credit for learning these skills before enrolling in college.

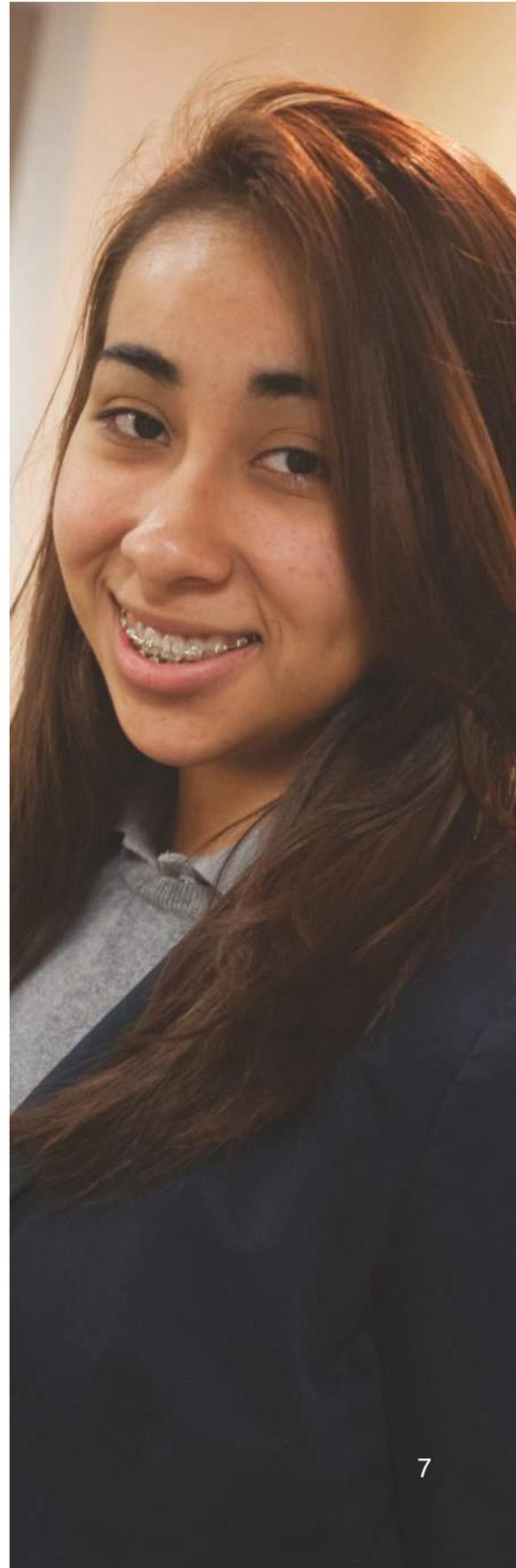
The partnership brought many Urban Alliance interns to NVCC, so over time the tie has helped NVCC grow as well. NVCC sends guest speakers to Urban Alliance workshops and Urban Alliance speaks at NVCC workshops, which helps Urban Alliance interns become familiar and comfortable with the campus and faculty before attending college. Fear of getting out of their comfort zone, leaving home and studying with college-level professors is often a deterrent for at-risk youth considering post-secondary education, so developing this level of comfort early through Urban Alliance programs has had a positive impact on these students.

“The Commonwealth of Virginia is committed to enabling students to get some college credit while they’re still seniors in high school,” said Mayor Allison Silberberg of the City of Alexandria. “The fact that some of the Urban Alliance students are able to receive college credit hours while they do their internships is tremendous. This is an opportunity that gives the students a taste for college and that will help get them going. I am a big supporter of this.”

Adapting the Model

Urban Alliance in Northern Virginia prides itself on its ability to be nimble and adaptive to the needs of the city it serves. For instance, the Northern Virginia population includes a substantial number of immigrants. Urban Alliance adapted by hiring Spanish speakers, translating materials and ensuring that workshops engaged students who speak English as their second language.

Urban Alliance has also piloted a new STEM curriculum to prepare interns for the emphasis on technology within many of the Virginia job partners. Reflecting a national trend, local schools are working to build pathways for students in technology fields because these professions are in demand.





This initiative pushed Urban Alliance to build a partnership with Virginia Tech. Because of this partnership, Urban Alliance is able to provide a STEM curriculum for youth within their workshops. And, Urban Alliance students are working at Virginia Tech labs in both Arlington and Falls Church.

Fairfax County Public Schools Pilot and Further Expansion

Urban Alliance's rapid growth within Virginia is a testament to its own capabilities and the support provided by VPP every step of the way. In a short time, Urban Alliance grew from serving under 20 students to now serving almost 70 students.

The organization continues to expand its footprint in Northern Virginia. For example, a pilot program in Fairfax County Public Schools provides training for high school juniors that prepares them to transition to the HSIP as seniors. As a result, Fairfax students will be even more prepared to enter the workforce and will thrive in their senior-year internships.

Urban A

"The partnership with VPP was unlike any other partnership I had been a part of or been aware of, because VPP is an involved funder in the sense that they were clearly there to support us more than monitor us. VPP said right off the bat, 'I'm here to be a thought partner, I'm here to support you and be a resource for you.' That was really comforting, especially as we were expanding into a brand-new city."

ALESSANDRA COLIA
NORTHERN VIRGINIA EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR, URBAN ALLIANCE

Urban Alliance also continues to seek the right employer partner to facilitate an expansion of HSIP into Prince George's County, an area of the region with tremendous need. It is already deeply engaged in youthCONNECT, the network of nonprofits that VPP leads in Prince George's County's Suitland High School.

NORTHERN VIRGINIA HIGHLIGHTS

Building Capacity for Greater Outcomes

In addition to providing the Executive Director with support during the expansion into Northern Virginia, VPP's investment supported increased capacity for Urban Alliance as a whole. Both organizations recognized that establishing a presence in Northern Virginia would require concentrated resources from existing senior leadership, including the CEO, Chief of Strategic Partnerships, and Director of Communications. Urban Alliance also enhanced its capacity to expand in the region and beyond by creating the new roles of President, Chief Administrative Officer and Chief Strategic Growth Officer. The individuals hired to fill these key roles remain with the organization and continue to contribute to its success.

The Northern Virginia site was launched soon after Urban Alliance expanded to Chicago and began its evolution into an organization with national reach. The more robust headquarters infrastructure ensured that Urban Alliance met its growth goals in Northern Virginia while also shepherding its Chicago site through a period of transition and maintaining strong programs in Washington, D.C. and Baltimore.

Joining Urban Alliance as President in 2013, Eshauna Smith became CEO in a smooth transition that was a testament to her leadership skills and her strong working relationship with her predecessor. Eshauna quickly won the support of the senior team as the organization continued its rapid expansion. As CEO, she used speaking engagements as well as high-profile events in partnership with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the Urban Institute, and others to raise national awareness of Urban Alliance and attract new funders.

Eshauna's leadership and the increased capacity in operations, finance, development and communications has enabled Urban Alliance to secure multi-year, million-dollar-plus grants from new national funders, including AT&T and Citibank. In 2015, Urban Alliance was awarded a multi-year, ten million dollar Investing in Innovation (i3) federal grant that enables Urban Alliance to further scale its existing sites, continue its randomized controlled trials and continue expansion. Urban Alliance was one of just 14 i3 awardees, selected from a pool of over 400 applicants.

Expanding to a new region, we accomplished:



REACH

163 youth served in the High School Internship Program

642 youth served through the Curriculum Outreach program

136 paid job sites created



SKILLS

80% of youth served demonstrate skills growth in hard skills, from their baseline to their final evaluation

75% of youth demonstrate skills growth in soft skills, from their baseline to their final evaluation



GRADUATION

On average, **90%** of youth that complete the year-long High School Internship Program graduate from high school on schedule



COLLEGE AND CAREER SUCCESS

90% of youth that complete the year-long High School Internship Program enroll in a 2-or 4-year college or obtain gainful employment within 6 months of high school graduation



Developing an External Profile

Over the course of the VPP investment, Urban Alliance has recruited a number of new job partners, most notably the U.S. Patent and Trade Office, which hosts more than 20 interns in Northern Virginia. Urban Alliance is also creating a niche for itself with technology-focused partners such as Virginia Tech, Airbnb and LinkedIn. These relationships have expanded the organization's external profile.

"It always makes a difference when student interns have training and are prepared to do the work on day one. Urban Alliance interns have this kind of training, and it makes all the difference in the world."

JOYCE WARD

UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADE OFFICE

As it has evolved into an organization with a national reach, Urban Alliance has garnered more exposure with youth employment and workforce development policymakers. In 2016, Urban Alliance was a featured organization in the inaugural My Brother's Keeper "What Works" Showcase, co-sponsored by the White House Office of Social Innovation, the U.S. Department of Education, and other key stakeholders. Eshauna Smith has presented to thought leaders during sessions at Opportunity Nation's National Opportunity Summit and Independent Sector's National Conference as well. And both the headquarters leadership and the regional executive directors are seen as leaders in their respective communities.

The Future

Urban Alliance will continue to refine and strengthen its model, a comprehensive program that offers holistic support, filling the gaps that are sometimes left between school and home.

Urban Alliance understands the importance of staying relevant in the shifting landscape. Internships in high school are much more important and valued today, and schools are figuring that out. Urban Alliance still faces the ongoing challenge of always bringing extra value to the marketplace and finding ways to express that value to the public.

The organization is also thinking of new and different ways to partner with employers. One of Urban Alliance's biggest assets is its strong employer base. While the organization relies on philanthropic support, its growth strategy includes a goal to reduce its dependence on philanthropy by further building relationships with employers.

The workforce of tomorrow will require a technological sophistication that we can only imagine today. To better engage students in learning and train them for the evolving field of tech-based jobs, Urban Alliance is motivated to refine the curriculum to prepare them for rapid technological change.

For example, Urban Alliance recently partnered with LearnZillion, an education technology company, to help get Urban Alliance's training curriculum onto a platform that young people can access in more technologically advanced ways. Young people are doing almost everything from their smartphones, so Urban Alliance will meet young people where they are to help them

"I'm grateful to Urban Alliance for making a significant difference in a young person's life at that critical juncture, and I am grateful to VPP for their incredible generosity and vision. Together, they are breaking down the barriers that prevent young people from getting good jobs and accessing higher education. Urban Alliance is tearing down those walls and showing the students that anything's possible and to go for their dreams."

MAYOR ALLISON SILBERBERG OF THE CITY OF ALEXANDRIA

train at deeper levels. With this advancement in technology, an Urban Alliance trainer will be able to say, "You missed last week, but you can go on your phone and look over the training module," or "In addition to what you learned last week, now you can do two or three things at home to go deeper and learn more."

Urban Alliance will continue to scale by identifying areas of increased need and working to meet those needs effectively. This includes learning new ways to scale that don't necessarily involve establishing the entire operation in a new city. Instead, some components of the model may be most relevant to a particular region or city, given its different circumstances and resources.

The future is bright for Urban Alliance and the young people it serves. VPP is proud of the role our partnership and investment has played in Urban Alliance's success. Together we built a stronger organization with planning, milestones, mutual trust and an abiding passion for working to help young people become successful adults.



Venture
Philanthropy
Partners

www.vppartners.org