

## The Business Case for Investing in Youth Character Development

Today's rapidly changing, global economy demands a workforce that is flexible, resilient, and equipped with a range of social and emotional skills. This means youth entering the workforce will need more than just a postsecondary degree or technical skills to succeed in career and life.

Investing in character youth development is a key strategy that chambers of commerce can champion to improve workforce outcomes within their communities and ensure a thriving regional economy.

### What is the Connection Between Character and Employability?

Workplace demands are changing—workers increasingly need to know how to solve complex problems, make sound decisions, and adapt to changing demands throughout their careers. According to a [study](#) published in the Business and Professional Communication Quarterly—integrity, responsibility, work ethic, positivity, courtesy, communication, social skills and teamwork are believed to be among the *most* crucial traits for successful employees to possess. Thus, developing enriching, character-building opportunities for youth support the development of a competitive future workforce, and increase the likelihood of our communities' economic success.

***Employability skills and social and emotional skills are closely related. Both skillsets rely on the ability to learn and apply knowledge, be responsible, think critically, work with others despite differences, and use appropriate communication styles.***

### The Facts on Character

- Research shows that every \$1 invested in youth character development yields \$11 in return ([RWJF, 2017](#)).
- 77 percent of employers believe that softs skills like dependability, work ethic, and being team-oriented are just as important as hard skills ([CareerBuilder, 2014](#)).
- Early soft skills development equips young people to succeed in the workplace and reduces their chances of poverty, legal troubles, and mental health issues ([Shallcross, 2015](#)).



Source: U.S. Dept. of Education, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education. (n.d.). *Employability skills network*. Washington, DC: Author.



Source: CASEL. (2017). *Core SEL Competencies* Chicago, IL: Author.

## What Does Chamber Investment in Youth Character Development Look Like?

The truth is, character development isn't complicated. Give youth the opportunity to collaborate, problem-solve, serve their community, and interact with strong role models and they will begin developing the skills that will help them be successful employees in the future. According to a [report](#) published by American Institutes for Research, afterschool and summer programs are prime settings for incorporating character development opportunities into children's lives. Chambers can partner with key stakeholders to support year-round character development opportunities in the following ways:

- **Policy** – Support federal and state policies that provide funding to afterschool programs and quality childcare
- **Member Engagement** – Engage the business community to have an active role in shaping their future workforce
  - Work with businesses to offer opportunities like internship, apprenticeship, and mentorship programs that support both hard and soft skill development for youth
  - Call on members to speak to the importance of character and soft skills at local schools' career days and other events
- **Partnerships** – Work with stakeholders to encourage collaboration and a shared understanding of community needs
  - Partner with key community stakeholders who may already have programs in place to see how your chamber can offer support
  - Work within partnerships to drive workplace relevance of existing programs
- **Programs** – Incorporate character development into education and workforce development programs
  - Find ways to incorporate character development into existing chamber programs
  - Develop new chamber-led programs such as youth leadership experiences and soft skills initiatives that engage the local business community and incorporate character-building opportunities

### Key Actions for Supporting Character Development

- Advocate for the benefits of youth character development among local businesses.
- Discover what soft skills/character development programs are already offered in your community, and whether there is a role your chamber can play.
- Advocate for policies that provide quality afterschool programs to youth.
- Partner with afterschool programs to drive workplace relevance in their programming.
- Find ways to incorporate character/soft skill development into pre-existing chamber programs.
- Offer chamber members and their employees volunteer opportunities with youth-serving organizations.
- Connect with other chambers of commerce who have advanced successful youth character development initiatives to discuss best practices.

Thank you to our supporter:



For samples of chamber-led character youth development initiatives, click [here](#), or contact Molly Blankenship, 703.998.3530 or [mblankenship@acce.org](mailto:mblankenship@acce.org).