In partnership with leading youth-serving nonprofits, Gap Inc.’s This Way Ahead (TWA) program gives young people a chance to prepare for and experience their first jobs. TWA operates in New York, San Francisco, Boston and Houston, with plans to expand to a 5th site in 2015. The program features three key phases: job readiness classes on topics such as diversity and conflict resolution; paid internships at Gap, Old Navy, and Banana Republic stores; and multiple months of follow-on support and guidance from nonprofit staff. The goal is to help youth envision new possibilities and gain the skills and confidence to pursue their own path.
Shadé Robinson, 2013 TWA NYC program graduate. After she completed the program, Shadé got her first job as a sales associate at Old Navy Atlantic Center in Brooklyn, NY.

"THE BEST PART ABOUT WORKING AT OLD NAVY IS MY AMAZING OLD NAVY FAMILY. I LOOK UP TO THEM, AND WE'RE ALWAYS HERE FOR EACH OTHER."

- SHADÉ ROBINSON, TWA NYC 2013

INNOVATION

TWA uses an innovative, interactive approach to demonstrate how a company can use a broad range of its assets to make an impact: Gap Inc.'s experience hiring young people and knowing what it takes to develop them, the company's deep partnership with nonprofits, and the ability to bring a business lens to social innovation. TWA is also set apart by its philosophy. It is explicitly designed not to be a free ride, with only half of participants becoming interns after a competitive selection process meant to mimic a real-world experience. The young people themselves are expected to "own" their path to success. Finally, TWA offers novel opportunities to replicate and Gap Inc. has shared its curriculum to inspire other programs.
Youth attend workshops to help prepare them for their first jobs. Our employees volunteer more than 40 hours (over two months) to teach these workshops.

MEASUREMENT & IMPACT

Quantitative and qualitative impact measurement was built into TWA's design. Since 2007, TWA has trained more than 1,600 youth and provided over 500 internship opportunities in New York, San Francisco, Boston, and Houston. The results demonstrate significant impact, with each year's findings showing improvement over those of the prior year. The most recent evaluation reports that 76 percent of youth showed improvements in job attainment skills, 51 percent of youth showed improved confidence, and gains occurred across all six measures of personal growth: maturity, conflict resolution, leadership, financial management, willpower, and career outlook. Gap Inc. employees also benefited, with 80 percent of volunteers in New York and 67 percent in San Francisco saying they improved leadership skills by acting as facilitators and 100 percent of volunteers saying TWA made them "extremely proud" to be Gap Inc. employees. The evaluations help Gap Inc. continually innovate and challenge itself to achieve greater impact.
PARTNERSHIP
Gap Inc. has worked with The Door, a youth-serving nonprofit with workforce development expertise, since creating TWA and collaborates through planning meetings and weekly conference calls. The Door has extensive experience in helping youth face a range of challenges and has helped Gap Inc. understand the need for interactive exercises.

“I AM SO PROUD OF THE [YOUNG PEOPLE’S] PROGRESS; I FEEL HONORED TO HAVE BEEN PART OF THEIR JOURNEY THROUGH THIS PROGRAM. THE TRUE STORY IS THAT THE MOST PROFOUND IMPACT WAS IN MY LIFE.”

- CINDY GILMAN-BRENNER, GAP GENERAL MANAGER, SALEM, NH.

clear and constructive feedback, and high expectations. At the same time, The Door staff strike a balance between being tough and supportive. They meet weekly with interns to discuss difficult issues such as a family member feeling threatened by an intern’s newfound ambition. Likewise, Gap Inc.’s work with San Francisco-based Enterprise for High School Students, Boston-area Cambridge Housing Authority, and Houston’s SER Jobs for Progress provides insights that the company can bring to other programs. As in all great partnerships, inspiration and learning flow both ways, and together the partners accomplish more than they could on their own.