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**Sponsor:** Workforce Solutions

**Meeting Date:** 6/1/2021

**Title:** Funding for Ramsey County and City of Saint Paul partnership for Right Track+ Young Adult Career Pathway Internship Program utilizing American Rescue Plan Act Funding

**File Number:** 2021-288

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**Background and Rationale:**

The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) of 2021 was signed into law on March 11, 2021. The relief package provides funding in several areas such as state and local aid, education, rental assistance, transit, stimulus payments for individuals, and other provisions. In addition, ARPA provides \$350 billion in additional funding for state and local governments. Funds may be used to provide job training to individuals to address the negative economic impacts created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Workforce programs for youth and young adults were identified as an ARPA Tier 1 funding priority by the County Manager at a County Board workshop on April 20, 2021.

**COVID-19 Pandemic Impact and Population**

Residents that have experienced the most disproportionate economic impacts by the COVID-19 pandemic are as follows:

- People who are under 35.
- People with less education, especially less than a high school diploma.
- People of color and indigenous people.
- Younger workers are over-represented in service industries, which were struck hardest by restrictions on movement, activities, and businesses. They are particularly vulnerable due to lower levels of seniority and work experience.

These impacts are a critical disruption to young people who are launching what may be their first-ever job. Beyond the immediate damage caused by the loss of a first job is the risk of “scarring,” what economists refer to as the long-term harm to income levels, career growth, access to training, ability to pay off debt, or deal with the added mental and social burdens of instability. Scarring has been proven to impact women, people of color, and young people, particularly in the job market.

**Community Collaboration**

Workforce Solutions (WFS) will partner with the City of Saint Paul to launch a new career pathway internship program focused on serving up to 300 COVID-19 pandemic impacted young adults (aged 18-24) in Ramsey County.

Through subsidized internships, supported by the County and the City, young adults will gain entry level skills and access to professional networks in six targeted industries. To ensure participant success, the Right Track+ program will partner with community-based organizations who will:

- Recruit and enroll COVID-19 impacted young adults.
- Provide 1:1 employment case management and wrap around services.
- Support participants’ engagement in Right Track+ through a new passport exploration program for participants to attend a variety of industry driven exploration events throughout the City and County.
- Provide each participant with a community mentor.
- Develop specialized personal or professional development for the young adults they are

serving.

Targeted industries for Right Track+ include: Public Sector, Trades/Green Energy, Urban Agriculture, Creative Arts, Technology, and Healthcare. All program participants will receive a training internship for up to 16 weeks. Right Track+ will partner with businesses and public sector employers to create and support these internships. Guidance will be provided to employers, leveraging tools that both the City and County have to most effectively support these young people.

Young adults who successfully complete the summer Right Track+ program may be eligible to move into other workforce training programs, building upon the career pathway they started by further pursuing certified and credentialed training.

Intentional partnership between the City of Saint Paul and WFS will provide the opportunity for each partner to lead in different areas, while bringing resources for the creation of this program which will run through the then end of 2021.

Ramsey County: The County will provide overall leadership for the program through Workforce Solutions. The County will fund the work of the community-based organizations and provide the back-office support to work with those vendors.

City of Saint Paul: The new program, Right Track+, will leverage assets and resources from Saint Paul's existing Right Track Program. The City plans to host and pay wages for up to 100 interns. In addition, the City will hire a program support role while also dedicating Parks and Recreation staff to execute professional development events for all Right Track+ participants. The Saint Paul City Council will be considering this project at its June 9, 2021 meeting.

The urgency to put every young person on a career pathway is immediate. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that our economy is built too heavily on low income, low wage jobs for many who already have significant barriers to education and employment. Government, collaboratively partnering with community-based organizations, is a necessary linkage to reach disconnected young adults and ensure they receive culturally relevant supports. Putting young people into career pathways ensures there will be a vibrant, diverse, skilled workforce in Ramsey County into the future, in alignment with the strategies identified in the Economic Competitiveness and Inclusion Plan.

**Recommendation:**

The Ramsey County Board of Commissioners resolved to:


1. Allocate \$2,100,000 of American Rescue Plan Act funds to the new Right Track+ Young Adult Career Pathway Internship Program, in accordance with federal guidance.
2. Authorize the County Manager to enter into agreements and amendments to agreements in accordance with the County's procurement policies and procedures, provided the amounts are within the limits of the grant funding.

A motion to approve was made by Commissioner Reinhardt, seconded by Commissioner McDonough.

Motion passed.

Aye: - 6: Frethem, MatasCastillo, McDonough, McGuire, Ortega, and Reinhardt

Absent: - 1: Carter

By: 

Abby Goldsmith, Interim Chief Clerk - County Board