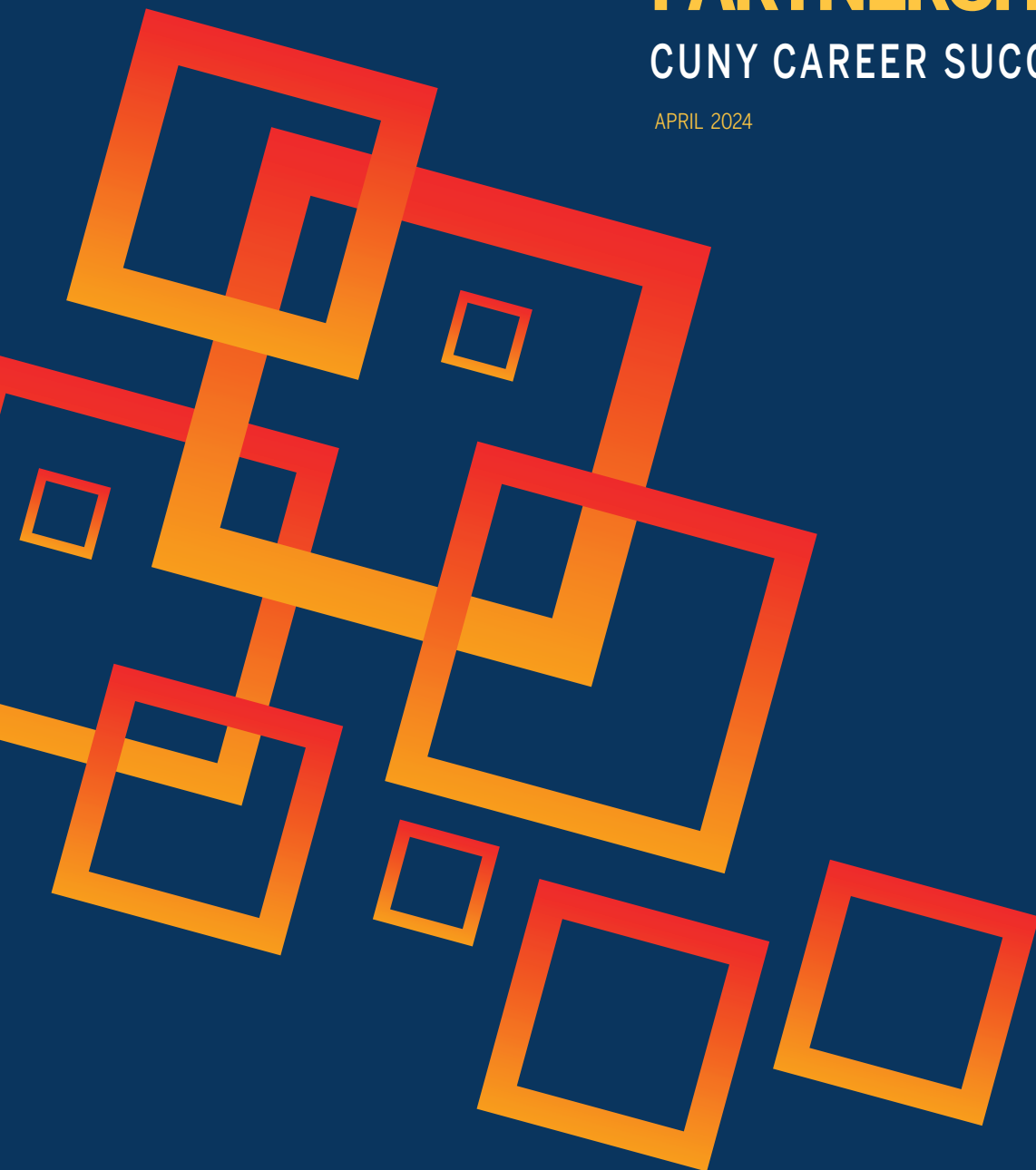


THE CENTERBRIDGE-BAIN PARTNERSHIP GRANT

CUNY CAREER SUCCESS

APRIL 2024

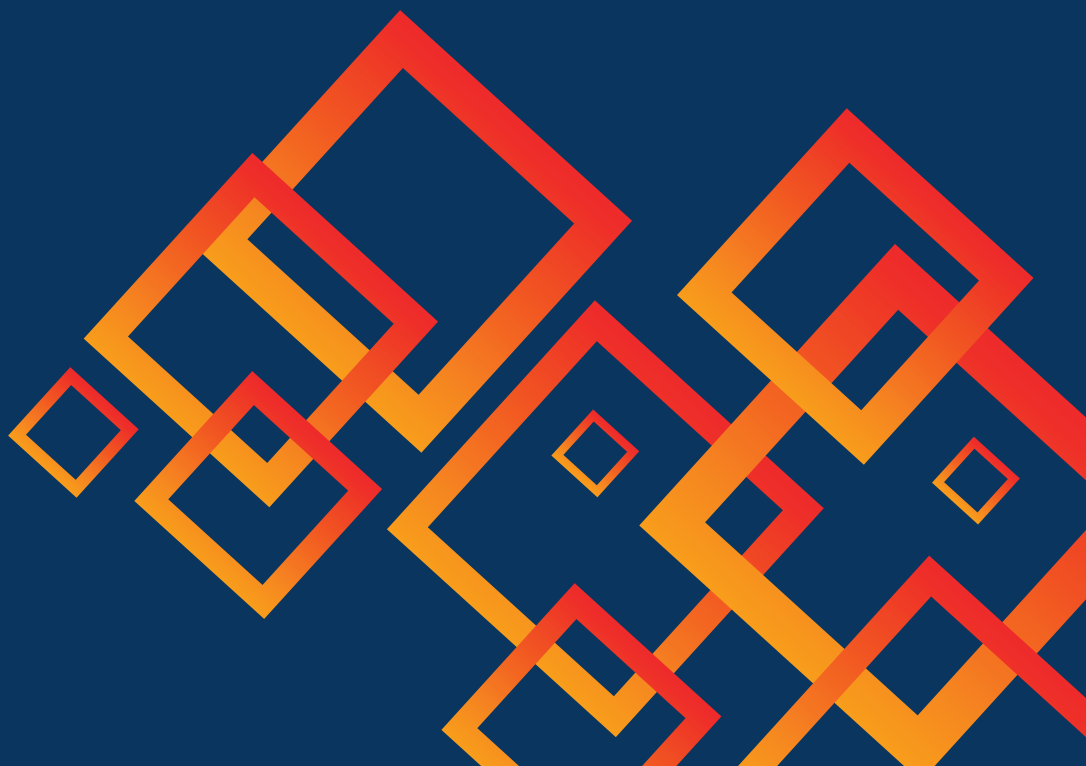


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 COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
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Introduction

The Partnership Grant (“Partnership Grant”) is a collaboration launched in 2012 by the Centerbridge Foundation (“Centerbridge”) and Bain & Company (“Bain”) with the goal to co-invest in a small portfolio of innovative, education-focused nonprofit organizations with established track records in New York City that are capable of achieving significant and sustained impact on student outcomes.

Through this unique partnership, Centerbridge commits grant funding of up to \$500,000 over a 4-year period, and Bain contributes pro bono consulting expertise focused on a strategic initiative. Partnership Grant recipients (“grant partners”) also have access to a range of other resources—such as guidance on external research and evaluation, leadership advisory and coaching, and professional development opportunities—to support continuous learning and increase impact across the portfolio. There are also informal networking and learning opportunities, including events with Centerbridge leadership, offered to grant partners. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Centerbridge also invited grant partners to apply for up to \$100,000 in supplemental relief funding.¹

Through the Partnership Grant, Centerbridge and Bain seek to drive change at two levels. At the organizational level, they aim to help organizations think and act strategically to build capacity to pursue their missions. At the sector level, they work to support and spur the development of “game-changing” ideas in the field of education.

Centerbridge and Bain selected the City University of New York (“CUNY”), the largest urban public university in the nation and a major talent pipeline for New York City employers, as the 2020 Partnership Grant recipient to support the Career Success Initiatives of its Office of Careers and Industry Partnerships (“OCIP”).²

The following case study, prepared by the Center for Public Research and Leadership at Columbia University (“CPRL”), documents CUNY’s transformational work towards improving its students’ post-graduation outcomes. The case study begins with background on CUNY and then recounts OCIP’s engagement with Centerbridge and Bain and areas of focus throughout the Partnership Grant, including progress to date. Finally, the case study distills key considerations for CUNY, Centerbridge, and Bain. Throughout, this case study describes how the Partnership Grant dramatically impacted how CUNY supports its students to identify, prepare for, and attain careers of their choosing, catalyzing a massive transformation that benefits not just CUNY’s hundreds of thousands of students and their families each year, but also New York City overall.



Background

CUNY is the public university system of New York City and the largest urban university system in the United States. CUNY's history traces back to the Free Academy, which opened in 1847.³ Established to educate students in the common schools of the city and county of New York, the Free Academy later became the City College of New York.⁴ Nearly a century later, the Free Academy was united under one banner with other colleges, including Hunter College, Brooklyn College, and Queens College, to form CUNY. CUNY now comprises 25 campuses: 11 senior colleges, seven community colleges, and seven graduate, honors, and professional schools, and has a presence in all five boroughs of New York City.⁵

CUNY has a longstanding mission of providing a public first-rate education to all students, regardless of means or background.⁶ Each year, CUNY serves more than 225,000 degree-seeking students and 150,000 continuing education and certificate students.⁷ CUNY has one of the most racially diverse student bodies in the United States: More than 77% of enrollees are students of color, 61% are Pell Grant recipients, 35% were born outside of the United States, and 57% are women.⁸ Sixty percent of CUNY students are the first generation in their family to attend college,⁹ and approximately 50% come from households earning less than \$30,000 per year.¹⁰ The majority of students entering CUNY are from New York City, with 82% of first-year students coming from New York City public schools.¹¹

Each year, CUNY awards 50,000 degrees, and has awarded more than 1.1 million associate, baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral degrees since 1967. More than 80% of CUNY alumni remain in New York City after graduation, where they impact and diversify the city's workforce in every sector.¹²

Yet CUNY, a critical preparer for and supplier to the workforce, is not meeting its full potential when it comes to students and alumni accessing living wage careers of their choosing. To support its work related to improving student career outcomes, CUNY first applied for a Partnership Grant in 2017. At the time, OCIP was under new leadership, who was working to grow and align the team on upcoming goals and priorities. The Partnership Grant committee thus decided to wait to award a Partnership Grant, while also identifying areas for

immediate support from Bain. Through that subsequent collaboration, Bain and CUNY analyzed student outcomes from the beginning of their journey freshman year to understand their academic pathing, graduation outcomes, and career outcomes. The objective and result of this work was to understand the current state for student career outcomes and the set of factors and experiences along a student's academic journey that relate to different outcomes. As described by Bain partner Keri Larkin, "To really be student centric we need to consider the student's end-to-end experience and their goal, which is to secure a career that is fulfilling and affords them a choice-filled life. This means seeing what portion of students are making it from the very start of the journey, first month of school, to that goal. Then we need to step back and think about how we can meaningfully increase that number."¹³

Bain and CUNY identified that far too few students are graduating and securing a career where they earn a living wage one year after graduation. Of those students who graduate, less than 50% earn a living wage 1 year after graduation.¹⁴ And with 61.9% of CUNY bachelor's degree candidates graduating within 6 years (35.3% within 4 years) and 30.4% of CUNY associate's degree candidates graduating within 4 years (10.7% within 2 years),¹⁵ career outcomes for students who do not make it to graduation are lower still, indicating that many students are lost along the way and, because of the wide variability in graduation rates across programs and campuses, graduation rates are addressable.

In 2019, when CUNY reapplied and was selected for a Partnership Grant, it was poised to significantly change how CUNY supported its students in preparing for and accessing jobs.

CUNY's OCIP and the Centerbridge-Bain Partnership Grant

At the outset of its Partnership Grant, Centerbridge invested in—and Bain partnered with—CUNY to “transform CUNY into an institution of academic excellence and career competitiveness by building programs and creating an institutional infrastructure that will fundamentally change how students are prepared for the labor market and how CUNY works with employers.”¹⁶

The Partnership Grant aimed to support CUNY to develop career-connected learning opportunities and improve career outcomes for students, leading not only to an increased percentage of CUNY students earning a living wage upon graduation, but also to helping students see the connection between—and make decisions about—future career opportunities and their CUNY education.

Centerbridge Co-Founder Jeff Aronson highlighted the importance of this investment to the firm's overall mission, “CUNY is educating the next generation of New Yorkers, and it is our responsibility to ensure they have the opportunities that will prepare them for work, especially the workplace in New York City, upon graduation. We are proud of our long-standing and extensive partnership with CUNY, and the work completed through the Partnership Grant.”

Improving career-connected opportunities, CUNY understood, would not only improve graduate career outcomes, but would also improve outcomes for all CUNY students, including by increasing program completion or graduation rates by helping students to see, every step of the way, the connection between their education and future career opportunities.

CUNY organized its work during the Partnership Grant period around three goals:

1

Near-term Goal

Increase student awareness of and access to career success opportunities

2

Long-term Goal

Increase transparency and accountability of college and CUNY leadership on leading and lagging key performance indicators related to career success

3

Organizational Goal

Ensure that CUNY has the data, tools, and programs to meet critical needs in light of COVID-19 and its impact on the labor market¹⁷

Bain began its Partnership Grant-related support in January 2020 by conducting a baseline analysis and helping the CUNY team develop a plan for improving student career outcomes, industry relationships, and alignment across CUNY's 25 campuses and central office.¹⁸

Just a few months into the Partnership Grant period, while Bain was completing the baseline analysis, the COVID-19 pandemic forced CUNY, Bain, and Centerbridge to adjust their work.

OCIP's overarching goal of improving student career outcomes remained, but it pivoted to help CUNY respond to its students' immediate needs, including through distributing cash grants, laptops, and Wi-Fi hotspots.¹⁹ Furthermore, the recession caused by the pandemic left one-third of all 18-to-24-year-old workers unemployed. CUNY, with Bain and Centerbridge's support, focused on identifying how CUNY could best support students with jobs—and thus financial security—in the near-term without losing the big picture of long-term career success and resilience.²⁰ Centerbridge awarded CUNY a COVID supplemental grant to support this work.²¹

One way that CUNY supported its students with immediate jobs was by leading the city's contact tracing work.

Called upon by then-Governor Cuomo and then-Mayor de Blasio to lead the nation's first contact tracing program, CUNY worked with Bain to craft and hire for thousands of jobs, many of which were filled by CUNY students.²²

Although some pandemic-related jobs were temporary, CUNY helped students understand how their new skills, such as in communications and customer service, were highly transferable and how to market these new skills to employers.²³

In addition, to support CUNY students and alumni who prior to the pandemic had worked predominantly in the disproportionately impacted food service and retail sectors,²⁴ OCIP, with the help of Bain, developed and launched "CUNY Upskilling," a website—subsequently made available to the public—that provides free trainings and other resources to help people gain new skills and become immediately qualified for new roles.²⁵ In fiscal year 2021, the website's first year, nearly 10,000 students participated in the upskilling training and the page received over 74,000 views, making it one of CUNY's most visited pages.²⁶ CUNY has since continued its upskilling program, discussed more below.

As the immediate effects of the COVID-19 pandemic began to stabilize and the nation, city, and CUNY returned to previous programming and priorities, OCIP refocused on its original goals, informed by the pandemic's impact.



Partnership Grant Areas of Focus

The Partnership Grant helped to propel CUNY into, in the words of Keri Larkin, a period of “true transformation,” from an institution that, “like most higher education institutions, viewed graduation as the end goal” to one that proactively and from many directions is “thinking through the student’s long-term outcome.”²⁷ This shift will improve outcomes for CUNY’s hundreds of thousands of students and their families each year while also bringing CUNY students’ talents to bear in industries across the city, thus reinforcing a mutually beneficial talent pipeline.

“Improving graduates’ career outcomes is a key priority at CUNY and we are grateful to Centerbridge and Bain & Company for their powerful support, which has helped us develop and scale coordinated initiatives to connect an increasing number of students from across our 25 campuses to the city’s top employers,” said CUNY Chancellor Félix V. Matos Rodríguez. “These programs help CUNY make good on its historic mandate to transform the lives of New Yorkers through higher education, which opens the door to life-changing careers and in turn elevates all of New York City.”

Lauren Andersen, who leads OCIP as CUNY’s Associate Provost for Careers and Industry Partnerships, emphasizes the benefit of the transformation to both CUNY students and the New York City community overall, describing it as not only “changing the game for our students when they leave our doors” but also as a means of driving economic development in New York City and in the region.²⁸

An overarching focus of the Partnership Grant was bringing new and existing programming to scale. The Partnership Grant pushed CUNY “to be more strategic,” moving away from “individual small-scale programs” and towards programs that can “scale much further across campuses.”²⁹ With this in mind, CUNY’s work during the Partnership Grant period focused on the following areas.

Infrastructure and Alignment

Prioritization of Student Career Success Across the University

Throughout the Partnership Grant period, CUNY engaged in an extensive change management effort to align each level of the university to the goal of prioritizing student career outcomes, from the Chancellor

to individual faculty and staff at individual campuses. At the highest level of the university, “over the last three years ... [the] Chancellor has elevated the career success of students to be a top priority for the University.”³⁰ In June 2023, CUNY named student career success as a primary goal in its seven-year strategic plan.³¹ This reprioritization amounts to, according to Centerbridge Foundation Managing Director Johanna Meadows, “a total, catalytic shift in CUNY’s mission.”³²

Expansion and Elevation of OCIP

At the outset of the Partnership Grant, OCIP, then known as the Office of Continuing Education and Workforce Programs (“CWEP”), focused mainly on students in continuing education (non-degree) programs and was “buried way down within the Office of Academic Affairs” within CUNY’s central office.³³ In 2022, in alignment with the Chancellor’s priorities and the goals of the Partnership Grant, the Chancellor elevated the office to the Chancellor’s Cabinet, a leadership team that meets regularly with the Chancellor.³⁴ The office was renamed OCIP, sending the message that the office had a mandate much broader than continuing education.³⁵

OCIP was also elevated to the Provost's cabinet, "in recognition that a lot of what [the office is] doing now is not just something that's ancillary, but actually embedded into all of the academic enterprise that CUNY is supporting."³⁶ In this position, OCIP collaborates directly with provosts and faculty chairs,³⁷ helping to ensure that student career outcomes are a university-wide academic focus.

At the outset of the Partnership Grant, OCIP (then CEWP), had a staff of 40. As of October 2023 it had grown to a staff of 55 operating across four divisions.³⁸ OCIP has developed capacity to (1) support industry hubs and employer connections for the university as a whole, (2) oversee workforce programs for non-degree students, (3) operate internship programs across campuses and programs, and (4) transform operations, including technology platforms, to serve more students at the speed of business. To carry out these functions, OCIP plays a role both in supporting and enabling work performed by campuses and in running its own programs university-wide.³⁹ In addition to OCIP's direct staff, OCIP initiated the hiring of 34 campus-based staff embedded within academic departments through the CUNY Inclusive Economy initiative (described below), who report directly to the academic departments they work in and are not included in OCIP's headcount.

Furthermore, before the Partnership Grant, a decreasing number of OCIP's employees were on "tax levy" payroll, meaning they are public employees paid by public funds, either via CUNY's internal budget allocations or through legislative appropriations. As described in more detail below, a major benefit of the Partnership Grant is that it has helped CUNY secure significant additional public and private funding. As of October 2023, 12 staff members—in addition to 30 of the CUNY Inclusive Economy advisors—were on "tax levy" payroll.

"We really need the departments to be where students are encouraged and supported to think deeply about their careers, about career options and about what those jobs look like. And then to enable students to have relevant experiences to increase their understanding and preparation. This means having career-oriented advisors, paid internships, and work-based learning experiences embedded within the degree program."

– Keri Larkin, Bain

Collaboration With Campus Departments and Faculty

Even with expanded staff and elevated priorities, the CUNY team understood that career advising could not take place solely within OCIP. As Lauren Andersen explained, "We don't have any students here at central. So whatever we set up [within OCIP] is not going to serve [students] unless the campuses are brought in and have the resources they need to do it."⁴⁰

CUNY's academic programs would need to be enlisted and developed to support student career success to have impact at scale. To achieve this, OCIP worked with the Provost and academic faculty to develop their capacities to leverage opportunities, information, and relationships with industry partners to improve student career outcomes. During the Partnership Grant period, among other efforts, CUNY launched:

- **Career Success Fellows**, a learning community for selected faculty who receive training on integrating student career planning and aspirations into the classroom.⁴¹ There are 50 career success fellows for the 2023-24 academic year,⁴² and OCIP anticipates continuing to grow the program.⁴³ The program is supported by CUNY's new Office of Transformation, established in June 2022 and led by the new role of Chief Transformation Officer, whose work includes engaging faculty and equipping them to integrate careers into their curriculum.^{44,45}
- **Futures in Finance**, a partnership with Centerbridge, Bloomberg, and Goldman Sachs, to help CUNY students and alumni prepare for and connect with careers in financial services and the investment industry.⁴⁶ To implement the program, OCIP provided intensive support to academic departments at individual campuses to support students with career planning and connections, representing the first instance of OCIP providing capacity-building support to academic departments.⁴⁷ In this way, Futures in Finance served as a model for CUNY Inclusive Economy, described below, as a way of developing and working with campuses to support students directly.
- **CUNY Inclusive Economy**, an initiative that invests in teams of hybrid academic-career advisors and industry specialists embedded in departments across CUNY's campuses. With 34 campus-based advisors working in pairs and each pair working with a cohort of 200 students, CUNY expects the program to reach 3,400 students during the 2023-24 Academic Year.⁴⁸ CUNY has secured an additional \$9 million in public and private funding for this program.⁴⁹ CUNY Inclusive Economy also supports industry partnerships, described below.

- **Careers Across the Disciplines**, a faculty-led effort to integrate career aspirations and connections into the classroom and degree paths through 1) support for faculty training and recognition, 2) integration of careers into orientations, coursework, and advising, and 3) embedded paid work-based learning opportunities.

Through these efforts, CUNY has supported faculty who believe that they, too, in addition to OCIP and other more explicitly career-focused staff, are responsible for student career options.⁵⁰

External Engagement

CUNY's work under the Partnership Grant required transforming not just its internal infrastructure and alignment, but also the ways in which it engaged externally, including with sources of public and private funding and industry partners.

Additional Public and Private Funding

During the Partnership Grant, with support from the Chancellor and Provost in communicating the message of CUNY's investment in better career outcomes for its students, combined with Centerbridge's investment and Bain's support in developing a roadmap for transformational change, CUNY was able to secure significant additional funding from both public and private sources.⁵¹ When the Partnership Grant was awarded in 2020, OCIP's Career Success Initiatives were financially supported by 10 foundations and corporations. During the grant period, this number grew by 25, translating to about \$6 million per year in additional funding on average. This substantial—and in some cases, sustained—outside funding demonstrates the catalytic effect of the Partnership Grant and the propensity for the work and impact to grow beyond the Partnership Grant period.

Public funding has included a \$4.4 million U.S. Department of Education grant for upskilling and \$12 million in wages and administration for the 2021 Summer Youth Employment Program. In 2023, New York City baselined CUNY's Career Launch, a summer internship program, in its budget with an annual commitment of about \$8 million.⁵² CUNY has also gained traction with private funders, securing millions of dollars in private grants each year during the Partnership Grant period to support, among other initiatives, future of work and upskilling programs. These funders include Bank of New York Mellon, Blackstone Charitable Foundation, the Carroll and Milton Petrie Foundation, Robin Hood Foundation, and Tiger Foundation, among others.⁵³ Some

initiatives have received both private and public funding: for example, CUNY Inclusive Economy, launched in early 2023 and described in more detail above, is supported by \$13 million in funding from New York City, \$1.5 million from the Cognizant Foundation, and \$1.5 million from the Charina Endowment Fund.⁵⁴

Industry Partnerships

Partnerships between CUNY and industry employers are mutually beneficial: They help students access internships and employment, and they help employers tap into the local and diverse CUNY talent pipeline, the largest in the city.⁵⁵ Yet CUNY's system for managing industry partnerships, stemming from CUNY's founding history as a collection of independent campuses later consolidated into a single system, has historically been largely decentralized and highly inefficient, with each campus acting autonomously in their relationships with industry partners, who in turn are required to manage connections with each campus, foregoing economies of scale and resulting in information gaps, inefficiencies, and fewer opportunities for students.

During the term of the Partnership Grant, CUNY developed the CUNY Industry Support Hub to centralize CUNY's relationships with industry partners.

The Industry Hub functions as “a front door” that helps employers navigate all of CUNY,⁵⁶ streamlining and maximizing the value of those partnerships for both students and employers. The Industry Hub helps conduct intake and screen prospective employers before referring those inquiries to the appropriate campus destinations. OCIP is in the process of procuring a new client relationship management (“CRM”) platform to support the Industry Hub to serve as a central navigation point for industry partners. In the meantime, it has hired a data manager to help track and manage partnerships data.⁵⁷

Developing the Industry Hub and implementing the related CRM are important steps, and strengthening industry partnerships will be an important lever in CUNY's transformation going forward.

Student Programming and Communications

CUNY's near-term goal of the Partnership Grant is to increase student awareness of near-term career opportunities. As described by Lauren Andersen, "for us to be successful in ensuring that students can identify career interests early, understand what it takes to pursue them, and get all the skills technically and professionally, they need to be successful and actually [have opportunities to] demonstrate their skills through applied experience, like internships. That needs to start from Day 1 for students, and it needs to be embedded within their degree path."⁵⁸ To do this, CUNY launched a variety of programs and communications strategies to spread student awareness of and access to internships and other career preparation opportunities.

Integration of Career Connections from Day One

Before the Partnership Grant, few CUNY students had clarity, information, and opportunities to learn about careers and engage in career exploration.⁵⁹ During the Partnership Grant period, CUNY schools doubled down on prioritizing career development and aligning messaging to make it clear to students that CUNY prioritized their career success, from orientation through graduation.⁶⁰ OCIP has worked to incorporate this messaging into advising, course selection, internships, career exploration, and mentoring and networking.⁶¹

Increasing Access to and Awareness of Paid Internships

An aspect of increasing student awareness of career success opportunities and a primary goal of OCIP's work during the Partnership Grant was to increase student awareness of, and the number of students accessing, paid internship opportunities and to ensure that every student sees internships as an essential component of their degree experience.⁶² Challenges to doing so included the small number of paid internship opportunities available and the burden of identifying and securing an internship, which often falls on the individual student without sufficient support from the university to support equitable access.⁶³



To address these challenges, during the Partnership Grant period, OCIP accomplished the following:

- In 2022, OCIP started **Career Launch**, a summer internship program that targets community college students and those without previous internship experience. In its inaugural year, Career Launch received over 11,000 applications for Summer 2022 internships and enrolled 1,910 as summer interns, 88% of whom had not previously had a paid internship related to their career goals.⁶⁴ In 2023, this number increased to nearly 100%.⁶⁵ An important yet unanticipated consequence of the program was that over 20% of the program's 284 first-year employers hired their interns in full- or part-time roles after the conclusion of the summer internship.⁶⁶ Another indicator of the program's success and future longevity, New York City subsequently baselined Career Launch in its budget with roughly an \$8 million annual commitment.⁶⁷
- Complementing its summer internship work, OCIP secured \$4 million from New York State to start **CUNY Spring Forward** in February 2023, a spring internship program modeled on Career Launch.⁶⁸ In its first year, Spring Forward received more than 2,400 applications and matched 630 students with paid internship opportunities for Spring 2023 internships.⁶⁹
- OCIP expanded the existing **CUNY Internship Program**, which now serves 13 city agencies and has added state agencies, including recent partnerships with the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) and New York State Information Technology Department, each of which support over 100 CUNY interns annually.⁷⁰
- OCIP also expanded two internship programs designed to convert to employment: It continued to expand the **Internship to Employment** program, which provides graduating students with an 8-week paid internship, followed by 24 weeks of subsidized employment at companies with less than 100 employees, and partnered with the city to expand the **Civil Service Pathways Fellowship**, which provides an on-ramp to public sector roles for CUNY graduates.⁷¹
- Through **CUNY Inclusive Economy**, described above, the embedded teams of academic-career advisors and industry specialists connect students to existing employer-paid internships.
- In addition to paid internship opportunities, OCIP has announced plans to triple the number of **paid apprenticeships embedded within Associates of Applied Science (AAS) degree programs** and expand the degrees that offer such programs, giving students the opportunity to work for pay and credit with companies like existing employer partners Mastercard, Ernst & Young, Citigroup, American Express, New York Jobs CEO Council, and others.⁷² New York State has committed \$2 million to expand these apprenticeship programs.⁷³

Though CUNY has begun to successfully implement and scale these programs, the percentage of CUNY students securing an internship fell during the Partnership Grant period, from 20.6% in 2020 to 14.7% in fiscal year 2022 (data were not gathered in fiscal year 2021 because of the COVID-19 pandemic).⁷⁴

CUNY attributes this decline largely to the COVID-19 pandemic, which decreased the supply of paid internships (because of, e.g., decreases in public funding for paid internships through programs like NYC's Summer Youth Employment Program and the CUNY Service Corps, and a decline in internship positions at private employers) and demand from students (e.g., student enrollment declined and many students lacked a quiet, private workspace for remote work). Through the programs listed above, and in the face of continued challenges such as recent city-mandated budget cuts that have reduced or eliminated paid internship programs, CUNY is working to address these declines and meet its goal of a 30% paid internship participation rate, as outlined in CUNY's Strategic Roadmap. Meeting this ambitious goal will require CUNY to scale and sustain these programs, and to increase faculty, staff, and student awareness of them.

Upskilling

Begun in 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, CUNY has continued to develop and offer upskilling training to students, alumni, and even the general public, through the CUNY Upskilling website. In its first year (fiscal year 2021), CUNY offered online trainings to nearly 10,000 participants via widely accessible web platforms such as Coursera. However, beginning the following year, CUNY was required due to funding restrictions to collect participant Social Security numbers, which decreased the ways in which it could offer programming and decreased the subsequent number of participants (to 3,458 in 2022).⁷⁵ CUNY pivoted to in-classroom trainings and virtual trainings offered only through CUNY's own course offerings, thus focusing more on serving CUNY's current students over broader community engagement.

One way CUNY has worked to improve post-upskilling job outcomes is by pairing technical training with foundational skills development. Increasing dramatically since the first year of the upskilling program, 15 of CUNY's 17 non-degree departments now provide low- or no-cost upskilling courses to students in in-demand fields, funded by this program.

Data Collection and Analysis

Before the Partnership Grant, colleges across CUNY's 25 campuses collected different data points, used different systems for collecting and storing data, performed different analyses, and determined and tracked different goals concerning student career success.⁷⁶ The resulting system was one in which the campuses—and even programs within campuses—had varying results in understanding and tracking student career success, and CUNY had no easily accessible source for university-wide comprehensive data related to student career outcomes.⁷⁷ A crucial condition for OCIP's continued success is significant improvement of CUNY's data systems and technology solutions used across all campuses, used to track and support students and connect to industry partners.

Lauren Andersen said that “one of the great values of the Partnership Grant and of Bain's work was that it really put some measurement to how we're doing in terms of preparing our students for career outcomes ... Without that data infrastructure in place, it's really hard for us to know at scale what works versus a small scale project or pilot.”⁷⁸ With Bain and Centerbridge's support, CUNY was able to focus on “how to make more data-informed decisions.”⁷⁹

Even though, according to Keri Larkin, CUNY is “leaps and bounds from where they were five years ago,” throughout the Partnership Grant period, data collection, tracking, and analysis was and continues to be a challenge for CUNY. This has inhibited progress towards its long-term goal of the Partnership Grant: to increase accountability of college and CUNY leadership for leading and lagging key performance indicators related to career success. As Centerbridge identified in its 2023 Impact Team Assessment of the Partnership Grant, although CUNY's “program staff have the tools and knowledge needed to capture outputs” they do not yet have “the data architecture mindset needed to capture data points about students and match them with industry recruitment strategies.”⁸⁰

Below are examples of CUNY's progress with respect to data systems.

Centralized Data Tracking Systems

Before the Partnership Grant, the CUNY-wide performance management system that the Chancellor uses to track CUNY's success across campuses, known as the performance management process ("PMP"), used approximately 70 metrics, none of which were related to student career success; the closest was tracking the number of students enrolled in STEM programs.⁸¹ Through the Partnership Grant, Bain helped CUNY develop plans for a CUNY-wide data tracking system that would enable OCIP to track progress beyond post-graduation outcomes and self-reported student surveys.⁸² In collaboration with CUNY's institutional research colleagues, OCIP built a data collection system that CUNY could use now and in the long term.⁸³ With that system, OCIP worked with Bain to determine metric-based goals for the office.⁸⁴

Each CUNY campus is now held accountable in the PMP for measuring the career employment outcomes of its graduates and for reporting the participation rates for paid and unpaid internships, enabling CUNY to know which students have had at least one internship during their CUNY career.⁸⁵

Cap & Gown Survey

An example of increased data collection, but also of continued challenges and opportunities for improvement, is CUNY's new "Cap & Gown" survey, which it first piloted in Summer 2022. The survey is administered immediately prior to a student's graduation, and it tracks which students obtained employment at the time of graduation and which participated in career preparedness activities.⁸⁶ The data collected aids OCIP's understanding at a programmatic level, breaking down where students are missing on-ramps into particular types of careers and identifying where career programming and curricula can be improved.

In 2023, CUNY rolled out the survey to all graduating students. Although some campuses got as high as a 50% response rate,⁸⁷ the overall participation rate was too low to count this information as administrative data for each student.⁸⁸ CUNY remains focused on increasing participation rates, with efforts including enlisting its communications team, academic advisors, college provosts, and the Office of Student Affairs to spread awareness of the survey, and raffling gift cards to incentivize participation.⁸⁹

Student-Facing Data

As part of its focus on collecting, sharing, and using data to advance student career outcomes, OCIP wanted data to be collected and used by university and campus programs and personnel. It also wanted to give students easy access to wage and employment data and other resources to help them make decisions about careers and, relatedly, academic programs, majors, and courses. To this end, OCIP created a student wage dashboard for graduates 1 year, 3 years, and 5 years post-graduation.⁹⁰ Published internally in early 2020 and made publicly available in early 2021, it lets students see job earnings for alumni working in New York State by campus, degree program, and other metrics.⁹¹

In addition, since 2020 CUNY has provided data to the U.S. Census Bureau to incorporate in its Post-Secondary Employment Outcomes (PSEO) Wage Explorer.⁹² This includes data for CUNY alumni nation-wide (about 10% of CUNY graduates leave the state).

Key Takeaways and Future Considerations

Transforming a large public institution like CUNY is no small feat. CUNY has demonstrated success in laying the foundation for and catalyzing transformational change, but substantial challenges and work remain. The following considerations may benefit all parties in future work.

Considerations for CUNY

Data Analysis and Infrastructure Are Required to Scale and Sustain Change

CUNY's transformation was ultimately motivated by data, which, through Bain's pre-Partnership Grant analysis, revealed that far too few students are graduating and securing a job that pays a living wage 1 year after graduation. For CUNY to be truly student-centric and deliver on its mission of inclusive upward mobility, it needed to meaningfully change this number, and the first step is understanding the data and current state. As Keri Larkin noted, CUNY "was brave and incredibly forward thinking to ask for [that] data ... And the fact that they looked at these outcomes and said, 'What do we do about it?'"⁹³

Yet the actual process of data collection, including implementing new tools, remains a challenge. CUNY must continue to prioritize and push for data collection and analysis, and to develop data architecture university-wide, consistently using data to set priorities, inform decisions about how to allocate resources, and drive continuous learning and improvement.

Invest in Industry Partnerships

Growing, strengthening, and streamlining CUNY's industry partnerships is essential for CUNY to achieve impact at scale for its students and alumni. Resulting from CUNY's founding history as a network of individual campuses, industry partnerships are still managed largely at the campus level and have not yet been cohesively organized within OCIP. CUNY should prioritize and continue to invest in infrastructure—including data, systems, and personnel—to maximize their value for both CUNY and the employer partners, leading to sustained opportunities and impact for CUNY students and alumni.

Students Are and Must Remain at the Forefront

Responsible for educating more than 500,000 students each year and preparing them for and deploying them into one of the largest and most diverse economies in the world, CUNY's success as an institution is inseparable from that of its students. CUNY's transformational work around student career success has benefitted from keeping students at the forefront, and any story about CUNY as an institution must center around them. As Keri Larkin noted, "this is about giving individuals who otherwise might not have the opportunities, or the pathway, or the access, or the awareness, the opportunity to secure a job that gives them financial security, their family financial security, and a choice-filled life. The students are the heart and soul of this and the reason for doing it."⁹⁴

Keeping students at the forefront also means empowering them to understand their career opportunities and make career-related decisions throughout their time at CUNY and beyond, and OCIP will reach and impact each student only through scaling programs that support students to do this. For example, with student-to-career counselor ratios at more than 3,000:1, CUNY must find other ways to give each student personalized service and advice. Over the next year, CUNY plans to implement an AI-powered technology solution to assist with resume creation and review. Implementing this software has been delayed due to New York State procurement policies. Going forward, CUNY should prioritize identifying and implementing technology solutions that will enable it to effectively scale its programs and support each student, and work to navigate and account for CUNY's historically decentralized structure and bureaucratic restrictions to do so.

Considerations for Centerbridge and Bain

Support from Centerbridge and Bain played a significant role in CUNY's progress during the Partnership Grant. As Centerbridge and Bain continue efforts to select and support grant partnerships, considerations may be drawn from CUNY's experience.

Continue to Invest In Opportunities for Expanded Support

Centerbridge's investment in—and Bain's support of—CUNY has been and continues to be transformative. Building on work begun during the Partnership Grant, Centerbridge continues to support CUNY through several initiatives, including the Futures in Finance program and fellowships and internships. Bain has also continued to support Centerbridge in broad and transformative ways, building on its work during the Partnership Grant and the pre-Partnership Grant project as well as new areas of support, and growing its partnership with CUNY to be a top priority of Bain's social impact practice.

This support has enabled CUNY to architect, begin to implement, and continuously evaluate and adjust its strategies for supporting student career opportunities, catalyzing a sea change that has and will continue to be transformative for CUNY students and the university overall.

Michael Yohai, CUNY's Senior Director of Operations and Finance, says the Bain engagement was “the golden apple. That was what we really needed in order to figure out what transformation would look like and what we needed.”⁹⁵ He credits Bain with enabling CUNY to secure millions of dollars in additional private and public funding that will sustain this work for years.⁹⁶ Johanna Meadows also says that Bain's work was particularly impactful for CUNY. “With such a broad mandate and scale, we were lucky to have such a strong Bain team with a depth of knowledge around increasing impact. They were able to focus the work and prioritize the immediate needs of CUNY students.”⁹⁷ Of Centerbridge's continued investment in CUNY, Lauren Andersen credits Centerbridge with not only “supporting [CUNY] financially,” but also providing sustained non-financial supports. “We have always benefited from [Centerbridge's] buy-in and insight ... they are always ready to engage ... to help us think through things or even build the professional development capacity of our staff.”⁹⁸

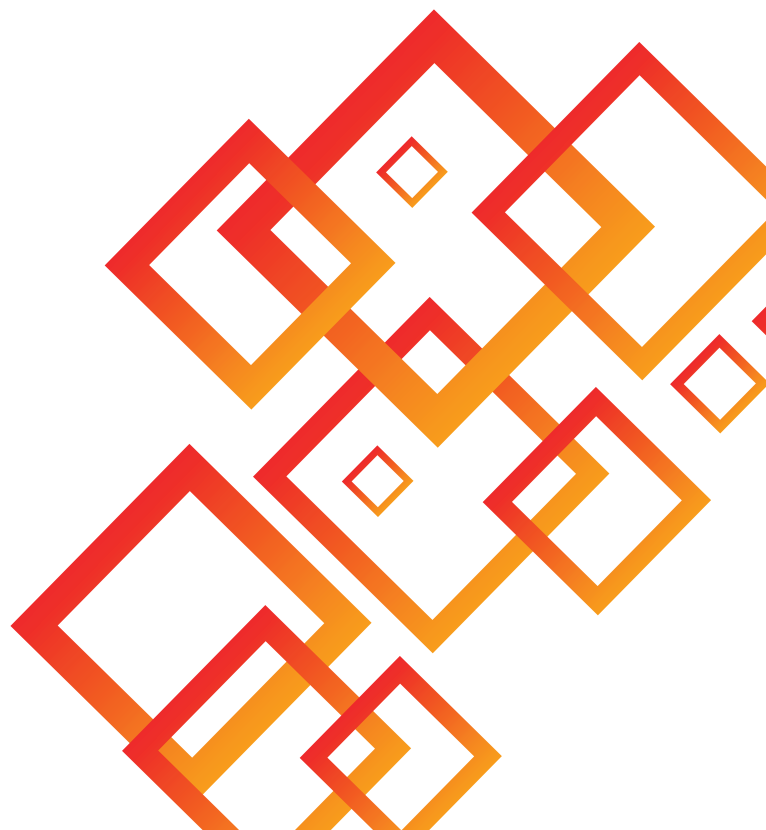
Centerbridge and Bain should continue to support grant partners with individualized scopes of support, expanding and continuing support where appropriate and useful for the particular grant partner.

Transformative Change Requires Sustained Investment and Accounting for Roadblocks.

As evidenced by CUNY's progress during the Partnership Grant period, transformative change for a large, public institution is complex and slow, and success requires substantial and sustained investments of money, time, focus, and other resources. One complication is that the scope of required work and potential challenges to complete it may not be known at the outset. For example, Keri Larkin said that at the beginning of the Bain engagement, “we were surprised at the order of magnitude, at how much work needed to get done.”⁹⁹

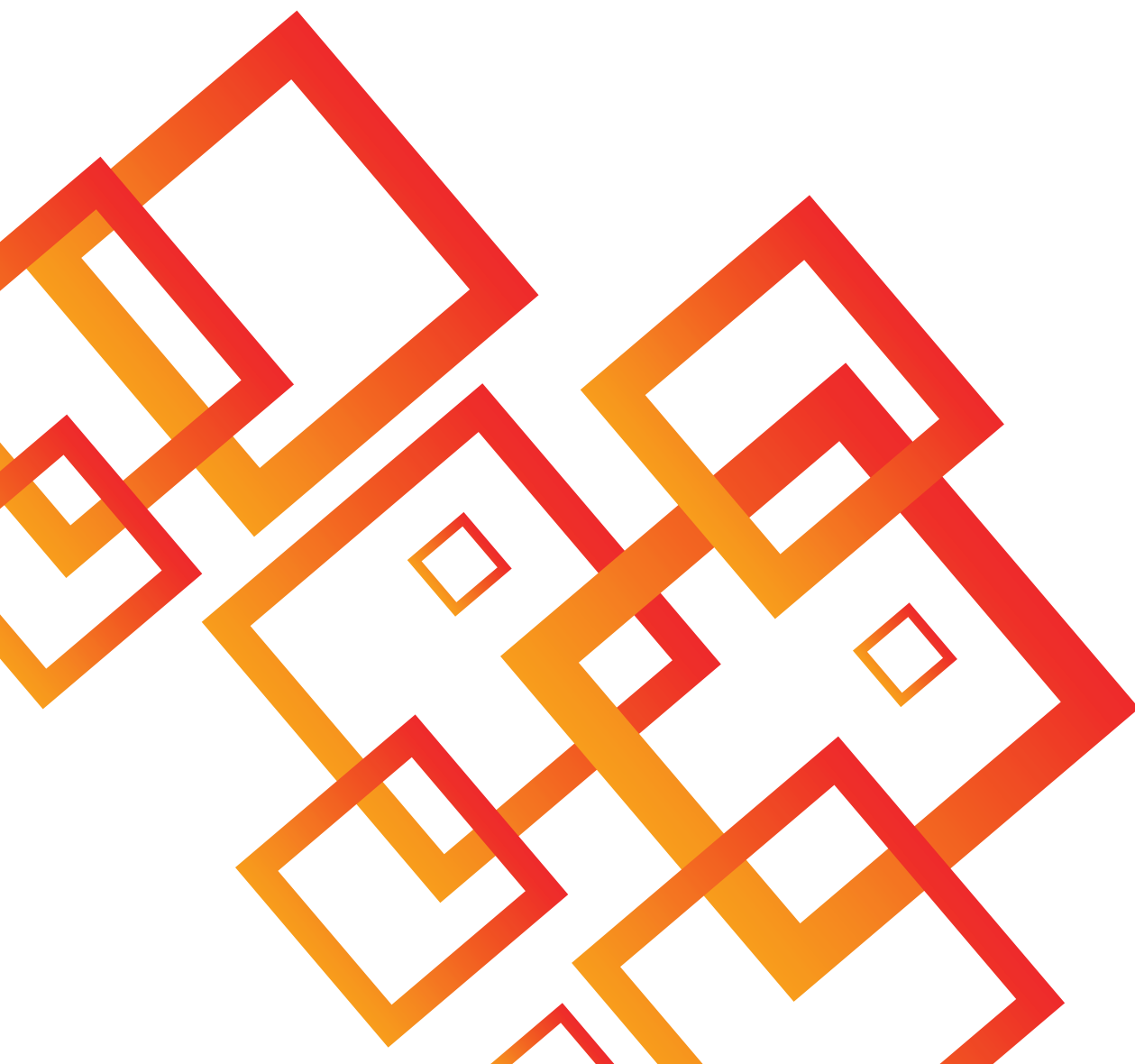
“This is the biggest ship in the country, and we're trying to turn it.”—Keri Larkin

Although such factors should be considered in the planning process, they should not deter investment. Overall, the progress CUNY has made underscores the importance of undertaking such efforts, even though results may take longer and require greater investment to achieve, and of investing in and sustaining them through long-term efforts. As Larkin noted, CUNY's work related to student career success “is transformative for the country...and for our city and for other systems, because if you can do it here, you can do it anywhere.”¹⁰⁰



Conclusion

The work of the Partnership Grant has laid the foundation for transformational change. As CUNY continues to develop and scale this work, it must continue to collect and use data to drive decision-making, to scale and improve student programming, to invest in industry partnership, and to continue doing what it has always done: Prioritize students and center their experiences. In doing so, it will be well-positioned to address remaining challenges and continue to drive CUNY to prioritize career success, developing a bidirectional talent pipeline to improve outcomes for CUNY students, alumni, their families, and New York City overall.

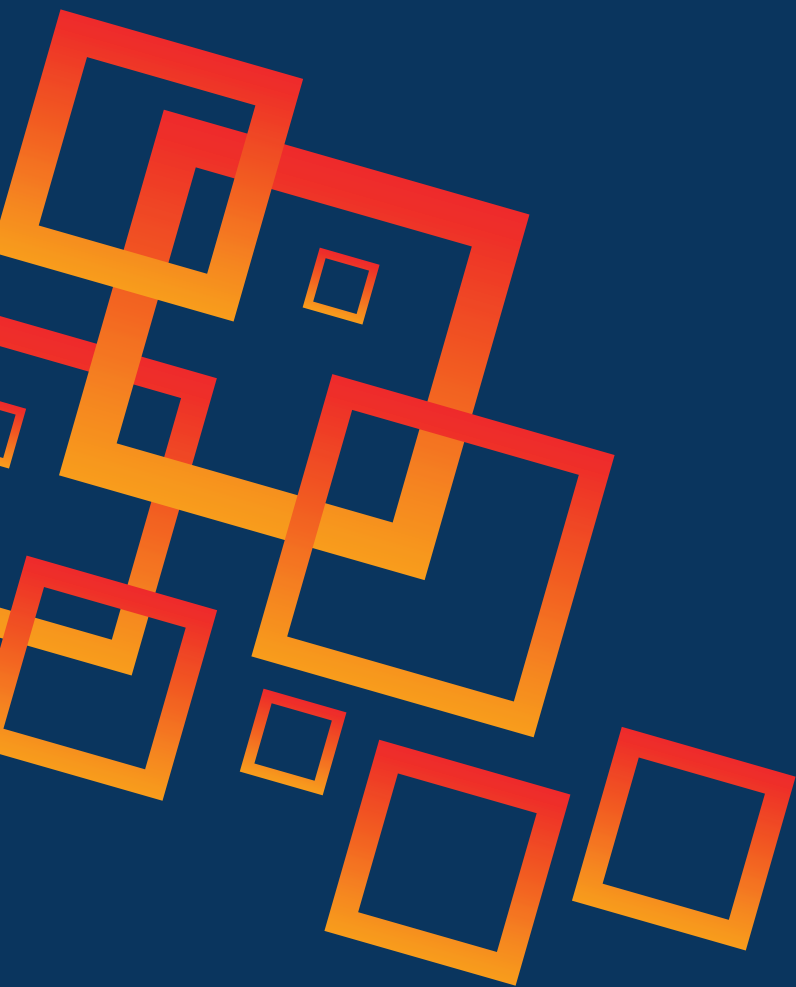


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