

# CRAIN'S NEW YORK BUSINESS

## [Op-ed: To build a stronger middle class, boost paid internships for CUNY students](#)

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Amid shorter days and colder temperatures, it may feel like summer is a long way off. But this is also the season in which thousands of employers across the city figure out their plans for summer internships.

This year, New York City leaders should pull out all the stops to ensure that far more of those internships go to students at the City University of New York.

Most CUNY students come from families that earn less than \$30,000 annually, and paid internships could help students channel their degrees into career opportunities and get on the path to the middle class. However, only 10% of CUNY students report having a paid internship during their time in college. As a result, too many end up unemployed or underemployed after graduation, limiting the effectiveness of CUNY as an engine of economic mobility.

Fortunately, there's a growing appetite among employers across the city to find ways to bring CUNY students on board. Our organizations have made it a priority to recruit from CUNY in recent years, and programs like Project Basta, CUNY Career Launch, Futures in Finance, Break Through Tech and the Tech Talent Pipeline Residency are finding success.

Now is the time to rally far more of the city's employers to recruit from CUNY for their internship programs — and make it much easier for companies to do so.

Companies often struggle to navigate CUNY's 25 different colleges, each of which operates with a high degree of autonomy. CUNY's career services offices are stretched thin, and employer engagement typically falls to just one or two staff members for a campus with thousands of students.

Faced with too large a lift, even some of the most well-intentioned employers will revert back to past practices, such as recruiting through existing staff alumni networks. To change this status quo, more employers will have to step up and make CUNY a key part of their recruiting strategy — and city officials will have to do more to help CUNY meet employers halfway.

First, Mayor Eric Adams and other top city officials should lead the charge to rally employers. The city should get behind CUNY's current goal of tripling the number of students who land paid internships and partner closely with the private sector to achieve this.

Second, policymakers should work with CUNY to scale up the small but powerful programs that are already working — and help replicate them for other industries. This should include expanding nonprofit partnerships like Project Basta and Break Through Tech, growing city-backed initiatives like the Tech Talent Pipeline Residency, and adapting programs like Futures in Finance for real estate, healthcare, professional services and other industries.

Third, CUNY should double down on efforts to make it easier for employers to partner with colleges. A new central, career-focused office could provide companies with a single point of entry, and CUNY should continue to add industry engagement specialists and employer-focused career services staff to foster long-term employer relationships. As part of this effort, the city should consider new ways to market CUNY to employers — similar to the omnipresent campaigns on the city's subways and buses that market CUNY to prospective students.

Summer hiring is right around the corner — and the clock starts now.

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