

ELEVATE+

Leveling the playing field with paid internships

2024 Impact Report



Dear Friends,

What an extraordinary year 2024 was for Elevate+! While we continued to serve marginalized students by providing access to internships, it was a period of significant transition and progress. We've intentionally moved beyond our early start-up phase into a more mature and robust organization, ready to meet the challenges and opportunities of the future.

This past year marked a milestone: the evolution of our name from Eleven+ to Elevate+. This change not only reflects our growth as an organization but also underscores our mission to elevate underserved students through transformative, paid internship experiences that foster economic equity and opportunity. We believe this name better captures our essence and impact.

We also introduced a new tagline: *"Leveling the playing field with paid internships."* This, along with updated branding, reinforces our dedication to creating equitable opportunities for underserved students.

Our professional development programming grew with the addition of master classes. These sessions helped our students develop personal brands with a LinkedIn expert and gain insights from a corporate recruiter into what employers seek in early career applicants. These enhancements reflect our commitment to equipping students for success.

We also hit a milestone in 2024, placing a student into our 150th meaningful, paid internship. We partnered with new organizations and introduced innovative support structures, while continuing our strong mentor program, to empower participants for success. These achievements reflect our evolution from an internship organization to a professional development organization.

Moreover, we made a significant shift in our financial practices, transitioning from a "just in time financing" approach—where we committed to fund intern wages before having the money in hand—to a sustainable model that budgets ahead of time and ensures we spend only funds already raised. This change represents a major step forward in our organizational maturity and financial stability.

Finally, in 2024, we appointed Stacey Slater as our first official Board Chair, transitioning this role from one I held rather informally, among my other responsibilities. Stacey's leadership has been instrumental in guiding Elevate+ through this transformative year.

Our Success in 2024 would not have been possible without so many of you. Whether you contributed time, resources, and/or expertise, your support has driven our mission forward. Together, we are building a future where every student has the opportunity to succeed based on talent, drive, and ambition.

Thank you for being an essential part of our journey. I invite you to explore our achievements in this report and to continue partnering with us as we elevate even more students toward brighter futures.

With gratitude,



Andrew Walker, Founder



Our Purpose

Students from underserved and disenfranchised communities often lack the access to internships which are critical for building skills and creating networks. Elevate+ levels the playing field, ensuring these students can get great paid internships doing meaningful work. As a result, young people gain transferrable hard and soft skills, valuable experience, and a network of mentors and peers that are critical to future success in the workplace.

Intern
Placements

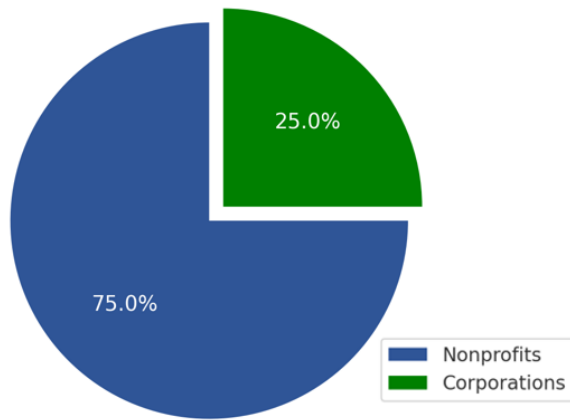
150

Since our start in 2021, Elevate+ has placed marginalized students into 150 impactful summer internships, helping them to build the skills, relationships, and confidence they need to prepare them for the future.

36

In 2024, we placed students into 36 internships. 27 were with nonprofit hosts while another 9 were with corporations. Each student was paired with a mentor within their host organization who provided coaching and support throughout the summer.

Internship Distribution Among Host Partners



Interweave mentor and intern, Janet and Kia

A Transitional Year: Stretching the Dollar

In previous years, Elevate+ directly funded the wages for interns working with nonprofits, while corporate partners self-funded their interns' wages. However, in late 2023, we adopted a new budgeting model to focus on fundraising for student wages in the preceding year. This change left us with a very short timeframe to secure the necessary funds to support interns in 2024, as most of our 2024 fundraising efforts were earmarked for 2025 student wages.

To maximize students' opportunities during this transitional year, we invited our nonprofit host organizations to contribute toward their interns' wages. Many partners stepped up to the challenge, funding between 25% and 100% of the \$17.50 hourly wage. This collaborative effort allowed us to expand our nonprofit placements, employing seven additional students.

We are immensely grateful to the **Greater Cleveland Partnership**, which committed to funding all 14 of our Ohio nonprofit placements for 2024—over half of the 27 nonprofit internships. Meanwhile, our for-profit corporate hosts continued to fully self-fund nine additional internships, bringing our total placements for 2024 to 36.

This collaborative approach not only allowed us to stretch our resources further but also set a strong precedent for shared investment in our interns' success.

Intern Success Story

Cyreema Marshall

Internship: **Discovery Orchestra, Summer 2022**

HTTV, Summer 2023

Currently: **Senior, Emory University**

Before joining Elevate+, Cyreema Marshall was a freshman at Emory University, eager to explore her career options. "Ms. Amato at North Star Academy connected me with this incredible program, and I'm so grateful she did," Cyreema shared.

As an administrative intern at **Discovery Orchestra**, Cyreema managed event logistics, data entry, and other critical tasks. The following summer, she honed her media skills with **HTTV**, where she edited her own video projects—an experience that had a lasting impact. **"Working with HTTV convinced me that I wanted to pursue media production as part of my career,"** she shared.

The professional development resources offered by Elevate+, particularly the speaker series, were transformative for Cyreema. "The sessions were both informative and inspiring." The summer following her HTTV internship, Elevate+ hired Cyreema to host the speaker series, where professionals shared their experiences and tips for success. Hosting the series, **"helped me build confidence and master professional communication,"** she explained.

Reflecting on her journey, Cyreema believes Elevate+ played a pivotal role in her success. **"Elevate+ connected me with mentors and gave me experiences I wouldn't have had otherwise,"** she emphasized. She advises future interns to maintain connections through natural conversations and seize every opportunity to grow.

Today, Cyreema continues to apply the skills she developed with Elevate+, especially her editing expertise, in her academic and professional pursuits. **"I would absolutely recommend Elevate+ to others. It's an opportunity to gain invaluable experience and build a strong network,"** she added.



Did you know?

Investing \$5,000 in a summer intern will shorten the time it takes her to secure a job after college and help her earn a higher salary. Over her lifetime, her internship can add at least **\$1,500,000** in earnings. (N.A.C.E., 2022)

Thank you to our Host Partners

Our work would not be possible without the host partners who create meaningful summer job opportunities for our students. We are deeply grateful to the 31 organizations across eight states that hosted interns in 2024, providing invaluable professional experiences that help shape their futures.

31

Intern Hosts



Intern Success Story



Francisco Velez

Internship: **Destination Cleveland, 2023**

Currently: **Senior, Cleveland State University**

Before joining Elevate+, Francisco Velez balanced college, part-time work as a construction laborer, and serving as an assistant wrestling coach. While these experiences taught him the value of hard work, he sought professional opportunities aligned with his interest in business administration. **"I was eager to gain professional experience that aligned with my interests,"** Francisco shared.

Through Elevate+, Francisco interned at **Destination Cleveland**, where he supported Human Resources, IT, Operations, and Finance functions. "My day-to-day responsibilities included assisting with social media campaigns, planning community engagement events, and analyzing data to improve outreach strategies," he explained. One standout project involved helping the organization adopt environmentally conscious practices, which resonated deeply with Francisco as a Cleveland native. "Seeing these changes benefit the community I call home was incredibly rewarding," he said.

The professional development resources offered by Elevate+ were transformative. **"The training sessions and networking events taught me how to present myself professionally and build meaningful connections,"** he noted. These skills became invaluable as he began exploring career opportunities.

After his Elevate+ internship, Francisco interned with the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland and later secured a full-time role after graduation in a rotational program with CINTAS. **"Elevate+ opened doors I didn't even know existed,"** he emphasized.

Francisco advises future interns to fully embrace the program. **"Take advantage of every opportunity, connect with mentors, and don't be afraid to step out of your comfort zone,"** he shared. Today, he applies the skills he developed during his internships and remains committed to making a difference in his community. **"Elevate+ is more than a program; it's a community that equips you to achieve your goals,"** he said.

Francisco's story is a testament to the power of opportunity and mentorship, showcasing how Elevate+ helps young professionals unlock their potential and build meaningful careers.

"Elevate+ opened doors I didn't even know existed"

Professional Development

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Professional Development Events

Elevate+ provides more than just a summer job. Beyond hands-on work experience, we offer students a robust suite of professional development programs to support their growth.

In 2024, we held 18 separate sessions that included:

Job Readiness Training – A virtual,

interactive course preparing students for professional environments. Covering personal organization, time management, prioritization, and workplace communication, the program offered three scheduling options before internships began.

Master Classes – Skill building sessions provided advanced training on personal branding and candidate success. Classes included: “Mastering LinkedIn for Success” and “Recruiter Tips and Strategies”. For students participating in our white-label Upward Mobility diversity program for the employee mobility industry, it also included industry-specific classes, “Relocation 101” and “Global Trends in Talent Mobility”.



Elevate+ Trustee Anthony Gonzalez led the personal branding class, “Mastering LinkedIn for Success”.

Role Model Speaker Series – A fireside chat-style discussion featuring accomplished professionals with backgrounds similar to our interns’. Elevate+ alumna **Cyreema Marshall** interviewed Univision’s **Bill Tipacti**, Adobe’s **Nora Ali**, and SixDegrees’ **Stacy Huston**, who shared their career journeys, insights, and advice.

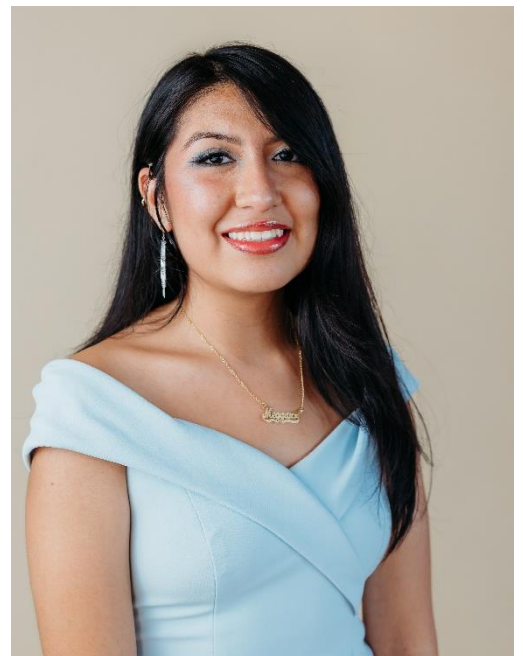


Role Model speaker Stacy Huston, the Executive Director of SixDegrees.org, inspired our interns in August.



In June, Cleveland interns participated in a networking workshop facilitated by executive coach Rod Williams. They were later joined by mentors and distinguished guests for lunch, followed by a professional photoshoot for sharp looking headshots.

Networking Events – Networking is a distinct skill that improves with practice. Elevate+ facilitated seven opportunities to help interns build confidence in relationship-building. These included two structured workshops, four in-person events with peers, mentors, and supporters, and several virtual sessions. At in-person events in Connecticut, New Jersey, and Ohio, we also provided professional headshots.



Head shots by professional photographers in Ohio, New Jersey, and Connecticut.

Left: Jocelyn by Photos Collette, Cleveland

Center: Kia by Basse Media, Newark

Right: Meggan by Brenda De Los Santos Photography, New London

Intern Success Story

Neema David

Internship: **Global Cleveland, 2024**

Currently: **Senior, Cleveland State University**

Neema David's journey is one of resilience and determination. As a child, her family fled the Democratic Republic of Congo, living in a Ugandan refugee camp before immigrating to Cleveland. She quickly adapted to a new language and culture while supporting her family. At Cleveland State University, she balanced studies, caregiving, and volunteering.

Her path led her to the Elevate+ internship program, where she gained mentorship and hands-on experience.

At **Global Cleveland**, Neema served as an Outreach Coordinator, working to foster international connections. "I organized outreach events, built relationships with diverse groups, and assisted with program development," she shared. "I also conducted research and helped design initiatives that promote inclusivity and engagement."

Neema credits Elevate+ with providing professional development that shaped her career. **"The training sessions gave me practical skills like communication, project management, and leadership strategies that I continue to use. The speaker series was incredibly inspiring, and networking events opened doors to new opportunities."**

Her internship influenced her academic and career goals. "It helped me see how my International Relations studies apply to community engagement and global connectivity. **I now aspire to work in the nonprofit or public sector, creating programs that support immigrants and marginalized groups.**"

Neema remains grateful for her Global Cleveland colleagues, especially her mentor, **Evan Chwalek**. **"His guidance shaped my confidence and leadership skills."** Since completing Elevate+, Neema has taken on new leadership roles, expanding her impact. Her story is a testament to mentorship, experience, and perseverance in shaping future professionals and serves as an inspiration to others seeking to make a difference in the world.



"His guidance shaped my confidence and leadership skills"

Talent Sources

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Our Talent Partners

At Elevate+, we are committed to empowering students from marginalized communities by providing them with meaningful, paid internship opportunities. To reach these talented individuals, we collaborate with a dynamic network of Talent Partners—high schools,

community enrichment programs, and universities—that help us connect with bright, motivated students from low-income backgrounds.

These partnerships are essential to our success. By sharing our summer job descriptions and application information, our Talent Partners play a critical role in identifying and supporting students who stand to benefit most from career-building opportunities. Their dedication ensures that the next generation of leaders gains the experience, skills, and professional networks needed to thrive.

In 2024, students were referred to the Elevate+ opportunities from fifteen partners:

Braven

Engage! Cleveland

The Orchid Foundation

Case Western Reserve

Higher Edge

The PEP Program

Cleveland State University

KIPP New Jersey

The Summit Partnership

Destination College

Montclair State University

Uncommon Schools

Drew University

Saint Peters University

Vivid Stage



Intern Success Story

Aryel Rodriguez

Internship: **SAGE Eldercare, Summer 2022**

Currently: **Software Engineer, Mastercard**

Before successfully applying to Elevate+ to be a communications intern at **SAGE Eldercare**, Aryel Rodriguez had only worked part-time retail and food service jobs. "I was inspired to apply for the internship by a friend who spoke highly of the program's professional growth opportunities," he said. At SAGE Eldercare, Aryel managed social media, crafted

newsletters, and organized outreach events, gaining skills that prepared him for professional environments.

One standout project for Aryel was leading a digital campaign to raise awareness for eldercare resources. **"The professional development sessions taught me how to communicate my ideas clearly and gave me the confidence to speak up during meetings,"** he shared.

Elevate+ helped Aryel overcome initial challenges of adapting to a professional setting and shaped his career trajectory. He encourages future interns to embrace all the program's opportunities. **"Take all the professional advice you can get and use it as much as possible. It can really shape your future,"** he advised.

While Aryel ultimately decided to pursue a slightly different career path, the skills he gained through Elevate+ have been invaluable. The experience shaped his ability to navigate professional environments and prepared him for future roles in the nonprofit sector.

Aryel credits Elevate+ with opening doors to new opportunities and equipping him with the skills to succeed. **"Elevate+ helped me in countless ways and prepared me for opportunities I wouldn't have had otherwise,"** he emphasized.

Did you know?

To date, Elevate+ has funded \$432,400 in intern wages. Including self and co-funded wages by host partners, we have paid interns nearly \$600,000.

Our Supporters

Just as we rely on our host and talent partners, our work would not be possible without the generosity of our supporters. In 2024, 181 individuals, couples, corporations, and foundations contributed to making our mission a reality.

181

Supporters

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Financial support makes our work possible.
Donations are gratefully received by PayPal or check.
We continue to fundraise to support our 2025 interns.

Elevate to Even+ Inc

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We level the playing field with your help.



Elevate+ Founder, Andrew Walker, with 2024 interns Meggan and Marnaysha

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