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Premium Content

Employers: Our youth need summer jobs

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I have a message for the decision-makers in Boston's business community. I know you're busy, so I'll get right to the point. I'm offering you an opportunity to enrich your organization and strengthen Boston's future.

Despite a strong overall job market, we remain in the midst of a youth unemployment crisis. Summer work among 16-to-19-year-olds in Massachusetts was cut in half between 1999 and 2012, from 54 percent to 27 percent. It's only begun to recover, inching up to 31 percent last year. The picture remains bleak for low-income youth and teens of color in Boston's neighborhoods.

A generation is entering adulthood without work experience. That's a problem for our community and our economy. It's why last year I made it a priority to expand the city's Summer Jobs program, in partnership with the Boston Private Industry Council and longtime supporters like John Hancock and State Street Financial. Together we got more than 10,000 young people jobs, and we introduced vital enrichments such as financial literacy training.



Martin Walsh is mayor of Boston.

This year we're going all-out to recruit more employers. I especially want to reach workplaces in the emerging economy. As Boston becomes a tech leader, none of us wants to see the situation some cities face, where new economy workers and longtime residents feel alienated from each other. Entrepreneurs themselves tell me that they want to forge closer bonds with our city. Well, hiring young people is the deepest kind of civic engagement there is.

And remember, our schools are full of tech-savvy teens. Ask Kostian Iftica, an entrepreneur I met at a Summer Jobs event last year. In 2006, Kostian's Summer Jobs internship sparked a dream of running his own company. Now 26, Kostian is the founder of Brilliant Geeks, a tech consultancy. Last summer he hired his own intern from the program who, in addition to learning programming and customer support, contributed ideas that Brilliant Geeks is still using today.

Kostian's experience shows how both students and employers benefit from summer jobs. Kostian paid forward meaningful work experience—offering concrete skills, genuine mentoring, and a new sense of possibility.

Summer work improves health and safety for urban youth. But I want to do more than keep kids out of trouble. I want to connect jobs to the college and career pathways we are building in our high schools.

I want summer jobs to help close the opportunity gap and launch young people toward their dreams.

Hiring teens is not just about doing good. It's about claiming your stake in our city's rising workforce. Young people getting their first taste of professional accomplishment bring energy to the workplace unlike any other.

We take pride in how highly Boston ranks in so many measures of success. But we also rank among the cities with the greatest inequality. We are fighting it on many fronts. But none is more important than getting our young people the opportunities they deserve. They are the next generation of Boston's workers, innovators, and leaders. Help me prepare them—and us—for success. All they need is a chance.

You don't have to wait for me to call. To learn more about the summer internship program, e-mail summerjobs@boston.gov.

Martin Walsh is mayor of Boston.