



**Site Visit Observations:
2016 Marion S. Barry
Summer Youth Employment Program**

December 21, 2016

Report Team

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**A Report by the Office of the District of Columbia Auditor
Kathleen Patterson, District of Columbia Auditor**

The Honorable Phil Mendelson, Chairman
Council of the District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.
Suite 504
Washington, DC 20004

Letter Report: Site Visit Observations: 2016 Marion S. Barry Summer Youth Employment Program

Dear Chairman Mendelson:

As part of a yearlong evaluation of the Marion S. Barry Summer Youth Employment Program (MBSYEP), the Office of the District of Columbia Auditor (ODCA) staff visited 18 MBSYEP sites where participants were taking work readiness classes or gaining work experience during the 2016 program. This letter report summarizes our site observations and presents issues for policymakers to consider in their efforts to ensure that the MBSYEP program is as effective as possible.

The Council allocated \$200,000 in the fiscal year 2016 budget for ODCA to “conduct an evaluation of multiple years of the summer youth jobs program to assess whether the program has met and is meeting program objectives.”¹ To examine MBSYEP’s operations in depth and from a variety of perspectives, ODCA: 1) issued a report in April 2016 comparing MBSYEP to summer youth employment programs in eight other large cities;² and 2) published a report in June 2016 summarizing MBSYEP program data and activities during 2015 and in preparation for the 2016 program.³ This letter report supplements our previous work by providing a snapshot of MBSYEP implementation. The fourth and final report assesses MBSYEP management and internal controls and will be published next month.

Background

The District of Columbia’s summer youth employment program has served thousands of youths every year since it began in 1979.⁴ In January 2015, D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser renamed the program the Marion S. Barry Summer Youth Employment Program (MBSYEP) in honor of longtime D.C. Mayor and Councilmember Marion Barry, who established the program during his first term as mayor and championed it throughout his time in public office.⁵ The D.C. Department of Employment Services (DOES) administers the program through its Office of Youth Programs.

¹ See Section 10(b) of D.C. Law 21-76, the “Fiscal Year 2016 Budget Support Clarification Temporary Amendment Act of 2015,” effective February 27, 2016.

² See Office of the District of Columbia Auditor, *Review of Summer Youth Employment Programs in Eight Major Cities and the District of Columbia*, April 21, 2016.

³ See Office of the District of Columbia Auditor, *Review of Marion S. Barry Summer Youth Employment Program Data and Activities*, June 2, 2016.

⁴ See Office of the City Administrator, “Findings of an Internal Investigation Regarding the District’s Summer 2008 Summer Youth Program,” August 12, 2008, pp. 6-7, and Susan Curnan, Christopher Kingsley, Lisa LaCava, and Joseph Frees, “Unfinished Work: Building Excellence in Washington, D.C.’s Summer Youth Employment Program,” The Center for Youth and Communities, Heller School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University, November 9, 2010, p. 4.

⁵ See Mayor’s Order 2015-37, issued January 14, 2015.

MBSYEP is a critical program because of its important objectives, scope, and costs, and seeks to give D.C. youths the opportunity to:

1. Earn money and gain meaningful work experience.
2. Learn and develop the skills, attitudes, and commitment needed to succeed in the workforce.
3. Explore career options.
4. Interact with professionals in a supportive work environment.⁶

MBSYEP expenditures totaled \$19.3 million in FY 2015⁷ and preliminary data indicate that total expenditures were \$17.1 million for FY 2016. Reflecting MBSYEP's broad scope and the considerable resources devoted to the program, ODCA found that MBSYEP serves a larger percentage of the youth population than comparable programs in eight other large cities.⁸

MBSYEP has traditionally served individuals who are 14 to 21 years of age, and since 2010 the program has been authorized to place 10,000 to 21,000 youths in jobs each summer.⁹ Mayor Bowser persuaded the D.C. Council to expand the program to include individuals who are 22 to 24 years of age during the summer of 2015 to provide young adults with "meaningful work experience and individualized support that will help them to identify a career pathway."¹⁰ In March 2016, the Council approved and Mayor Bowser signed legislation authorizing the participation of up to 1,000 youths between the ages of 22 and 24 during the summers of 2016 and 2017.¹¹

A major concern for policymakers and observers of MBSYEP has been to ensure that program assignments help youths develop skills, knowledge, attitudes, and experience that will help them in their education and career development. Although many participating youths, parents, and employers, as well as outside observers, have praised the program for giving youths a start in the workforce and engaging them in productive activities during the summer, there also have been ongoing criticisms that youths have little to do at many sites.¹² In a review of the District's 2008 summer youth employment program, the Office of the City Administrator noted that:

⁶ Government of the District of Columbia, "MBSYEP Summer Report," p. 5.

⁷ Although reported FY 2015 expenditures for DOES program code 4820, "Summer Youth Employment Program," were \$18.0 million, \$1.3 million in MBSYEP expenditures were charged to DOES' Year-Round Youth Program and its Local Adult Training Program budgets, raising total FY 2015 expenditures to \$19.3 million.

⁸ See Office of the District of Columbia Auditor, *Review of Summer Youth Employment Programs in Eight Major Cities and the District of Columbia*, April 21, 2016, p. 7. The eight comparison cities were Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco, and Seattle.

⁹ See D.C. Official Code § 32-241(a)(1).

¹⁰ D.C. Department of Employment Services, "DOES to Launch Summer Youth Employment Program Expansion," press release dated April 6, 2015.

¹¹ This legislation became D.C. Law 21-112, the "Marion S. Barry Summer Youth Employment Expansion Amendment Act of 2016," which took effect on May 12, 2016, following a required period of congressional review.

¹² For example, *The Washington Post* stated in a June 2, 2015 editorial ("Getting D.C.'s Summer Youth Jobs Program Right") that, "The program can bring needed income to youths from low-income families, expose them to careers and work habits and provide an alternative to hanging out on the street. But the program has also been faulted for its cost, management and questionable outcomes in providing useful work experience."

It was clear during research that some programs provided a higher quality experience to young people than others; some programs can demonstrate results and others do not. Yet, the number of organizations that receive funding year after year suggests that host organizations are not asked to demonstrate that they prepare young people for jobs later in life.¹³

A Wilson Senior High School student who participated in the summer of 2015 described MBSYEP to *The Wilson Beacon* as a “great program,” while another Wilson student quoted in the same article stated that, “Some days I just did my summer homework or brought a book to read.”¹⁴ This report summarizing our observations of 18 MBSYEP sites seeks to help policymakers ensure that more youths enjoy an enriching summer work experience similar to that of the first student.

Objectives, Scope and Methodology

Objectives

ODCA undertook this review to observe a diverse set of summer youth program sites and thereby gain a firsthand view of MBSYEP operations. These direct observations complement the extensive review of program data and documentation, as well as interviews with MBSYEP program managers and other key DOES staff members, performed in other aspects of our MBSYEP evaluation work. The use of multiple methods to examine MBSYEP provides a fuller, more detailed picture of the program and its components.

Scope

This review addresses the 2016 MBSYEP, which began on June 27, 2016, and ended on August 5, 2016. ODCA set a goal of visiting 20 sites chosen to reflect the diversity of MBSYEP “host employers,” which is the term DOES uses for the providers of summer work experience and work readiness activities.

ODCA staff directly observed 18 sites, described in Figure 1 on the following page. At the 19th site selected, youths were away from the program site while participating in a weeklong field trip, and at the 20th site, youths were working at sites around the city after reporting to a central office. Nevertheless, ODCA staff also interviewed managers from the two sites where youths were not present to gain additional perspectives on the program.¹⁵

The MBSYEP sites where ODCA staff observed program activities included a public school,¹⁶ D.C. government agencies,¹⁷ a federal government office,¹⁸ community-based non-profit organizations,¹⁹ and

¹³ Office of the City Administrator, “Findings of an Internal Investigation Regarding the District’s 2008 Summer Youth Program,” August 12, 2008, p. 32.

¹⁴ Helen Malhotra, *The Wilson Beacon*, August 28, 2015.

¹⁵ These sites were the Friendship Public Charter Collegiate Academy at 4095 Minnesota Avenue, NE, and the Department of General Services’ warehouse at 2200 Adams Place, NE.

¹⁶ ODCA staff observed the Benjamin Banneker Academic High School Summer Institute.

¹⁷ ODCA staff observed programs at two Department of Recreation centers (one of which housed a program operated by the Department of General Services) and the Commission on Arts and the Humanities.

¹⁸ ODCA staff observed the Capital Guardian Youth ChalleNGe Academy, which is administered by the U.S. Department of Defense, National Guard.

¹⁹ Examples include Empowerment Enterprise II, Siblings Together, and The MusicianShip.

other private-sector organizations.²⁰ ODCA visited sites sponsored by several of the largest host employers in the MBSYEP program, including the D.C. Department of Parks and Recreation, which hosted 1,072 students and was the largest site, and the D.C. Public Schools, which hosted 959 youths.

Figure 1: 2016 MBSYEP Sites Visited by ODCA Staff, Worksite Descriptions, and Enrollment

Site	Worksite Description	Enrollment
Agape Cabbage Patch Early Childhood Learning Development Center, 2510 Pennsylvania Ave., NW	Work experience – Work as aides and camp assistants at child care facility	18
Agape Cabbage Patch Woodland Tigers Youth Academy, 2533 Pennsylvania Ave., NW	Work experience – Work as camp assistants helping lead teacher	118
Benjamin Banneker High School Summer Institute, 800 Euclid St., NW	Work readiness – Strengthen academic skills through Summer Bridge program for incoming freshmen	30
Bradley & Associates, 2409 Ainger Place, SE	Work readiness – Learn computer coding and create app for Department of Energy and the Environment	26
Capital Guardian Youth Challenge Academy, 3201 Oak Hill Drive, Laurel, MD	Work readiness – Attend military-style, residential program offering education and life-skills training	22
Commission on Arts and the Humanities, 200 I St., SE	Work readiness – Explore creative economy by working as theater technicians, actors, singers, writers, directors, and administrative staff	89
Department of General Services, Maintenance Workers, 1100 Michigan Ave., NE	Work experience – Help remove trash and debris from recreation centers, parks, pools, and fields	2
Department of Parks and Recreation, Hands on the Future program at Columbia Heights Community Center, 1480 Girard St., NW	Work readiness – Learn about daily operations of music industry from box office to backstage	82
Department of Parks and Recreation, Turkey Thicket Aquatics Program, 1100 Michigan Ave., NE	Work experience – Help staff maintain pool facilities and coordinate aquatics program	4
Department of Parks and Recreation, Turkey Thicket Summer Camp, 1100 Michigan Ave., NE	Work experience – Help staff plan and implement summer camp activities	11

²⁰ ODCA staff observed the program at the Agape Cabbage Patch Early Child Development Center. In addition, ODCA staff visited a training session sponsored by H Street Main Street, which assigns students to work in businesses along major commercial corridors.

Site	Worksite Description	Enrollment
Empowerment Enterprise II, 4900 10th St., NE	Work readiness – Participate in job training with opportunity to develop performing arts skills, such as drumming and dancing	71
H Street Main St., Inc., 729 10th Street, NE	Work experience – Participate in weekly training sessions and gain career exposure or work at businesses on major commercial corridors	138
IT Computer Wiz Kids, Inc., 2730 Martin Luther King Ave., SE	Work readiness – Receive training in computer hardware troubleshooting, coding, programming, app development, and other technology skills	45
Latin American Youth Center, 1419 Columbia Road, NW	Work readiness – Receive structured employment and career readiness opportunities	33
Red Sprinkle, 1351 Alabama Ave., SE	Work readiness – Receive training in fashion design and styling, makeup and hair artistry, accessory design, fashion blogging, modeling, and photography	154
Siblings Together, 1200 Clifton St., NW	Work readiness – Study civil rights movement and non-violent conflict; learn about poetry, rapping, filmmaking	88
The Jarmal Harris Project, 1816 12th St., NW	Work readiness – Learn about fashion show production, including marketing, hospitality, fashion design, wardrobe styling, and stagecraft	194
The MusicianShip, 3950 Chesapeake Street, NW	Work readiness – Receive music instruction; practice a range of instruments as well as chorus and dance; learn about the music business	164

Notes: The address listed for each host employer is the location where ODCA employers observed MBSYEP operations, not the host employer's main office. Some host employers offered MBSYEP services at multiple sites. Program descriptions are based on each organization's host employer agreement with the Department of Employment Services.

Methodology

ODCA assigned a two-person team to visit each site in order to get multiple observations. The ODCA site visitors first reviewed the agreement between DOES and the host employer to understand the work experience, training, or other services that the employer intended to provide. The site visitors then researched host employers' websites and searched for news articles about the host employers as a way to understand the mission of each organization.

ODCA site visitors addressed the following list of issues while visiting each site:

- Please record the date and time of your visit.
- How many staff were present at the time you arrived?
- How many youths were present at the time you arrived?
- Was someone clearly in charge of the program or activities during the time of your visit and was he or she paying attention to the youths under his or her care?
- Did the youths seem to be engaged in classroom or work activities? Please provide a description of those activities.
- How would you describe the physical condition of the site? Did you notice any possible safety hazards?
- What other observations, if any, were notable from the site visit?

ODCA site visitors prepared written summaries of each visit that addressed the points listed above, and then compared the observations from each site about program staffing and supervision, site activities, youth engagement, attendance and behavior, facility conditions, and program administration to identify patterns among sites. The observations and patterns that resulted from the site visits are described in the following sections of this report.

ODCA believes that the site visits provided valuable insights, but emphasizes that the sites do not represent a generalizable sample of MBSYEP program sites that precisely mirrors the full range of host employers. Although ODCA sought to visit a diverse set of MBSYEP host employers, the sites were not selected through a random, statistically valid sample. It is important to keep the following limitations in mind:

- The site visits targeted relatively large host employers, several of whom were serving more than 100 youths. Only two of the sites visited had fewer than 10 participants.
- Two-thirds of the sites visited mainly offer work readiness, classroom-based activities, which are targeted at 14- and 15-year-olds, as well as older youths who are not ready for a job.²¹ These programs were selected in part because classroom activities are easier to observe without disrupting the participants. Nevertheless, programs that focus on work readiness also include some older youths who help administer the program and gain valuable work experience in the process.²²
- The site visits provide only a snapshot of 2016 activities at the selected sites.

This letter report was drafted, reviewed, and approved in accordance with procedures outlined in ODCA's Policy and Procedure Manual.

²¹ See the classifications of the 18 programs in Figure 1 on pp. 5-6.

²² For example, Siblings Together assigns 22- to 24-year-old participants to serve as instructors who help supervise the program's Civil Rights Café.

Results of the Auditor's Review

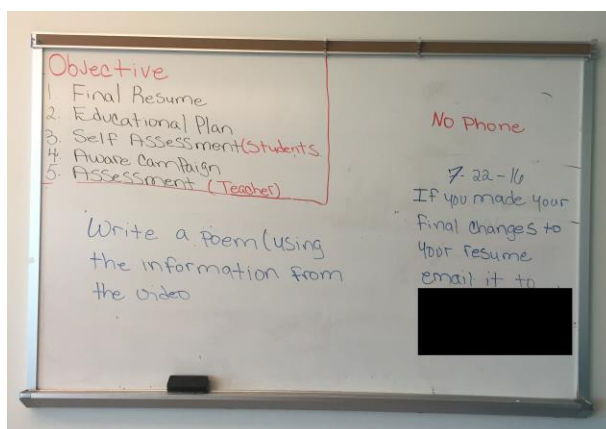
ODCA's 18 site visits resulted in a range of observations and impressions. At some sites, youths seemed to be engaged in enriching activities guided by committed and experienced adults while at other sites, some of the youths appeared to be uninvolved and idle. The patterns that emerged from the site visits are categorized below under: 1) staffing and supervision; 2) worksite activities; 3) youth engagement; 4) attendance and behavior; 5) facility conditions; 6) administration; and 7) additional observations.

Staffing and Supervision

Adequate staffing and effective supervision serve as foundations for the program because well-trained, attentive, and caring adults are needed to guide and educate youths while ensuring their safety. Supervisors can also serve as role models and mentors for youths who can help them make connections needed to find jobs. In an evaluation of D.C.'s summer youth employment program written in 2012, researcher Nisha Sachdev stated that:

Employers play an important role in preparing youths for successful transition into adulthood. Not only do they provide opportunities for work-linked learning but often also advising and training in relevant skills. Employers also can provide developmental assets to youths that no other setting can fully duplicate including exposure to the mainstream economy, practices of the working world, authentic information about career options and paths, and opportunities to apply formal learning to real-world problems in a team setting.²³

ODCA site visitors noted instances of strong and weak supervision. Several programs employed managers who were very knowledgeable about the range of activities at their sites and provided guidance to both staff and youth participants. At one site, groups of youths were engaged in activities such as dance, chorus, and financial literacy instruction, while another group left on a field trip and a different group had already left to shadow a video crew. The multitude of activities seemed well-coordinated, and staff members regularly approached the executive director for informal consultations. At another site, the supervisor closely monitored the activities of the youth participants and maintained a folder with each youth's weekly research, writing, and other assignments.



In a report on D.C.'s 2010 summer youth employment program, researchers from Brandeis University's Heller School for Social Policy and Management noted that, "In SYEP, a relationship with a caring adult is key. DOES host sites that exhibited the most effective supervision had someone in the host coordinator position who was passionate about the program and about helping kids—a champion for the program

²³ Nisha Sachdev, *An Evaluation of the District of Columbia Summer Youth Employment Program*, dissertation submitted to the faculty of the School of Public Health and Health Services of The George Washington University, May 20, 2012, pp. 22-23.

and the individual youth.”²⁴ ODCA site visitors observed several site managers and other staff members express and demonstrate a strong commitment to the well-being of youths under their care by helping them with a variety of problems or everyday tasks. One supervisor stated that after admonishing a youth for wearing baggy pants, he learned that the teenager did not own a belt and bought one for him. At another site, two supervisors were regularly approached by youths for help with problems such as a lost Metro SmarTrip card. These supervisors, one of whom had participated in the summer youth employment program as a teenager, spoke at length about their efforts to help youths develop soft skills, such as how to deal with an angry or stressful situation, that will be valuable throughout their lives and careers, and about the importance of keeping youths safe during the summer.

At some other MBSYEP sites, there were clearly strains on supervisory capacity, reflecting the challenges often inherent in keeping dozens or even hundreds of youths occupied in meaningful activities. At one site, approximately 100 youths, who were normally assigned to academic instruction in five classrooms, were in an auditorium for ballroom dance practice.²⁵ Roughly one-half of the youths were practicing the steps, under the guidance of an instructor, while the other half watched from auditorium seats. The instructor struggled to hold the attention and direct the activities of the youths despite her constant efforts to instruct them on how to behave. In another large program (where 80 to 90 participants were present), the staff had difficulty keeping all of the youths involved. Despite the staff’s efforts, about half of the students seemed disengaged, and were talking on cell phones, eating, chatting, and, in one case, napping. At a smaller site with 21 youths present, the instructor tried to engage passive students in an information technology class by asking them questions, but his efforts were unsuccessful. Several students were on their cell phones, one student slept for part of the time, one student had headphones on, and one student left the room to talk on the phone for at least 10 minutes.

Finally, one site was described by ODCA site visitors as having “no discernible programming or structured activities, and groups of children and/or young adults seemed to be just milling around.” The activities taking place included roughhousing in a boxing ring, eating, hair braiding, and working out on fitness equipment.

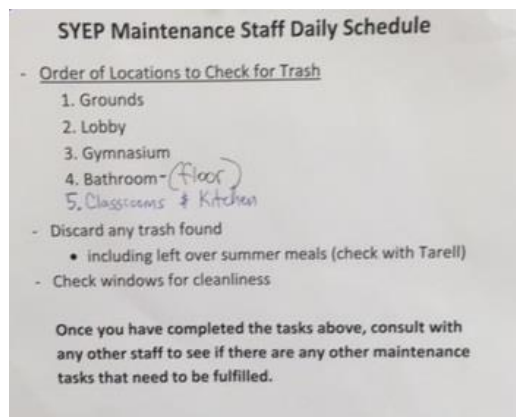
Worksite Activities

As noted earlier, MBSYEP’s stated goals are to give youths the opportunity to: 1) earn money and gain meaningful work experience; 2) learn and develop the skills, attitudes, and commitment needed to succeed in the workforce; 3) explore career options; and 4) interact with professionals in a supportive work environment.²⁶ The work readiness and work experience provided at MBSYEP worksites is the primary means of attaining these goals—where the rubber meets the road.

²⁴ Susan Curnan, Christopher Kingsley, Lisa LaCava, and Joseph Frees, “Unfinished Work: Building Excellence in Washington, D.C.’s Summer Youth Employment Program,” The Center for Youth and Communities, Heller School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University, November 9, 2010, p. 4.

²⁵ This site had a mix of MBSYEP and non-MBSYEP participants.

²⁶ Government of the District of Columbia, “MBSYEP Summer Report,” p. 5.



ODCA’s site visits, as well as other observations about MBSYEP, suggest that the term “summer youth employment program” may be a misnomer.²⁷ MBSYEP policy is to provide individuals aged 14 and 15 with “work readiness” activities and then to place youths between the ages of 16 and 24 “on actual job sites as they are deemed ready.”²⁸ Therefore, many MBSYEP participants are attending classes in a variety of subjects, rather than working at a job site. The classes incorporate job-related skills such as resume writing and interview preparation, as well as lifelong skills such as financial literacy. As noted earlier, the majority of ODCA’s site visits involved programs

offering work readiness, classroom-based activities, partly because such programs are easier to observe without disrupting the host employer site.

In a written statement to the D.C. Council’s Committee on Jobs and Workforce Development in September 2012, Martha Ross of the Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program emphasized the range of summer youth program activities that include, but are not limited to, traditional work experience. Ms. Ross noted that:

First of all, (the summer youth employment program) appears to have multiple goals: Providing income, providing something to do (“keeping kids off the street”) and providing job placements with well-defined skill and employment-related outcomes ... to the extent that the first two goals are emphasized, the third goal becomes harder to meet. The program becomes less of a true employment experience and more of an income supplement and developmental experience for the youths, which implies that the employer/host site is less of a supervisor and more of a camp counselor.²⁹

Several host employers offered a broad range of instruction and career exposure focused on a particular field or occupation. The MusicianShip, a non-profit organization that provides music instruction, offered classes in instrumental music (trumpet, tuba, baritone horn, trombone, saxophone, clarinet, piccolo, snare drum, bass drum, and cymbals); the music business (promotions, marketing, and licensing); media specialties (radio, TV, film, and broadcast journalism); choral performance; dance; and administration. Similarly, The Jarmal Harris Project offered a broad view of the fashion industry by offering classes in marketing/public relations, hospitality, fashion design, wardrobe styling, and stagecraft.

Other work site plans and activities did not emphasize an in-depth introduction to a particular industry or interest, such as music or fashion. The host employer agreement between DOES and Empowerment

²⁷ In a 2010 report, researchers from Brandeis University’s Heller School for Social Policy and Management noted that, “For youth who had more limited understanding of workplace expectations, had far fewer supports and greater obstacles to succeeding, and had not had opportunities to dream and plan for future aspirations, the SYEP program became an initial connection to the workforce and an opportunity to learn and practice foundational workplace skills, such as communication, presentation of self, and following expectations.” See Susan Curnan, Christopher Kingsley, Lisa LaCava, and Joseph Frees, “Unfinished Work: Building Excellence in Washington, D.C.’s Summer Youth Employment Program,” November 9, 2010, p. 6.

²⁸ Department of Employment Services, “FY 15-16 Performance Oversight Hearing Questions,” submitted to the D.C. Council Committee on Business, Consumer and Regulatory Affairs, p. 105 (available at www.dccouncil.us).

²⁹ Martha Ross, Fellow, Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program, written statement to the Council of the District of Columbia, Committee on Jobs and Workforce Development, September 24, 2012, p. 1.

Enterprise II states that the organization would provide youths with “job skills training” and “an opportunity to learn and develop performing arts skills that will include band drumming and band dance.”³⁰ Nevertheless, the job training component included resume writing workshops, mock job interviews, and college preparation sessions. At the Latin American Youth Center, youths participated in music, papermaking, poetry, and jewelry making classes, while also going on field trips to a lake, nature walk, and a zip-lining park. These activities were intended to meet the needs of youths who may be learning to speak English.

Academic instruction was a focus at two MBSYEP sites visited by ODCA employees. At Benjamin Banneker Academic High School, 30 MBSYEP students participated in the Banneker Summer Institute, which is described as a “five-week bridge program designed to strengthen academic skills for transitioning freshmen” that will help them prepare for “the rigors of the Banneker program.”³¹ Students in Banneker’s Summer Institute take classes in math, science, social studies, study skills, and other subjects. The Summer Institute is designed not only to smooth students’ transition to high school, but also to help teachers and other school staff to get to know the students, and their academic strengths and weaknesses. At the D.C. National Guard’s Capital Guardian Youth Challenge Academy,³² which focuses on education and life skills for individuals who are 16 to 18 years of age, youths take classes in English, math, science, and other subjects in order to pass the general equivalency diploma exam.

Many MBSYEP site managers stated that they sponsored field trips for students to supplement and extend the classroom instruction or work experience, and to promote career exploration. One host employer advised ODCA site visitors that he took youth participants on field trips to the Smithsonian Institution, Anacostia Watershed, and the Aquatic Resources Education Center, while conducting four workshops at a Microsoft store. At another site, some youths were leaving for a field trip to National Public Radio and others were shadowing a video production crew on the day of the ODCA site visit. Other site managers stated that they brought guest speakers to the site; for example, a program focusing on the fashion industry brought in fashion designers, photographers, interior designers, fashion bloggers, and others to speak to the youths.

Youth Engagement

ODCA staff observed considerable variation in participant engagement among the 18 MBSYEP sites that were visited, a pattern that should not be surprising in light of the prior discussions of staffing, supervision, and worksite activities. MBSYEP sites with strong supervision and well-designed activities tended to hold the attention of youths and engage them in classroom learning and work experience, whereas sites with less effective supervision and less structured activities had more difficulty keeping youths active and involved. Keeping dozens of youths engaged in an activity at any one time will inevitably be a challenge, but there are steps that site managers could take—such as controlling cell phone use—that would increase youth involvement and teach valuable lessons for the future.

³⁰ Empowerment Enterprises II operated two sites during the summer 2016 program; this description refers to the site visited by ODCA staff at 4900 10th Street, NE.

³¹ All incoming freshmen at Banneker (approximately 140 students) must participate in the summer bridge program, but only 30 were enrolled in MBSYEP.

³² The “NG” in “Capital Guardian Youth Challenge Academy” is deliberately capitalized to underscore that it is a National Guard program.

MBSYEP youths appeared very attentive and involved in classroom or worksite activities at several host employer sites. At an early childhood development center, three youths were absorbed in their jobs while playing with toddlers and preparing props for a mock bus trip, while another youth was helping an adult employee feed infants and change their diapers. Participants at several sites were engaged in preparing for end-of-summer performances.

Nevertheless, at many sites at least some of the youths were detached and idle. At one site, some students worked on sound mixing in a recording studio while others sat unoccupied toward the back of the room. During a resume writing class at another site, seven students were participating in the exercise while two other students took selfies and talked to each other. At still another site, it proved difficult to engage 80 students in a sewing project. Approximately half of the youths seemed disengaged; many were using their cell phones, while some were eating, chatting, and at least one youth was napping. As noted earlier, at one site approximately 100 youths were in an auditorium for ballroom dance practice.³³ Roughly one-half of the youths were practicing the steps under the guidance of an instructor, while the other half watched from auditorium seats.

At several sites with a small number of youths assigned, there was little activity. At one recreation center, two youths working at the pool's customer service desk were not busy and two youths who were working as custodians were idle, stating that they had finished their work of taking out trash, cleaning bathrooms, and restocking supplies several hours earlier. As mentioned earlier, at one site youths did not seem to be engaged in structured or supervised activities; rather, youths were occupying themselves by roughhousing in a boxing ring, eating, braiding one another's hair, and working out on fitness equipment.

Attendance and Behavior

Site managers and other staff advised ODCA employees of some attendance and behavior problems they confronted. At several sites, program staff cited attendance rates ranging from 63 percent to 86 percent. Although only a small number of sites reported dealing with serious behavior problems, the distractions created by cell phone use were pervasive, as discussed earlier in this report, and often not addressed.

With regard to attendance, ODCA site visitors were apprised of the following:

- At one site, 120 youths had been assigned, but the site manager stated that daily attendance had dipped to 80-90 youths (67 percent to 75 percent) by the fourth week.
- At another site, 88 youths had been assigned, but a site manager estimated that daily attendance totaled 55 to 60 youths (63 percent to 68 percent).
- A manager of a program with more than 100 youths estimated the daily average attendance rate as 75 percent.
- At a site where 174 youths were enrolled, the supervisor stated that 110 students to 150 youths (63 percent to 86 percent) attend on any given day.

³³ This site had a mix of MBSYEP and non-MBSYEP participants.

Many site managers stated that they experienced only minor disciplinary or behavioral problems. One site manager, for example, noted that “Kids will be kids,” and that she would sometimes have to send youths home for the day when they behaved poorly. At another site, the manager stated that students had been removed from the program only when they never showed up.

Several site managers also expressed their commitment to policies of progressive discipline. One site manager discussed his organization’s emphasis on “positive youth development” (focusing on strengths) and noted that his program works with youths and their families to correct behavioral problems, rather than moving to terminate a youth from the program. At another site, a manager stated that her organization gives a youth three chances to correct behavior problems, with escalating consequences for each infraction. She added that her organization had not dismissed any youths from the program during the summer of 2016.

Still, host employers at a minority of sites stated that they had to address serious behavior problems, as noted earlier. At one site, a site manager reported that a SmarTrip card, cell phone, cell phone charger, purse, and money were stolen from staff and youths, and that a youth was dismissed from the program for stealing a staff member’s purse. The manager also stated that another youth was removed from the program for bringing her older brother to the site to threaten another youth who had allegedly stolen marijuana from her. At another site, staff stated that they had to call the police to escort a youth off the premises because of her bad attitude and violation of program guidelines.

Although an important goal of MBSYEP is to teach youth participants soft skills, such as coming to work on time, cooperating with colleagues, and dressing appropriately,³⁴ site supervisors sometimes tolerated behaviors that undermine the development of workplace and life skills, or found it difficult to address them. At one site, 12 youths were present when ODCA observers arrived at 9 a.m. and nine more youths arrived within the next hour (the program’s official starting time was 8:30 a.m.). The instructor explained that some of the students had called to notify him that they would be late.³⁵ Another site manager acknowledged that he had difficulty getting youths and sometimes parents to understand that if a youth does not show up, he or she will not be paid. More generally, another program manager cited the following problems: youths using cell phones, youths smoking marijuana, and youths not being thoroughly pre-screened by DOES to ensure that the summer activity was appropriate for them.

By contrast, the supervisor at one site had banned cell phone use entirely, requiring students to store their phones in a locker by the building entrance. The supervisor expressed the view that this policy eliminates a significant source of distraction and disruption.

The attendance and behavior issues discussed above are not new. In their report on D.C.’s summer 2010 summer youth employment program, Brandeis University researchers cited the following as the most important challenges or problems regarding youth behavior:

- Dress code/attire
- Punctuality and attendance
- Importance of communication, especially around giving notice for absence or tardiness
- Attending to detail

³⁴ Indeed, one of the stated goals of MBSYEP is to help youth “learn and develop the skills, attitudes, and commitment necessary to succeed in the workforce.” See Government of the District of Columbia, “MBSYEP Summer Report,” p. 5.

³⁵ By contrast, at another site the program staff locked the doors at the program’s starting time, and did not admit late arrivals.

- Cell phone use/texting
- Respect toward supervisors.³⁶

The Brandeis researchers also noted the problem of youth entitlement in their report, stating that some youths view the program as “free money, based on having had previous experiences where they did not have to do much and did not feel vested in the agency.”³⁷

Facility Conditions

The physical condition of the MBSYEP program sites that ODCA visited were generally good and in several cases, excellent. Several programs were offered at recently built or renovated government facilities, such as Wilson Senior High School,³⁸ Cardozo Education Campus,³⁹ Columbia Heights Community Center,⁴⁰ and Turkey Thicket Recreation Center,⁴¹ pictured at right, which were well-suited for the activities sponsored at these sites.



For example, the MusicianShip’s summer program about instrumental music, chorus, dance, and the music industry used Wilson Senior High School’s practice rooms and its black-box theater to tailor instruction to students with different interests such as marching band or drum line.

Similarly, the Department of Parks and Recreation’s “Hands on the Future” program, which teaches youths about the daily operations of the music business, benefited from the sound studio, video studio, and multi-purpose room available at the Columbia Heights Community Center.

Still, ODCA observers found that the Agape Cabbage Patch Woodland Tigers Youth Academy was operating in a large, unstructured, and poorly-lit space that could lead to accidents or conceal inappropriate activities such as smoking. Empowerment Enterprise II operated its job training program in a church with facilities that were described as somewhat cramped and poorly lit. In addition, one site manager recommended that DOES assess more thoroughly the facilities under consideration for summer youth placements before the program starts to make sure that planned activities for youths will be appropriate.

³⁶ Susan Curnan, Christopher Kingsley, Lisa LaCava, and Joseph Frees, “Unfinished Work: Building Excellence in Washington, D.C.’s Summer Youth Employment Program,” The Center for Youth and Communities, Heller School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University, November 9, 2010, p. 7.

³⁷ Susan Curnan, Christopher Kingsley, Lisa LaCava, and Joseph Frees, “Unfinished Work: Building Excellence in Washington, D.C.’s Summer Youth Employment Program,” The Center for Youth and Communities, Heller School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University, November 9, 2010, p. 8.

³⁸ Wilson Senior High School underwent a major renovation in 2011.

³⁹ Cardozo Education Campus underwent a major renovation in 2013.

⁴⁰ Columbia Heights Community Center opened in 2007.

⁴¹ Turkey Thicket Recreation Center underwent a major renovation in 2006.

Administration

Managers and other staff at the MBSYEP sites visited by ODCA employees reported a number of administrative challenges, which may be inevitable in a program serving more than 13,000 youths.⁴² In one of its earlier reports on MBSYEP, ODCA found that the program serves a much larger percentage of youths, often twice the number or more, than similar programs in eight other large cities.⁴³ Nevertheless, administrative glitches divert both DOES staff and host employer staff from efforts to deliver and monitor high-quality summer programs for MBSYEP participants. Some of the administrative problems that were described by MBSYEP site managers and staff, which echoed problems described in a report on D.C.'s 2010 summer youth employment program,⁴⁴ were as follows:

- A host employer stated that at the start of the program, approximately 100 youths who should have been assigned to three separate program sites all reported to a single site with room for 20 youths. She stated that she had to review the participants' background and skills, assign them to one of the three sites, and turn away unqualified applicants.
- A host employer reported that youths who had previously enrolled in her program and wanted to return for the summer of 2016 were incorrectly assigned to other programs and then had to be transferred.
- Another host employer reported that youths who had previously enrolled in his program and wanted to return for the summer of 2016 were assigned to other programs,⁴⁵ while he was instead assigned youths who did not want to be there. In addition, the same host employer stated that some youths who were on his roster of assigned participants did not show up, while some youths who were not on the roster did show up.
- Several host employers stated that they had difficulties making sure that youths were properly paid. One host employer advised ODCA that youths were paid for fewer hours than she had reported, which created a need for DOES to provide supplemental paychecks.
- One host employer stated that youths had transferred out of his program, but remained on the roster of assigned youths.

⁴² A data file provided by the Department of Employment Services indicates that 13,106 youth participated in the summer of 2016.

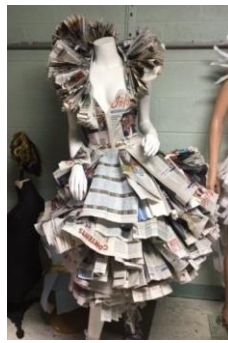
⁴³ Office of the District of Columbia Auditor, *Review of Summer Youth Employment Programs in Eight Major Cities and the District of Columbia*, April 21, 2016, p. 7. The eight comparison cities were Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, New York City, San Francisco, and Seattle.

⁴⁴ Susan Curnan, Christopher Kingsley, Lisa LaCava, and Joseph Frees, "Unfinished Work: Building Excellence in Washington, D.C.'s Summer Youth Employment Program," The Center for Youth and Communities, Heller School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University, November 9, 2010, pp. 17-18.

⁴⁵ Host employer difficulties in getting prior program participants re-enrolled were also cited in a report on D.C.'s 2010 summer youth employment program. See Susan Curnan, Christopher Kingsley, Lisa LaCava, and Joseph Frees, "Unfinished Work: Building Excellence in Washington, D.C.'s Summer Youth Employment Program," The Center for Youth and Communities, Heller School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University, November 9, 2010, p. 17.

Additional Observations

The site visits also yielded several observations that did not fit clearly into the sections listed above. Many host employers prominently displayed participants' work, as reflected in the photos shown below. For example, at the Siblings Together site, the classrooms were adorned with youth participants' poems and posters about civil rights. In addition, many host sites sponsored performances and showcases at the end of the summer to reinforce and expand what participants had learned during the program and highlight their accomplishments. For example, youths assigned to the D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities performed a play at the Atlas Theatre that culminated a summer of instruction in stage management, lighting, sound, costume design, acting, and directing. The executive director of the Musicianship stated that there would be an end-of-summer showcase expected to draw 500 people, and that participants had performed for the U.S. Department of Education, DOES, and at Kings Dominion.



Recommendations

Because MBSYEP offers work readiness and enrichment activities intended to help youths develop skills they will need in further education and on the job, there could be synergies between MBSYEP and education reform efforts in the D.C. Public Schools (DCPS) and D.C.'s public charter schools. Researchers have documented that summer learning loss disproportionately harms children from low-income families and that summer learning programs can not only mitigate summer learning loss, but lead to achievement gains.⁴⁶ Because 26 percent of District of Columbia children were poor in 2014, as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau, summer learning loss is a particularly salient issue for D.C. policymakers and educators. Moreover, because a majority of MBSYEP youths reside in Wards 7 and 8, where child poverty rates are particularly high,⁴⁷ a large number of MBSYEP youths are at risk for summer learning loss.

⁴⁶ See for example Jennifer Sloan McCombs, Catherine Augustine, Heather Schwartz, Susan Bodilly, Brian McInnis, Dahlia Lichter, and Amanda Brown Cross, "Making Summer Count: How Summer Programs Can Boost Children's Learning," the Rand Corporation, 2011, p. xv.

⁴⁷ In a recent report, the National Research Council presented data showing that 49 percent of children in Ward 8 and 41 percent of children in Ward 7 are poor. See National Research Council, *An Evaluation of the Public Schools in the District of Columbia: Reform in a Changing Landscape*, (Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press: 2015), p. 29.

Accordingly, ODCA recommends that:

- 1. DOES, the D.C. Public Schools, and D.C. public charter schools should continue to develop and expand MBSYEP offerings that combine work readiness activities for younger participants with academic skills development.**

There are several models that DOES and the public schools (traditional and charter) can use to strengthen the links between summer youth employment programs and the school curriculum. First, summer bridge programs for incoming freshmen, similar to the Banneker High School Summer Institute described in this report, could be expanded. Friendship Collegiate Academy and Friendship Technology Preparatory Academy, both of which are public charter schools, also offered summer bridge programs through MBSYEP in the summer of 2016.

Another model is the DCPS Study Abroad program, launched this year, which funds summer travel for foreign language students who have finished 8th grade or 11th grade in order to promote language acquisition, cultural immersion, and service learning. During the summer of 2016, 87 MBSYEP youths participated in the DCPS Study Abroad program, traveling to foreign countries and completing a “Making Global Local” project upon their return to reflect on what they learned while abroad.

Finally, a model involving more explicit school-to-work linkages is DCPS’ Career Ready Initiative, which seeks to provide youths with “intensive employability skills training” and summer work experience. Under this program, youths between 15 and 21 years of age who receive a recommendation from their school’s employability skills instructor and participate in an interview process with potential employers can then get summer jobs through MBSYEP (269 MBSYEP youths were part of the Career Ready Initiative in the summer of 2016).

In its written comments on a draft of this report, DOES described other initiatives that are underway in collaboration with DCPS. DOES’ comments are appended to this report in their entirety.

To address the variation in program quality described in this report—reflected in the previous sections on Staffing and Supervision, Worksite Activities, and Youth Engagement—and increase the likelihood that youths will have engaging and enriching experiences in MBSYEP, ODCA recommends that:

- 2. DOES should intensify its efforts to recruit and develop host employers that can provide high-quality career exploration and work experience, particularly by working with host employers between summers, to identify high-quality providers and offer them training and technical assistance to improve further.**

Although intensive training of host employers would be a massive undertaking (there were 539 host employers in the summer of 2016),⁴⁸ DOES could focus its technical assistance on the largest host employers. For the 2016 MBSYEP, DOES conducted supervisor orientations and invited host employer applicants to participate in webinars, but these efforts could be expanded. DOES has designated some employers as “outstanding host sites,”⁴⁹ and the practices of these exemplary sites could be more widely

⁴⁸ This figure is as of July 19, 2016.

⁴⁹ Government of the District of Columbia, “MBSYEP Summer Report,” p. 14.

shared and incorporated into training plans. Prior research has also cited the importance of training host employer supervisors in principles of youth development.⁵⁰

Finally, to address the youths' behavior issues discussed previously under the headings of Staffing and Supervision and Attendance and Behavior, ODCA recommends that:

- 3. DOES should work more intensively with host employers to discourage worksite behaviors, such as frequent absences, tardiness, and use of cell phones during classes, that undermine the development of soft skills that are important to success in school and on the job.**

This guidance about acceptable workplace behavior could be provided through host employer training and orientation sessions, as well as in youth orientation sessions, the Youth Handbook, and the Youth and Parent Information Packet.

ODCA submitted this letter report in draft form to DOES for comment. ODCA appreciates the constructive response from DOES, which is attached.

Sincerely,



Kathleen Patterson
District of Columbia Auditor

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⁵⁰ Nisha Sachdev, *An Evaluation of the District of Columbia Summer Youth Employment Program*, dissertation submitted to the faculty of the school of Public Health and Health Services of The George Washington University, May 20, 2012, p. 104.



**Department of Employment Services (DOES Management Response
Office of the District of Columbia Auditor's (ODCA)
"Site Observations: 2016 Marion S. Barry Summer Youth Employment Program"**

December 19, 2016

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Department of Employment Services

MURIEL BOWSER
MAYOR



DEBORAH A. CARROLL
DIRECTOR

December 19, 2016

Ms. Kathleen Patterson
District of Columbia Auditor
Office of the District of Columbia Auditor
717 14th Street, NW, Suite 900
Washington, DC 20005

Re: *"Site Visit Observations: 2016 Marion S. Barry Summer Youth Employment Program"*

Dear Ms. Patterson:

This letter is in response to your December 2, 2016, correspondence regarding the Office of the District of Columbia Auditor's (ODCA) draft report entitled, *"Site Visit Observations: 2016 Marion S. Barry Summer Youth Employment Program."* As requested, the Department of Employment Services (DOES) has prepared a separate, written response that addresses each recommendation detailed in ODCA's draft report as provided.

As noted in our response to the recommendations, DOES Office of Youth Programs has made many enhancements to the MBSYEP program over the last several years and the recommendations are already underway and due for expansion or fully implemented. We thank you and your team for your observations.

Please let me know if you have any questions. We look forward to receiving a copy of the final report.

Sincerely yours,


Deborah A. Carroll
Director

cc: Courtney Snowden, Deputy Mayor of Greater Economic Opportunity
Betsy Cavendish, General Counsel, Office of the Mayor
Lawrence Perry, ODCA
Aniema Udofa, DOES, CPA, OCIM

Attachment

Overview Statement:

The Department of Employment Services (DOES) has reviewed information contained in the above referenced District of Columbia Auditor (ODCA) Site Observations of the Mayor Marion S. Barry Summer Youth Employment Program of 2016. This report is part of a series of reports by the DC Auditor, following a year-long review of the MBSYEP program. The review provides a snapshot of the MBSYEP program during FY 2016. DOES welcomes this review and is pleased to highlight the program enhancements already in place or underway in the agency. DOES looks forward to working with the ODCA, Councilmembers, and stakeholders to ensure investments will promote a comprehensive youth development initiative in the nation's capital in comparison to similar cross-country strategies, particularly as it relates to private sector opportunities and career pathways for older youth in the program.

Recommendation:

1. DOES, the D.C. Public Schools, and D.C. public charter schools should continue to develop and expand MBSYEP offerings that combine work readiness activities for younger participants with academic skills development.

Management Response:

Currently, DOES engages in a number of efforts to develop and expand offerings that combine work readiness activities for younger participants with academic and skills development. Highlighted below are a few examples:

- DC Public School (DCPS) and DC Public Charter Schools (DCPSB) are vital partners in the Marion Barry Summer Youth Employment Program (MBSYEP), both in the recruitment and delivery of program offerings. In addition, DOES partners with school and non-profit programs to encourage youth to engage in summer enrichment, including STEM and STEAM career activities.
- In preparation for MBSYEP 2017, DOES has engaged parents, DCPS and DCPCSB senior leadership, and Department on Disability Services' Rehabilitation Services Administration (DDS) executives in the planning, development, and recruitment of youth for MBSYEP programs. In addition, DDS and DOES meet monthly to plan both summer work experience and year-round programs for youth with disabilities to increase MBSYEP participation and provide high quality career development that help prepare them for post-secondary education and employment. In preparation for their summer work experience, the DC Alliance of Youth Advocates provides a pre-employment work readiness program to facilitate the transition.
- DOES partners with DCPS youth enrolled in the Career Technical Education (CTE/NAF) academies, and enables youth in these intensive career exploration programs to gain hands-on work experience in fields of Finance, Hospitality & Tourism, Information Technology, Engineering, and Health Sciences.

- DOES hosts the Marion Barry Youth Leadership Institute Summer Leadership Academy during MBSYEP. This six-week summer intensive provides leadership development, career planning, and college readiness for high school students.
- Youth engaged in the Global Kids Leadership program explore issues of poverty, economics, and citizenship in the District of Columbia and in other countries as well as international careers, including International Relations, Political Science, Urban Planning, Medicine and Education.

Recommendation:

2. DOES should intensify its efforts to recruit and develop host employers that can provide high-quality career exploration and work experience, particularly by working with host employers between summers, to identify high-quality providers and offer them training and technical assistance.

Management Response:

DOES shares this goal and has plans to enhance its' strategy to develop the businesses' capacity to provide a high-quality summer career exploration experience:

- Plans are already underway for DOES to host several Host Employer workshops beginning February 2017. The workshops usually include standard operating procedures for the MBSYEP program. These workshops will provide additional emphasis on developing curricula that can be used during the six-week program with the youth, technical assistance, and training to host employers and their supervisors and will incorporate strategies around best practices for engaging youth workers.
- DOES conducted post-MBSYEP feedback sessions with several 2016 host site partners. Partners were able to share insight on their summer experience as well as provide suggestions to enhance 2017 SYEP. DOES will also share participant communications with all partners to streamline technical assistance and reinforce implementation of promising and best practices.

Recommendation:

3. DOES should work more intensively with host employers to discourage worksite behaviors, such as frequent absences, tardiness, and use of cell phones during classes, that undermine the development of soft skills that are important to success in school and on the job.

Management Response:

A key goal of the SYEP program is to strengthen soft skills of youth workers by creating an environment where consequences are used as teachable moments for youth in their personal and professional development. Learning to be a good employee is a developmental process that youth learn over time.

In addition to the training offered to the host site supervisors described above, DOES implemented a variety of new interventions targeted to strengthen and reinforce positive work-site behaviors.

- DOES implemented a behavioral economics strategy to improve attendance and reduce attrition. DOES call center staff reminded youth to come to work, be on time, or determine why they did not attend work. Incentives were provided for perfect attendance, and other developmentally appropriate strategies to foster learning and positive behavioral reinforcement. In addition, DOES provided a transportation advance to remove financial barriers for getting to and from work. These interventions contributed to a reduction in the attrition rate to about 1%.
- During MBSYEP 2016, DOES conducted a pilot work readiness program with out of school youth on a college campus. Attendance and professional demeanor were reinforced with the participants. The contractor hosted various trainings weekly, which included training on time management, workplace communication, body language, problem resolution and managing workplace relationships. Youth qualified for incentives to reinforce positive work-place behaviors. Early results of this new intervention resulted in approximately 30% increase in college enrollment compared to the previous year. DOES will continue to offer these trainings and will expand these offerings to include additional topics that will support the growth and development of youth.
- DOES is working closely with the LAB at DC to develop and implement additional strategies during 2017.