



PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact: Shireese M. Bell at 803-760-9125 or Shireese.Bell@columbiasc.gov

Area Youth Gain Work Experience through City of Columbia & Columbia Urban League Partnership

Sixty youth began their summer break at various sites in the City of Columbia as part of the Columbia Urban League's Science Technology Enrichment Program (STEP).

STEP exposes youth ages 14 to 19 to global technology and the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics skills necessary to obtain and maintain gainful employment in the emerging global workforce.

"In today's dynamic world, the fields of science, technology, engineering, and math are crucially important," Columbia Mayor Steve Benjamin said. "Teaching our young people about Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics education breeds a generation of innovators and critical thinkers."

"As Columbia continues to become a world-class city, rich with a competitive talent pool and ample opportunities, our support for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics education must be at the frontline of our education discussions," Benjamin said. "Thank you to the Columbia Urban League for providing our young people with an amazing Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics summer program filled with invention, creativity, and problem-solving."

More than 100 students have signed up to work during the summer across 22 sites in the City of Columbia. Students will work a minimum of two weeks per session through August 2.

City Manager Teresa Wilson said City of Columbia departments look forward to working with the young people of the STEP program every summer.

"Our staff purposefully decide to invest in the program and offer positions throughout the City to enrich the lives of these youth, and encourage the spirit of mentorship amongst City employees," Wilson said.

The program, which was founded in 1984, was created to engage youth in productive summer work experience while introducing them to career opportunities.

"This program highlights the importance of soft skills in career development," Columbia Urban League President and CEO James T. McLawhorn, Jr. said. "According to an article from the *Washington Post*, soft skills coupled with technology are what separates Google's top employees from the rest of the workforce."

Fifteen-year-old Irmo High School student, Alyssa Smith, said the STEP program is great for youth who are looking for their first job experience and encourages others to participate.

"It's a good beginning for people who want to learn about (new careers)," Smith said. "It can really help you learn new skills and progress (as a young adult)."

Smith said she has improved her computer skills while in the program because of the assignments she has been given, and has started to think about careers in Information Technology or Accounting.

For more information about the STEP program, contact the Columbia Urban League at 803-799-8150.

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Participating City of Columbia Departments and Locations

- Budget & Program Management
- Charles R. Drew Wellness Center
- City Manager's Office
- Columbia Animal Services
- Columbia Art Center
- Columbia Empowerment Zone
- Columbia Fire Department
- Columbia Police Department
- Community Development
- Greenview Park
- Hyatt Park
- Information Technology
- James E. Clyburn Golf Center
- Martin Luther King, Jr. Park
- Office of Business Opportunities
- Parks & Recreation Administration Office
- Procurement & Contracts
- Public & Media Relations
- Public Works
- Real Estate
- Utility Operations
- Wastewater Management