Virginia Hospital Center is a leading comprehensive healthcare facility in the Washington, DC metropolitan area. The 342-bed not-for-profit, teaching facility offers comprehensive healthcare and multiple, independently recognized Centers of Excellence. Below is an interview with Robin Norman, Senior Vice President and Chief Financial Officer, about Virginia Hospital Center’s partnership with their local youth organization, Urban Alliance.

**Why did Virginia Hospital Center decide to partner with Urban Alliance?**
Virginia Hospital Center is a large nonprofit committed to supporting our community in a variety of ways. We align with a lot of educational organizations, mostly health care related, but not all of our partners are in this industry. Even though our mission isn’t directly in education, it is something we value, which is why we have always sought out opportunities to host interns and why we started working with Urban Alliance.

**How does Urban Alliance meet your business needs?**
Virginia Hospital Center has been able to maximize the use of Urban Alliance interns compared to other internship programs mainly because of the training Urban Alliance does. With a high school student in particular, you may worry if they’ll know how to be mature in a work setting. While this is an ongoing process of learning, the interns that came here from Urban Alliance were well prepared and quick learners. The training they received allowed them to perform quality work with very little intervention. Before we knew it, they were able to take on more tasks and work more independently, which is not always the case with High School interns.

As most companies can also relate to, some of the college interns we’ve hosted have been great and strong, and others have fallen short. We quickly learned that with Urban Alliance, if an intern issue arises during the internship, we are able to address it quickly and reach out to Urban Alliance’s staff. Having such a strong support system ensures that we can do everything we can to make sure our Urban Alliance interns have what they need to succeed.

**Can you tell us a little more about the roles that are filled by Urban Alliance interns?**
Interns Syed and Kiara work in two different departments, with finance and the executive offices respectively. Kiara’s main task has been clearing the file room, which includes identifying terminated and expired contracts that can be moved off-site. Her project requires the labor intensive task of scanning and organizing documents as they transition phases of the online data system, Kiara’s mentor shared that she is good at asking questions and is efficient.

Syed works in the Finance Department. He is mainly responsible for filing and shredding projects as well as supporting tasks for their audit. His mentor describes him as very professional and is impressed that he is performing at the level of another Virginia Hospital Center college intern.

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— Robin Norman, Senior Vice President and Chief Financial Officer
What additional benefits have your company realized as a result of the partnership?

Working with Urban Alliance has been a win-win for Virginia Hospital Center. Not only is it a feel-good experience, it has been a true return on investment! While Syed and Kiara have benefitted from gaining real-world, professional experiences, they have also done real work at a cost-effective price for our organization. In addition, my team of employees who support the interns have grown stronger as a result of their rallying together to teach someone else. Our staff truly enjoy working with youth, which has increased employee engagement and collaboration across our organization. Furthermore, many of our staff who work with the interns are junior in their career, so it is a really good match. Without a doubt, it has been a positive experience.

Is there anything your company particularly values in your program or the young adults that is not reflected above?

Of the many internship programs I’ve been involved in, I think the advantage of paying for an intern is that you’re going to make sure there is work that needs to get done. The interns and Urban Alliance both take this internship extremely seriously, and as the hosting organization, it is our responsible to make sure we have important tasks that utilize the interns. This ensures that the work gets done, and it happens to be at a much lower cost to us than if we had paid for temporary staff. Everyone involved is very focused on creating value, which is why we see Urban Alliance as a true investment and a program that is mutually beneficial.

What would you recommend to another employer?

As I mentioned, the secret of our success is to have real work and a real project for the interns. Job partners should take the time to determine projects that they would have spent money on otherwise to complete, and then use Urban Alliance interns to work on those projects. I have found it to be a great experience and a truly rewarding partnership, which is why I highly recommend others explore working with Urban Alliance as well.

ABOUT URBAN ALLIANCE

Urban Alliance empowers under-resourced youth to aspire, work, and succeed through paid internships, formal training, and mentorship. Its goal is to give youth access to professional growth and experiences. Through the course of the year, students participate in the High School Internship Program that prepares them for a life of work and self-sufficiency. All students start the program with 6-weeks of job readiness training so they are equipped to succeed in their internships and are supported throughout the program year by Urban Alliance staff, job site mentors, and continued professional development training.

Since its founding in 1996, Urban Alliance has partnered with more than 200 corporations, connected more than 2,000 young people with internships, and reached an additional 15,000 youth through job skills training and workshops. The results are impressive:

- 100% of Alumni graduate high school on time
- Over 90% of Alumni are accepted into college
- 80% of Alumni enroll in a 2– or 4-year college
- 80% of those who enroll in college persist to their second year
- More than 90% of Alumni report feeling comfortable in a professional office environment
- 84% of Alumni remain “connected” to a pathway—including college, employment, or a career training program—one year after completing Urban Alliance.

Urban Alliance is the only year-long employment program for under-resourced high school seniors in Washington, DC; Baltimore, MD; Chicago, IL; and Northern Virginia. For more information, please visit: theurbanalliance.org