

Case Study: El Museo del Barrio's Partnership with New York City Autism Charter School's (NYCACs) Work Internship Program

Visit El Museo del Barrio's School Partnership webpage [here](#).

Visit NYCACS's Partnerships webpage [here](#).

Program Summary

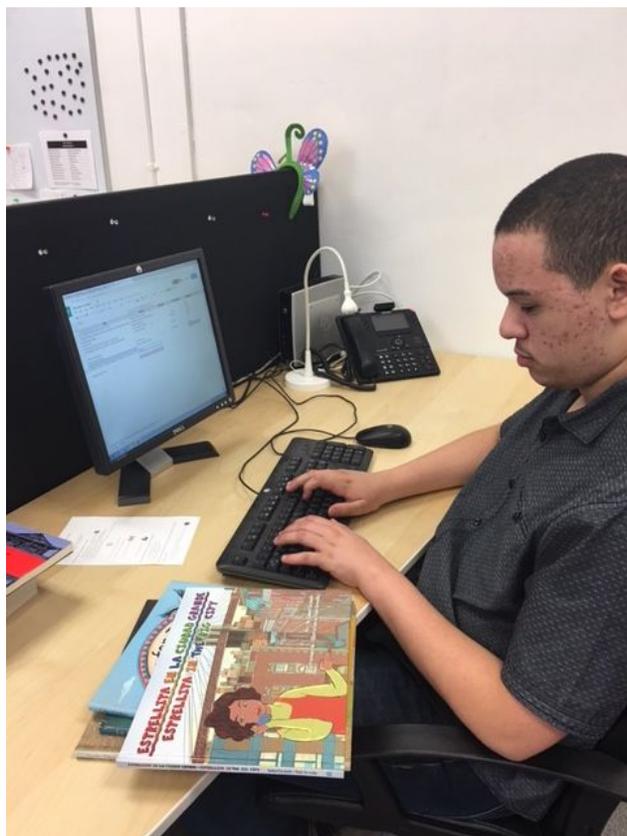
- El Museo del Barrio partners with NYCACS to bring four high school interns to the museum once a week.
- El Museo facilitates the internship program with just two staff members, and there is no additional cost for either the school or the museum to maintain this program.
- The school and the museum work together to determine appropriate projects based on each student's skills and needs.
- Interns' projects have included art-making, database entry, and mass mailings.
- Interns are evaluated by their teachers during each session, and spend the week leading up to their time at El Museo working on helpful skills for their internship tasks.



Program Profile

The New York City Autism Charter School (NYCACs) Work Internship Program at El Museo del Barrio was developed in 2014 as a partnership between both organizations.

El Museo del Barrio is one of NYCACS's many Work Internship partnerships at businesses in a variety of fields throughout New York City, particularly in East Harlem. El Museo del Barrio is a museum in East Harlem dedicated to presenting and preserving the art of Puerto Ricans and all Latin Americans in the United States. El Museo's work with NYCACS exemplifies the museum's deep commitment to their neighborhood and to the future generation of both museum goers and employees. The NYCACS Work Internship program allows their students to gain experience in a wide range of work environments. NYCACS staff members accompany students to their internships assignments in order to assess students' travel, work, and social skills; then, back at school, the staff is able to address any challenges or work to reinforce strengths observed during the Work Internship Program. Each group of students participates consistently throughout the course of the school year, then rotates into a Work Internship Program at another business for the following year. Each student at NYCACS participates in a number of Work Internship Programs so they have the opportunity to experience many different types of work environments throughout their time at NYCACS.



NYCACS typically selects four high-school aged students to serve as interns at El Museo. Each year the interns are different. The museum staff meets with the school staff to learn about the students, how they use language, their literacy skills, and their communication methods. Once this information is shared, the museum staff and the school staff discuss tasks that will best fit the students' skills. The Work Internship Program takes place once a week in the administrative offices of El Museo, and the students serve as interns for up to one full school year. The comfort level the students exhibit at El Museo is indicative of the success of the partnership. When students arrive at the museum they know where to go, using the elevator to reach the administrative offices. After several sessions at the museum, students are

able to independently find their work station, log on to their computer, and check their very own El Museo del Barrio e-mail to read about their task for the day. Sessions at the museum last an hour and a half; during this time, students primarily assist in the education and development departments and projects are being developed with other departments to give interns a comprehensive experience. Many of the students' projects incorporate artistic skills in addition to more traditional office skills. Examples of projects include making hundreds of paper crowns for El Museo's annual Three Kings' Day Parade, helping with mass mailings, and personalizing cards to donors. Students also worked using Google Drive to enter library books into a database, learning valuable administrative skills such as spreadsheet management and data entry, in addition to soft skills including asking for help from a supervisor, managing volume and conversation in an office environment, and greeting co-workers. In the future, El Museo hopes to offer projects that give students the opportunity to do work as greeters or museum educators.

At the end of each school year, NYCACS teachers write a resume for every student that includes work experience and skills gained from their internship. (A sample resume is included in the "Additional Resources" section of this case study.)

"One of the really exciting things about this kind of program...is that there's room to go outside of your traditional work experience and internship program. Museums are a unique place to work, and why should that be any different for people who are on the spectrum? So instead of just focusing on office work, you get the chance to work on those hard skills, soft skills, and artistic skills. Whether that comes in the form of art making, or in talking about art, or just experiencing it together – for me, that was always a skill that was as valuable as appropriate office behavior..."

-Samantha Schott, former Manager of Access and Community Education at El Museo del Barrio

Highlighting Best Practices

Consider partnering with existing organizations serving students and adults in transition.

El Museo del Barrio works hand-in-hand with NYCACS to design, develop, and implement the program. The tasks are selected through conversation with the school about the students and their interests, abilities, and growth areas. The school is able to

support the interns onsite, reinforce skills back at school, and pre-teach necessary skills and ideas, if needed.

“Prior to students beginning a work internship rotation at El Museo del Barrio, museum staff are provided with brief bios on each of the students assigned to work at El Museo that year. The bios include descriptions of the learning style (e.g., learns best from modeling, works best on individual as opposed to collaborative tasks, etc.), communication mode (e.g., student is verbal, student uses a software app on a phone to communicate, etc) as well as 1 or 2 things that each student enjoys (helps for rapport building). El Museo staff and I meet to review tasks identified for our students to do. We ensure tasks are in [each] student’s repertoire (or that they can be learned at site) and, if necessary make modifications to tasks or environments to ensure that students will be successful in completing tasks (creating visual supports, checklists, video models, etc.) ...This partnership is a win-win – NYCACS students learn valuable work skills (increasing their chances of obtaining and maintaining meaningful employment as adults) and museum staff gain assistance in accomplishing tasks on their to-do lists!”

-Moir Cray, Director of Transition & Community Outreach at New York City Autism Charter School

Start small, and make sure the project is manageable without too much institutional support.

The interns are supervised by an education staff member and an education intern currently in graduate school studying museum education. These staff members set aside the hour and half a week to support the interns. This program is supported by staff hours and time put in by the museum staff and the school staff to make this program successful. Although time is the cost of the program, the benefits outweigh the cost, as the four NYCACS interns can accomplish a lot more than what one or two people may be able to do, and the work the interns do is authentic, necessary work for the museum. For example, the interns were able to enter approximately 500 books into the library database over 3 visits.

“Because we’re a very small department... the biggest thing for us at the time was not necessarily saying that this is something worthwhile, but just saying that it’s something that’s manageable... I had the time for it, and I had a meeting with [NYCACS], and the first year that we did the program, everything took place

within our department. I think the biggest thing was working with them to know how much time it was going to take up and see that it's something that we were able to do... When it comes to employment, if you're taking on anyone in any capacity – new interns, new employees – that's really the biggest concern a lot of the time: will it add more work or will it alleviate work?"

-Samantha Schott, former Manager of Access and Community Education at El Museo del Barrio

Offer staff trainings and opportunities for other departments to get involved.

The interns are meeting the staff at El Museo del Barrio and taking on more tasks in other departments. They are preparing to work on another project for development that will be overseen by the development staff with support from the education staff. They are also looking forward to working in the coat check which will also involve other staff at the museum in the program.

"About halfway into our first year of just me partnering with them, Moira [Director of Transition and Community Outreach at NYCACS] actually came in and did a training for the staff. So that really helped everyone become familiar with the program and the people in our community who would be coming to the museum through this initiative. She talked about autism in general and these specific students and what this kind of program means for them. And we got much more institutional buy-in and people from other departments who were willing to say, 'Oh, we'll help you, we'll be a partner, we have these projects'."

-Samantha Schott, former Manager of Access and Community Education at El Museo del Barrio

Building strong partnerships allows for a program's sustainability and long-term growth.

The partnership between NYCACS continues to grow and has survived a major staff change as Samantha Schott who began the partnership moved on and Amalia Guajardo-Fajardo has taken over the program. NYCACS values the connection to a museum in the neighborhood of their school, enjoys working with the staff at El Museo, and sees the students flourishing in a workplace environment that could open up an exciting future for the students. Even within the sessions, the staff at El Museo and the

teachers and staff at NYCACS are in communication, making changes and adjustments along the way to best support the interns and improve the partnership.

“It’s not all going to happen in the first year – you’re not going to get it perfect. Building up a relationship with your partnering organization is so important so that those discussions can happen. We had a really big reflection after our first year of partnering, and it was maybe one of the most helpful meetings I’ve ever had... I got the chance to articulate some of [El Museo’s] ideas, and it definitely shifted what we did the next year. And they got the chance to say things like, ‘It would be really helpful if you could put together visual schedules’ and some of those more resource-oriented and organizational ideas that really impacted everything that we do.”

-Samantha Schott, former Manager of Access and Community Education at El Museo del Barrio

Additional Resources

[Quarterly progress resume \(NYCACS\) \(names redacted\)](#)

[Skills assessment form \(NYCACS\) \(names redacted\)](#)

[Google Drive Login Visual Support \(e-mail and names redacted\)](#)