

# Letter of Recommendation Pilot

This year, the Department of Youth and Community Development, in partnership with the University of Pennsylvania, is conducting a "letter of recommendation" pilot. We are asking employers to fill out surveys about some of their Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) youth. We will use the information they provide to construct a letter of recommendation for these youth. The youth will be able to show the letters to teachers, guidance counselors, and potential employers. We hope the letters will help youth leverage their summer experiences into better school performance and more productive job opportunities.

If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact the faculty at the University of Pennsylvania who are partnering with SYEP on the pilot: Judd B. Kessler ([judd.kessler@wharton.upenn.edu](mailto:judd.kessler@wharton.upenn.edu)) and Sara Heller ([hellersa@sas.upenn.edu](mailto:hellersa@sas.upenn.edu)).

## FAQs

### What is the pilot study?

Rigorous evidence has shown that SYEP has extraordinary effects on youth in terms of keeping them safe and out of trouble. But it does not dramatically improve their education or employment outcomes. One idea for expanding SYEP's impact in those areas is to share more information about youth with the adults who contribute to their education and labor market success: parents, teachers, guidance counselors, and future employers. So, in partnership with researchers at the University of Pennsylvania, we are testing whether providing letters of recommendation about the skills youth develop during SYEP can help them leverage their summer experiences into better school performance and more productive job opportunities.

### **As an employer, what do I have to do?**

If one or more youth who worked for you this summer are randomly selected to be part of the pilot, you will receive an email inviting you to complete a short survey, which should take you 1 to 2 minutes per youth. Your responses about each youth will be used to generate a letter of recommendation specific to that youth.

### **Does every SYEP participant get a letter?**

No, only some youth have been randomly selected to participate in the pilot. We are starting small so that we can work out the kinks and test whether the letters actually help youth before asking every employer to provide information on every youth they employ.

### **I'm a youth who received a letter. What should I do with it?**

We hope that telling the adults around you about your individual strengths will help open doors for you. So, if you are still in school, you can give copies of the letter to your teachers and guidance counselors. If you are applying for a job, you can include a copy of the letter in your application. If you run out of letters, check the e-mail account that you used for your SYEP application for an email with your letter as an attachment!

### **I received a letter from a youth. Does it reflect information about that youth in particular, or does everyone get the same letter?**

The contents of the letter reflect what an actual employer thought about that particular youth. We asked employers to rate individual SYEP employees separately on a number of characteristics. The contents of the letter are direct responses about that specific youth. Although the format of the letter is common across all pilot participants, the contents are about that individual youth.