REACH Round 4 Grant - Final Report

Project SPROUT: A Replicable Model for Internship Onboarding, Training, and Mentorship at Small, Grant-Dependent Organizations

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REACH Round 4 Grant

Final White Paper

Project SPROUT

In partnership with:

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Executive Summary

The REACH Round 4 initiative was developed to advance a sustainable, replicable approach to experiential education and community engagement that strengthens workforce readiness while supporting organizations that address key social determinants of health (Sandeen, 2012). This final white paper presents a structured, transferable model for onboarding, training, and mentorship within small, grant-dependent organizations, where limited infrastructure, lean staffing, and high programmatic demands frequently inhibit continuity and long-term capacity-building.

Across the nonprofit sector, small mission-driven organizations serve as critical anchors for under-resourced communities. Yet these organizations often lack formalized systems to effectively prepare, guide, and develop interns and early-career professionals. While organic mentorship and informal onboarding practices can foster strong relationships and short-term productivity, they are challenging to scale, document, and sustain across cohorts. As leadership capacity shifts or funding cycles end, organizational knowledge is frequently lost, requiring each new cohort to rebuild foundational processes from the ground up. This gap reveals a broader need for structured, scalable, and equity-centered internship models that strengthen operations while preparing interns to become capable contributors and future community leaders.

To address this challenge, Newark Science and Sustainability, Inc. (NSAS), in partnership with the Rutgers Institute for Corporate Social Innovation (RICSI) and Rutgers University, implemented a mission-driven summer internship program from June 2 to August 31, 2025, followed by a comprehensive evaluation process. This work culminated in Project SPROUT (Structured Program for Replicable Onboarding, Upskilling, and Tutelage), an intentionally designed framework to formalize and replicate high-impact internship practices across small organizations operating in resource-constrained environments.

Throughout the summer, NSAS hosted interns who participated in a structured experiential learning model supported by weekly in-person meetings every Monday at Rutgers Business School in Newark. These sessions provided a consistent professional environment for coordination, reflection, skill-building, and engagement with leadership. Interns directly

supported the implementation and delivery of community programs, including sustainability events, certifications, outreach initiatives, conferences, and educational workshops. In parallel, they produced tangible outputs such as professional infographics, communications materials, event documentation, and program artifacts that strengthened NSAS's operational capacity.

A defining feature of REACH Round 4 was its emphasis on grounding recommendations in lived experience. The evaluation employed a mixed-methods, qualitative-first design incorporating five focus groups across current interns, past interns, community participants, and growers; three leadership interviews with Tobias Fox focused on onboarding, training, and mentorship practices; weekly cohort meeting field notes; and the Project SPROUT Intern Upskilling & Micro-Credentials Survey, which achieved a 100 percent response rate. These data sources provided both narrative and quantitative insights into program effectiveness, early-readiness gaps, training priorities, mentorship needs, and operational challenges.

Findings confirm that the NSAS internship model was highly effective in fostering intern engagement, confidence, leadership exposure, and commitment to community-centered work. However, onboarding and mentorship processes were largely informal and dependent on leadership bandwidth, creating risks to consistency and replication. As Tobias Fox articulated, "It is not a movement if I am the only one doing it." This statement encapsulates the core objective of SPROUT: transforming impactful but individualized practices into documented systems that can be adopted, sustained, and scaled by peer organizations.

Project SPROUT formalizes three interconnected pillars: structured onboarding that accelerates readiness and clarifies expectations; modular upskilling aligned with nonprofit operational needs and intern-identified skill priorities; and tutelage as a multi-tier mentorship system that balances autonomy with consistent support. The model is supported by standardized toolkits, standard operating procedures (SOPs), communication templates, micro-credential pathways, measurable key performance indicators (KPIs), and replication-ready governance structures.

By documenting the whole cycle from implementation to evaluation to model design, Project SPROUT provides small, grant-dependent organizations with a sustainable framework to strengthen internship ecosystems, build leadership pipelines, and expand community impact across diverse geographic contexts.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Small, mission-driven organizations play a critical role in addressing interconnected social challenges in under-resourced communities, where education, employment, food access, and population health are deeply intertwined. These organizations frequently operate within grant-dependent environments characterized by lean staffing and limited infrastructure, making internships an essential mechanism for extending capacity, cultivating leadership, and delivering community-centered programming (Damschroder et al., 2022). Yet, in many small nonprofits, internship models evolve organically in response to immediate operational needs rather than through formalized systems, resulting in inconsistent onboarding, uneven training, and mentorship practices that are difficult to sustain or scale.

The REACH Round 4 initiative was designed to address this structural gap by supporting the development of a sustainable, replicable framework for internship onboarding, training, and mentorship that can be realistically implemented in resource-constrained settings. Rather than replacing the relational and experiential strengths that define grassroots organizations, the initiative seeks to preserve those strengths while translating them into structured processes that promote continuity, accountability, and long-term impact. The grant explicitly called for a dissemination-ready white paper that synthesizes findings and recommendations into a model other communities can adopt, supported by webinars and publication-oriented outputs to ensure transferability beyond the local context.

This paper builds on a summer-long implementation and evaluation conducted by Newark Science and Sustainability, Inc. (NSAS) in partnership with the Rutgers Institute for Corporate Social Innovation (RICSI), Rutgers University, and a broad ecosystem of community stakeholders. During the June 2 through August 31 internship period, interns supported community-facing programs while also producing operational and communications outputs that strengthened organizational capacity. The internship combined structured onboarding assets, tool-based training in platforms widely used by small nonprofits, experiential responsibilities tied to live programming, and mentorship intended to cultivate a leadership pipeline rather than provide short-term service support.

A defining feature of the REACH Round 4 approach was its emphasis on learning from practice and grounding the model in lived experience. Using a mixed-methods, qualitative-first design, the evaluation incorporated five focus groups across stakeholder groups, leadership interviews focused on onboarding, training, and mentorship, field notes from cohort meetings, surveys, and program artifacts. Findings were systematically translated into replicable tools, such as SOPs, onboarding assets, and measurable KPIs, ensuring the final model operationalizes not only what occurred but also how other organizations can implement similar structures with clarity and sustainability.

Internships are increasingly recognized as a pathway for advancing social determinants of health by strengthening workforce readiness, civic engagement, and access to professional networks. For small organizations, however, the challenge lies in converting intern contributions and informal mentorship into systems that endure beyond individual leadership. Project SPROUT emerges from this work as a Structured Program for Replicable Onboarding, Upskilling, and Tutelage, transforming observed practices into a scalable framework designed to support organizational resilience and equitable intern development across communities.

The sections that follow provide the program context, trace the evolution of the NSAS internship model, present the methodology and evidence base, and outline best practices, gaps, and recommendations that collectively support national replication.

Program Overview

History and Evolution

The NSAS Internship Program originated in 2016 as a grassroots initiative developed to meet immediate organizational and community needs while advancing experiential learning in urban agriculture and environmental education. Beginning with a single intern working directly alongside leadership, the program emphasized hands-on engagement, mission alignment, and relational mentorship rather than structured systems. This early approach mirrored the realities faced by many small, grant-dependent nonprofits that rely on passion, adaptability, and community trust to sustain programming despite limited infrastructure.

As NSAS programming expanded, the internship evolved into a central operational pillar supporting grant-funded activities, community outreach, events, data collection, and communications. Participation steadily increased to as many as ten interns per summer, highlighting both the program's value and the growing strain placed on informal onboarding and mentorship structures.

Research on organizational socialization demonstrates that when newcomers are integrated primarily through informal, individualized processes rather than structured and collective tactics, role ambiguity and coordination challenges increase as organizations scale (Allen & Meyer, 1990). In practice, interns became essential contributors to organizational capacity, enhancing program visibility and continuity, while simultaneously revealing the limits of informal structures as the program scaled.

This form of learning through participation aligns with Wenger's concept of communities of practice, in which newcomers develop competence and professional identity by engaging in shared work alongside more experienced members. However, when participation is not supported by explicit structures, shared artifacts, and documented practices, knowledge remains tacit and difficult to transfer, leading to inefficiencies and continuity gaps as cohorts change (Wenger, 1998).

This organic growth directly informed the REACH Round 4 partnership and the development of Project SPROUT. The initiative provided a structured opportunity to document, evaluate, and formalize internship practices that had proven impactful yet fragile. Through implementation and evidence gathering during the summer of 2025, NSAS began transitioning from an informal seasonal internship to a model designed for continuity, scalability, and replication. The long-term vision now consists of expanding toward a year-round internship structure supported by standardized onboarding, modular training, documented mentorship pipelines, and durable operational assets that can sustain the program independent of any one individual.

Current Practice Snapshot

At the time of the REACH Round 4 implementation, the NSAS Internship Program operated with a combination of structured elements and informal practices shaped by organizational

culture and resource constraints. Core components of onboarding, training, and mentorship were present, though not yet fully standardized or documented.

Onboarding practices included a welcome packet, shared calendars outlining program activities and expectations, and required agreements to establish roles and responsibilities. These materials provided interns with an initial orientation to NSAS operations and helped set baseline expectations for participation and professionalism (Bauer & Erdogan, 2011).

Training was delivered through a short, intensive orientation period, typically spanning three days, followed by hands-on learning embedded directly into ongoing program activities (Kram, 1985). Rather than relying on classroom-style instruction, training emphasized hands-on learning, with interns gaining exposure to nonprofit operations, community engagement, event logistics, and basic administrative and communication tools as they contributed to active initiatives.

Mentorship within the program primarily took place in an informal, relational form. Interns received guidance from organizational leadership, including the NSAS Director, as well as support from the internship coordinator and returning or former interns who served as ad hoc mentors. While these relationships were meaningful and impactful, mentorship was not governed by a formal structure, schedule, or documented framework. Instead, it developed organically through proximity, shared work, and ongoing collaboration.

Together, these practices formed a functional but highly personalized internship model that depended heavily on leadership involvement and institutional memory. While effective in many respects, this approach also highlighted the need for greater consistency, scalability, and continuity as the program expanded and sought to serve as a model for replication.

Stakeholder Map and Roles

A defining feature of a sustainable and replicable internship model is the intentional alignment of stakeholder roles and responsibilities. For small, grant-dependent organizations, clarity around responsibilities is particularly important, as capacity is often distributed across individuals and partners rather than centralized within dedicated departments. The Project SPROUT framework

emphasizes role-based participation that can be adapted to different organizational contexts while preserving accountability, continuity, and impact.

Organizational Leadership

At NSAS, organizational leadership provides strategic direction, ensures mission alignment, and oversees the program as a whole. Leadership is responsible for articulating organizational values, setting expectations for professional conduct, and ensuring that internship activities align with both programmatic goals and community needs. In a replicable model, this role is typically held by an executive director, program director, or senior manager who can connect intern contributions to broader organizational strategy.

Replicable role guidance: Effective internship programs require leadership involvement that is visible but not operationally burdensome. Leaders should serve as stewards of mission, reinforce purpose, and model values, while delegating day-to-day execution to coordinators and near-peer mentors.

Internship Coordinator

The internship coordinator plays a critical operational role by providing day-to-day guidance, managing schedules, facilitating communication, and serving as a point of continuity across cohorts. At NSAS, this role has often been filled by a former intern, creating institutional memory and reinforcing a leadership pipeline.

Replicable role guidance: Small organizations benefit from designating a coordinator who bridges the gap between leadership and interns. This role does not require a full-time position, but it does require consistency, availability, and familiarity with organizational workflows. Near-peer coordinators are particularly effective, as they combine credibility with relatability.

Returning Interns and Near-Peer Mentors

Returning interns serve as near-peer mentors, supporting onboarding, modeling expectations, and providing informal coaching to new cohort members. Their presence reduces onboarding friction, reinforces norms, and distributes mentorship responsibilities beyond senior leadership.

Replicable role guidance: Programs should formalize pathways for interns to return as mentors or coordinators. Near-peer mentorship is scalable, cost-effective, and culturally resonant, particularly in community-based organizations where trust and shared experiences are crucial.

Community Partners

Community partners comprise residents, growers, nonprofit collaborators, and local organizations that engage directly with program activities and provide feedback on the program's relevance and impact. At NSAS, community partners contributed insights through focus groups, program participation, and co-design of events and initiatives.

Replicable role guidance: Community partners should be engaged as co-creators rather than passive beneficiaries. Their role includes providing feedback, shaping program design, and validating whether internship-supported activities meet the real needs of the community. This engagement strengthens legitimacy and improves outcomes.

Academic and Research Partners

Academic partners support program rigor, evaluation, and knowledge dissemination. In the REACH Round 4 context, these partners encompassed Rutgers University, NJIT, medical schools, and research institutions that contributed evaluation expertise, student engagement, and dissemination capacity.

Replicable role guidance: Organizations seeking replication should identify higher education institutions, research centers, or professional schools that can support evaluation, student pipelines, and applied research. These partners add credibility, methodological support, and pathways for scaling learning beyond a single organization.

Funders and Sponsors

Funders provide the financial resources necessary to support intern stipends, program coordination, evaluation activities, and core infrastructure. The REACH Round 4 initiative was made possible through funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), which

served as the primary funder for both REACH grant cycles and supported the development, evaluation, and dissemination of this work.

In addition to philanthropic support, the funding model reflected a blended approach commonly required in small, mission-driven organizations, incorporating higher education partnerships and private sponsorships aligned with workforce development, education, and community health priorities. For replication, this model underscores the importance of cultivating diverse funding streams while maintaining alignment with funder values related to equity, capacity building, and sustainable community impact.

Replicable role guidance: A diversified funding strategy is essential for sustainability. Effective internship models typically draw support from a mix of public agencies, higher education institutions, philanthropic foundations, and private sponsors whose priorities align with workforce development, education, public health, or community resilience. Diversification reduces risk and supports program continuity.

Methodology and Quantitative Overview

Design

The REACH Round 4 evaluation employed a mixed-methods, qualitative-first design to capture the depth, complexity, and context of internship experiences within a small, grant-dependent organizational ecosystem. Qualitative methods were intentionally prioritized to surface lived experiences, relational dynamics, and operational realities that are often overlooked by purely quantitative approaches, particularly in community-based settings where informal practices play a significant role.

This design choice aligns with established methodological guidance indicating that qualitative inquiry is especially effective for exploring stakeholder perspectives and contextual dynamics in complex organizational environments, while the integration of quantitative data enhances the credibility and practical validity of implementation-focused models (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Quantitative data were incorporated where appropriate to complement qualitative findings, validate patterns, and support the development of measurable indicators. This design reflects the grant's emphasis on producing actionable insights and a replicable model rather than a narrowly scoped impact evaluation.

Data Sources

Multiple data sources were utilized to ensure a comprehensive and triangulated understanding of onboarding, training, and mentorship practices within the NSAS internship ecosystem. Together, these sources capture perspectives from interns, organizational leadership, and community stakeholders, while also documenting the scope, duration, and intensity of engagement throughout the summer implementation period.

Focus Groups

Five focus groups were conducted during the summer to capture experiential feedback across key stakeholder groups, including past interns, current interns, community members, program participants, and growers. Each session followed a semi-structured facilitation guide designed to encourage open discussion, shared reflection, and collective sense-making around program effectiveness, learning experiences, community impact, and opportunities for improvement.

To contextualize these qualitative insights, the following quantitative characteristics were documented:

- Total focus groups: 5
- Facilitators: 2+ per session
- Duration: Approximately 90 minutes per session
- Format: Mostly Virtual (one in person)

Focus Group Composition:

- **Focus Group 1: Past Interns**
  Participants: Six (6) former interns
  Focus: Retrospective reflections on onboarding, training, mentorship, and career impact

- **Focus Group 2: Past Program Participants (Community Members)**
  Participants: Seven (7) community members
  Focus: Program effectiveness, accessibility, and community impact

- **Focus Group 3: Growers and Farmers**
  Participants: Four (4) growers/farmers
  Focus: Program support, technical assistance, and community engagement

- **Focus Group 4: Additional Program Participants**
  Participants: Three (3) participants
  Focus: Longitudinal participation, trust-building, and program continuity

  Note: This session contained live Spanish interpretation support to accommodate the engagement of additional participants.

- **Focus Group 5: Current Interns**
  Participants: All active interns (Four - full cohort), plus one Internship Coordinator
  Focus: Real-time feedback on onboarding, training, mentorship, and program design

  Note: This focus group was conducted in person at the Rutgers Business School in Newark, New Jersey, immediately after a regularly scheduled cohort meeting.

Across all focus groups, participation rates were high, and discussions consistently met or exceeded the allotted time, indicating strong engagement and a high level of willingness to contribute detailed feedback.

Detailed observational notes and discussion summaries from the first four focus groups are included in Appendix A (Appendices A1-A4)

Leadership Interviews

Three semi-structured interviews were conducted with NSAS leadership, specifically with Tobias Fox, to capture organizational-level perspectives on internship design and scalability.

- Number of interviews: 3
- Interviewee: NSAS Director (Tobias Fox)
- Duration: Approximately 60 minutes per session
- Format: In person

Interview topics included current onboarding practices, training approaches and skill development, mentorship dynamics, and structural constraints related to scale and sustainability. These interviews provided essential context for interpreting intern and community feedback within the realities of small, grant-dependent organizational operations.

Cohort Formal Meetings at RBS and Field Notes

Observational data were collected through detailed field notes taken during weekly internship cohort meetings held throughout the internship period.

- Internship period: June 2 through August 31, 2025
- Meeting frequency: Weekly, every Monday
- Total meetings observed and documented in 2025: 13
    - June: 2, 9, 16, 23, 30 (5 meetings)
    - July: 7, 14, 21, 28 (4 meetings)
    - August: 4, 11, 18, 25 (4 meetings)
- Duration: 5 hours per meeting (9:00 AM - 2:00 PM)

- Attendance: 100 percent attendance across interns, the internship coordinator, and the leadership team
- Location: Room 304, Rutgers Business School (RBS), Newark

Each meeting functioned as a structured logistical and planning session to prepare interns for the upcoming week's work, coordinate program activities, align responsibilities, and provide ongoing guidance and support. Field notes from these sessions offered longitudinal insight into engagement, communication norms, skill development, and cohort dynamics over time.

Intern Survey

A post-program intern survey was administered to the most recent and previous cohorts to complement qualitative findings with targeted quantitative data.

- Total respondents: 13 interns
- Response rate: 100 percent
- Estimated completion time: Approximately 5 minutes

The survey collected data on perceived readiness at program start, priority skills and training needs, familiarity with online learning platforms, time availability for upskilling, and perceived impact of structured onboarding and certifications. Survey findings directly informed the development of training and upskilling recommendations presented later in this paper. See Appendix B (Appendices B1 - B9).

Program Artifacts and Outputs

Additional data sources consisted of program artifacts and outputs generated during the internship period, such as professionally looking infographics created by interns, event materials, and documentation. These materials provided concrete evidence of skill application, communication capacity, documentation practices, and operational contribution, further grounding the evaluation in observable outcomes.

Procedures

All focus groups and interviews were audio recorded with participant consent and transcribed for analysis. Identifying information was removed during transcription to protect confidentiality and encourage candid participation. Transcripts and field notes were organized and analyzed using a thematic coding approach guided by a structured codebook aligned with the core domains of onboarding, training, mentorship, and organizational capacity.

To enhance reliability and rigor, the analysis incorporated:

- Double-coding of selected transcripts to ensure consistency in interpretation.
- Triangulation across data sources, comparing findings from focus groups, interviews, surveys, and field observations to identify convergent themes and reduce bias.
- Member-checking, where appropriate, through informal validation of emerging findings with program leadership and participants.
- An audit trail documenting analytic decisions, revisions to the codebook, and the linkage between raw data and synthesized findings.

These procedures were intentionally designed to strike a balance between methodological rigor and feasibility, recognizing the operational constraints faced by small organizations while maintaining credibility and transparency.

Application to Replication

The primary purpose of this methodology was not only to assess program effectiveness, but to translate learning into practice. Findings from the evaluation were systematically mapped to the development of:

- Standard operating procedures (SOPs) for onboarding, training, and recurring program activities
- Toolkits and templates to support consistency and continuity across internship cohorts

- Key performance indicators (KPIs) aligned with both intern development and organizational outcomes

By embedding evaluation directly into the operational ecosystem, the methodology supports the creation of a model that is both evidence-informed and practically implementable. This approach ensures that the final white paper moves beyond description to offer a framework that other small, grant-dependent organizations can adopt, adapt, and sustain over time.

Best Practices Observed

The summer implementation period surfaced a set of practices that consistently strengthened intern effectiveness, organizational continuity, and community impact across the broader Newark Science and Sustainability (NSAS) ecosystem. These practices are presented as "what worked" in operational practice and can be adapted by small, grant-dependent organizations seeking a sustainable and replicable onboarding, training, and mentorship model. Understanding implementation outcomes such as adoption, feasibility, and sustainability is critical to evaluating the success of structured internship processes (Proctor et al., 2011).

Onboarding Best Practices

A structured onboarding package that establishes clarity, legitimacy, and readiness.

A core strength of the internship model was the use of a defined onboarding package that helped interns transition quickly into a mission-driven, operational environment. Tobias Fox described onboarding as including a welcome packet, calendar integration, and clear administrative agreements, which together reduced ambiguity and reinforced professional standards.

Observed elements that improved readiness and continuity:

- Welcome packet with foundational context and expectations (what the organization does, why it matters, and what the intern role supports).
- Early visibility into the seasonal calendar and program rhythm reduces the need to "start from scratch" and improves task anticipation.

- Agreements and structured paperwork (including signed expectations) that formalize the role and reduce uncertainty for both interns and supervisors.

Clear communication of mission, values, and expectations.

A replicable onboarding model must teach interns not only how to complete tasks but also how to work in a mission-driven setting. The REACH proposal explicitly frames onboarding and training as preparation for interns to "quickly become highly effective contributors" in a mission-driven organization.

This aligns with internship participants describing the work as meaningful and identity-forming, not transactional. In Focus Group 1 (past interns), participants were enthusiastic and referenced the strong bond created through the program.

Effective icebreakers and early team-building activities that accelerate trust.

A standout best practice, repeatedly reinforced in the intern feedback, was the intentional use of early team-building exercises during orientation. Past interns directly linked these exercises to stronger working relationships and greater comfort participating.

This is a replicable, low-cost, and high-impact approach: it reduces coordination barriers, accelerates collaboration, and fosters psychological safety for interns who may be new to professional settings (Bauer et al., 2007).

Peer-support structure anchored by a near-peer internship coordinator.

The model benefited from near-peer support, especially when the coordinator had lived experience in the internship role. In Focus Group 5 (current interns), the meaningful participation of the internship coordinator, who was formerly an intern in the prior cohort, enabled continuity and peer credibility.

Current intern feedback also points to consistent coordinator engagement as a practical mentorship mechanism, including "regular check-ins," respect for interns' time, and responsiveness to individual skill sets.

Training Best Practices

Early “skills-to-tools” training that reflects real nonprofit operating needs.

Training was strongest when it focused on practical tools and workflows that small, grant-dependent organizations rely on to execute programs and report outcomes. Tobias Fox described the program as including a structured training period (three days) to build foundational readiness.

Training priorities included:

- Operational digital tools feature Google Workspace (with its calendar and collaboration features), Canva for design and outreach, and Excel or Google Sheets for tracking and reporting.
- Event systems and communication workflows, including registration and outreach processes, are supported by tool-based learning and hands-on practice.

Past interns also emphasized that they gained or strengthened software skills and communication capacity, including learning new software and building on Canva skills.

These skills-to-tools training practices culminated in applied communications outputs, including a series of professional infographics produced by interns to document and disseminate outcomes from the 13th Annual Sustainable Living Empowerment Conference, providing concrete evidence of experiential learning and capacity-building through real program delivery (see Appendices D1-D4).

Communication, storytelling, and cultural sensitivity as “core training,” not optional add-ons.

During the weekly meetings, we observed that cultural sensitivity, expectations, and communication were treated as essential training topics rather than secondary ones, reflecting the realities of community-based work.

This matters for replication: community-facing programs fail when interns are not trained in respectful engagement, clear messaging, and role boundaries. The model's emphasis on mission communication and community awareness helps protect trust across the ecosystem.

Hands-on, experiential immersion that immediately connects interns to mission delivery.

A defining training strength was immediate immersion in meaningful responsibilities. Past interns described supporting multiple programs and operational functions, including Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) distribution logistics, communication and contact list management, creating event materials, and participating in on-site events.

This approach also builds workforce readiness skills, as experiential learning research demonstrates that skill acquisition is accelerated when learners engage in authentic tasks paired with reflection and feedback (Van Wart et al., 2023). Interns reported growth in communication, logistics, organization, networking, multitasking, and confidence as they approached future job searches.

Documentation habits and data collection as a "training outcome".

The program integrated documentation and data tracking into professional training, recognizing their importance for grant-dependent sustainability. In the weekly meetings, it was explicitly emphasized that the critical role of data collection, spreadsheets, and consistent data submission is essential for reporting and leadership-facing outputs, such as infographics and funder communications.

This aligns with the grant's call to develop "robust metrics and measurements" and produce dissemination-ready outputs for replication.

Skill application through communication products that build organizational capacity.

A strong best practice was training interns to translate program work into public-facing, professional outputs. During meetings with the interns, it was explained that interns worked

extensively on infographics specifically because compelling visuals strengthen reporting, storytelling, and stakeholder communication. Past interns also reported creating infographics and event materials, as well as managing surveys and analyzing data from surveys, demonstrating capacity-building beyond day-to-day tasks.

Mentorship Best Practices

A "near-peer to leader" mentorship pathway through returning interns.

The REACH grant explicitly envisions a mentorship model in which interns return as mentors, enabling continuity while developing leadership and managerial skills.

This mentorship pathway is both scalable and realistic for small organizations as it builds internal capacity without requiring significant new staffing investments.

Informal, high-frequency mentorship behaviors that interns experience as meaningful.

Even when mentorship is not fully formalized, the model demonstrated mentorship behaviors that mattered to interns: respect, responsiveness, and consistent check-ins. Current interns highlighted that mentorship included respect for personal lives and individual skill sets, and that coordinator check-ins were effective in this regard.

These behaviors are replicable and can be operationalized into a mentoring cadence (weekly touchpoints, structured reflection prompts, and role-aligned coaching).

Cohort bonding as a mentorship mechanism inside the internship ecosystem.

Mentorship in small organizations often occurs through peer learning, cohort identity, and shared problem-solving, rather than solely through formal one-on-one pairings. Past interns repeatedly referenced the strong bond formed through the program, highlighting early team-building as a foundation for effective collaboration.

A leadership pipeline orientation rather than short-term service labor.

The grant's intent positions internships as a leadership and career-development pathway, including long-term impact and improved employment trajectories through mentorship connections.

This is a defining best practice: the internship is designed to build future community leaders and workforce-ready professionals, while simultaneously strengthening the organization's capacity to deliver programming.

Gaps and Challenges

Although the internship experience generated strong outcomes and high engagement across the broader NSAS ecosystem, several structural gaps limit consistency, scalability, and replication. These gaps are also common "capacity pinch points" for small, grant-dependent organizations and therefore should be addressed directly in the national model.

Continuity and Knowledge Management Gaps.

A recurring challenge was the absence of a centralized repository and a standardized cohort-to-cohort handoff process. Current interns explicitly recommended "one place where we keep all our files" and noted that when they needed prior materials, they had to request them directly from leadership, rather than accessing a shared archive. This dynamic slows execution, increases dependency on specific individuals, and makes replication more challenging because new cohorts can start from a fragmented knowledge base rather than an institutional memory.

Compressed Onboarding Because Delivery Starts Immediately.

The internship model is highly experiential, but that also creates an onboarding compression problem. Interns described the early period as "hit the ground running," with orientation occurring at the same time that major event deliverables were already approaching. Interns specifically noted that early execution would have benefited from a more precise outline of what needed to be accomplished in the first week and what "done" meant for each major deliverable.

A related challenge is that interns may enter through different pathways and may start at different points in the summer, which can create uneven onboarding experiences and “catch-up” burdens for late arrivals.

Training is Strong in Practice but Not Yet Fully Modularized.

Training is occurring, but several comments suggest the need for a more formalized and reusable training architecture. Interns expressed a desire for a “handbook,” and they discussed the potential value of a training platform that could store role-based instructions, videos, and guidance for completing recurring tasks. They also recognized that implementation requires dedicated time and resourcing, and that time constraints can prevent training tools from being fully populated and maintained.

Mentorship is Valuable but Sporadic and Dependent on Leadership Bandwidth.

Mentorship exists and is meaningful, but it is not yet formalized as a consistent program component. NSAS leadership explicitly reflected on the difficulty of structuring mentorship roles, including whether mentorship should be a formal position, how it overlaps with the internship coordinator role, and how to avoid duplicating functions in a small organization.

Intern feedback also reinforces that the internship is demanding and that the program’s effectiveness is strongly tied to a small number of individuals, which creates vulnerability when leadership bandwidth is stretched, a pattern that has been documented in prior research on internship supervision and mentoring capacity (Maertz et al., 2014).

This pattern reinforces the value of distributed developmental support, where interns and emerging professionals benefit from a small network of complementary advisors rather than relying on a single mentor, thereby reducing strain on any one leader while improving continuity and guidance quality (Shen et al., 2015).

Research on internship design demonstrates that when mentoring structures are informal and contingent on individual supervisors, learning quality and program sustainability become highly variable, particularly in resource-constrained organizations (Maertz et al., 2014).

Capacity Constraints and Overreliance on a Few Key People

Interns directly stated that “it is a lot” on the internship coordinator and the NSAS Director, emphasizing that the operation is constrained by the reality that leadership is “just one person.”

They recommended additional staffing and suggested that a full-time team member could provide critical pre-summer support before the season accelerates. This poses a significant replication risk because models that rely on heroic effort are challenging to sustain and difficult for other communities to adopt and implement.

This risk is well documented in the mentoring literature, which cautions against mentorship models that concentrate guidance, sponsorship, and knowledge transfer in a single individual. Kram’s foundational work on mentoring emphasizes that sustainable developmental systems rely on multiple, complementary mentoring relationships rather than a sole mentor figure, particularly in dynamic organizational contexts where turnover, workload fluctuation, and role strain are common (Ragins & Kram, 2007). When mentoring functions are overly centralized, organizations become vulnerable to burnout, discontinuity, and loss of institutional knowledge, reinforcing the need to formalize distributed mentorship structures that extend beyond individual leaders.

Funding Volatility Impacts Coordinator Support, Stipends, and Program Stability.

Both leadership and interns surfaced funding as a core constraint. Interns openly acknowledged the need for increased funding and additional support. Leadership described how the program’s ability to fund an internship coordinator shifted over time, including periods when funding was available and later periods when funding was no longer available to sustain that staffing role. This volatility affects continuity, training infrastructure, and the organization’s ability to institutionalize mentorship.

Partnership Dynamics Can Limit Sustainability.

Leadership also described a challenge highly relevant to replication: partners may be willing to collaborate programmatically but are unwilling to share funding or establish equitable grant partnerships. For small, grant-dependent organizations, this can constrain growth, reduce bargaining power, and increase administrative fragility.

For example, leadership described partnerships where collaborators supported program delivery and visibility but were unwilling to engage in shared funding arrangements or joint grant ownership, leaving the lead organization responsible for compliance, reporting, and financial risk despite shared program benefits.

Recruitment, Readiness, and Clear Expectations Remain Ongoing Challenges.

NSAS positions the internship as a leadership pathway, not just service work, and leadership emphasizes the importance of interns having baseline skills and readiness to engage professionally with external stakeholders. Tobias also noted that the program's branding and marketing are "under-reflected," suggesting a gap in communicating the internship's value proposition in a way that attracts candidates aligned with the program's expectations and intensity.

Data System Maturity and Intern Participation in Evaluation Design.

During the last focus group, the current interns highlighted that, as they are responsible for collecting and extracting survey data, they should also have a role in survey design to improve the flow, clarity, and downstream analysis. This is a constructive gap that highlights the need for standardized evaluation templates, a data governance process, and training on survey design and interpretation as part of a replicable model.

Recommendations for Sustainable Development

Project SPROUT is designed to translate the lived experience of the Newark SAS internship ecosystem into a sustainable, replication-ready model for onboarding, training, and mentorship that small, grant-dependent organizations can adopt in any geography. The recommendations below are grounded in a core sustainability principle articulated by the NSAS Director Tobias Fox: “It is not a movement if I am the only one doing it.” The goal is to reduce “reinvention” each season, strengthen intern performance quickly, protect staff bandwidth, and build durable capacity in under-resourced communities.

Onboarding Recommendations

Build a national onboarding checklist and “nonprofit basics” primer (replication-ready).

Evidence from interns and leadership suggests that early friction often arises from a lack of a shared baseline on how small, grant-funded nonprofits operate, resulting in confusion, delays, and avoidable rework. In one of the intern focus groups, one participant described feeling like they were “starting from ground zero,” even when programs were in their third year. A national checklist should be concise, standardized, and deployable by any adopting organization in under one week (Bauer et al., 2007).

Recommended checklist components (core, non-negotiable):

- Mission primer and ecosystem map: mission, values, community context, programs, partners, and community stakeholders.
- Nonprofit basics: what grant-dependent operations mean in practice (deliverables, reporting timelines, documentation, compliance, why data matters). Leadership explicitly noted that assuming interns “knew the full workings and purpose of a non-profit organization” created gaps that required re-clarification.

- Role clarity: responsibilities, boundaries, escalation paths, expected weekly outputs, and quality standards.
- Operating glossary: program names, recurring events, tools, partner acronyms, and key terms.
- SOP archive and index: a "where to find what" table of contents pointing to procedures and templates, even if early versions.

These core elements are operationalized through a standardized, replication-ready onboarding checklist designed for use by small, mission-driven organizations and provided in Appendix C.

Launch a pre-start package to raise early readiness and reduce Day 1 friction.

The SPROUT survey data show that interns began the internship moderately prepared, with 61.5% rating their preparedness as 3 out of 5 and 30.8% rating it as 2 out of 5 (n = 13). A pre-start package should be sent 7 - 10 days before the start date, allowing Day 1 to prioritize engagement and execution rather than focusing on orientation-only content.

Recommended pre-start package:

- 20-30 minute welcome and expectations video (mission, professional norms, Week 1 success definition).
- 2 - 3 short required readings or videos (preferred) with a brief confirmation (quiz or acknowledgment).
- Tool access checklist (email, calendar, shared drive, Canva access if applicable).
- One-page "How we work" overview (communication norms, meeting rhythm, response times, escalation).
- Short, low-pressure skills self-assessment to inform Week 1 training priorities.

Standardize early visibility practices as replication requirements.

NSAS onboarding strength included a welcome packet, signed principles, and early visibility of the seasonal calendar, which improved coordination and clarified expectations. Research on effective onboarding and early organizational socialization emphasizes that providing clear role expectations, early performance signals, and shared visibility into priorities significantly accelerates newcomer adjustment and effectiveness, particularly in complex or resource-constrained environments (Watkins, 2016).

Leadership described sending a welcome package, having interns sign an agreement aligned with the program's principles, and sharing the program calendar as part of the onboarding process. For replication, the toolkit should treat the following as non-negotiable:

- Seasonal calendar published on Day 1
- Signed guiding principles and participation agreements
- Clear expectations for outputs, quality, and accountability
- Centralized “Program Hub” repository

Create a centralized repository as the backbone of continuity, handoffs, and scalability.

A single, organized “Program Hub” reduces leadership bandwidth strain and prevents cohorts from rebuilding systems each year, directly addressing the “starting from ground zero” risk raised by interns. This approach is consistent with implementation research, which emphasizes that long-term program sustainability depends on preserving core functional components, as staff, funding streams, leadership, and external conditions inevitably change, requiring organizations to adapt without losing institutional memory or operational coherence (Fixsen et al., 2005).

Minimum repository structure (recommended folders):

- 00_Start-Here (mission primer, key contacts, onboarding checklist)

- 01_Onboarding (welcome packet, guiding principles, working agreements)
- 02_Training (week-one plan, tool guides, micro-credential track links)
- 03_SOPs (events, outreach, data collection, reporting)
- 04_Templates (email scripts, forms, tracking sheets, slide decks)
- 05_Programs (one folder per program with a repeatable "program kit")
- 06_Impact-Reporting (KPIs, dashboards, reporting templates)

Institutionalize guiding principles plus working agreements.

To preserve the culture and professionalism that support performance across the ecosystem, replication should contain two lightweight tools:

- A Guiding Principles one-pager (values, professionalism, respect, community accountability)
- A Working Agreements protocol (communication norms, conflict resolution, escalation paths)

Design early peer-to-peer onboarding to reduce the burden on leadership.

Evidence shows that the internship coordinator role functioned as a near-peer anchor, improving bonding and execution. For replication:

- Assign a near-peer onboarding facilitator (returning intern, intern coordinator, or cohort lead) for the first two weeks
- Run structured icebreakers, paired introductions, and a strengths map, defined as a simple, shared inventory of interns' skills, interests, availability, and prior experience, used to guide early task allocation and collaboration
- Implement a Week 1 buddy system with brief daily check-ins and a Day 5 handoff checklist

Training Recommendations

Implement a modular curriculum aligned to operational capacity pinch points.

Training should be modular so it can be delivered in short blocks and adapted to varied intern skill levels, while still enabling immediate operational contribution. SPROUT data reveal clear priorities: interns selected Project Management Basics (61.5%), Event Planning and Logistics (53.8%), and Program Evaluation and Data Collection (38.5%) as top performance-improving skills (n = 13). See Appendix B5.

Recommended modular curriculum (SPROUT core set):

- **Module A: Project management for small nonprofits** (workback schedules, task owners, status updates, meeting notes that become execution tools)
- **Module B: Event planning and logistics SOPs** (registration workflow, run-of-show, setup checklists, role assignments, closeout)
- **Module C: Program evaluation and data collection** (high-value metrics, data hygiene, documentation standards, reporting-ready notes)
- **Module D: Operational tools bootcamp** (Google Workspace, shared drive habits, naming conventions, version control, basic Excel)
- **Module E: Communications and storytelling for impact** (infographics, stakeholder updates, narrative framing)
- **Module F: Community engagement and cultural sensitivity** (trust-building, respectful communication, accessibility norms)
- **Module G: Teamwork and conflict management** (coordination norms, feedback habits, resolving friction early)

This aligns with internal notes that emphasize tool training (Canva, spreadsheets), improved data presentation, templates for future cohorts, and the importance of project management and documentation habits.

Make micro-credentials structured, fundable, and realistic for intern time constraints.

SPROUT feasibility data show that most interns can dedicate 1-2 hours per week (76.9%), and most will complete either short modules or short courses "as long as it is relevant" (69.2%) (n = 13). Perceived impact is high: 84.6% rated that completing 1 - 2 short certifications before starting would improve performance at 4 or 5 out of 5 (n = 13). The intern platform preference also supports implementation, with LinkedIn Learning (84.6%) and Coursera (76.9%) being the most preferred options (n = 13). See Appendix B3.

Replication approach: a two-lane Micro-Credential Track

- Lane 1 (default): 1 - 2 hour weekly modules aligned to immediate tasks
- Lane 2 (optional): 4 - 6 hour short courses for interns seeking deeper credentials
- Each credential must produce a proof-of-learning artifact added to the repository (template, checklist, mini SOP, or reflection linked to an operational task)

During the weekly meetings with the interns, the online Coursera platform was repeatedly mentioned as a preferred micro-credential pathway, and it was framed as meaningful upskilling, rather than optional enrichment.

Prioritize communication and storytelling as a core training line, not a soft add-on.

SPROUT data shows the most valued communication skills were Storytelling for Impact (84.6%), Professional Email and Stakeholder Communication (84.6%), Public Speaking (76.9%), and Technical Writing (69.2%) (n = 13). This aligns with program needs, where interns translate work into infographics, outreach materials, and narratives for funders.

Examples of these intern-produced storytelling and communication artifacts, including infographics and outreach materials developed for program and funder audiences, are included in Appendix E.

Replication practices:

- Email professionalism template set (subject lines, response expectations, stakeholder updates)
- One-page impact narrative framework (problem, action, outcome, community value)
- Short weekly public-speaking reps tied to intern updates and event prep

Standardize tool training as "operational readiness," sequenced by week.

To reduce ad hoc training demands on leadership and improve speed-to-productivity:

- Week 1: Google Workspace, shared drive structure, basic Excel
- Week 2: Canva fundamentals
- Week 3: Eventbrite workflows and reporting
- Week 4: Documentation standards and SOP writing
- Week 5+: Data collection and reporting habits tied to KPIs

Build SOP-driven "Program Kits" for recurring events and programs.

Each recurring event should have a simple kit that outlives the season:

- Purpose and target audience
- Annual timeline and lead times
- Required materials and vendors
- Staff and intern roles

- Data to collect and how to submit
- Post-event reporting template

Include “data collection literacy,” not only data collection mechanics.

The Grower focus group described how initial pushback on data collection decreased once the purpose was explained and contextualized. Replication should encompass:

- A simple impact framework (inputs → outputs → outcomes)
- A small, high-value metric set collected consistently, rather than many low-quality metrics

Mentorship Recommendations

Build a multi-tier mentorship ecosystem that does not collapse under leadership bandwidth limits.

Intern feedback reflects a desire for autonomy, but also notes that mentorship can feel “too hands off” when structure is missing, and interns must chase tasks or clarity. Replication should preserve organic mentorship while adding light structure through three tiers:

- Peer tier: near-peer coordinator plus buddy system
- Alum tier: returning interns as mentors for the next cohort
- External tier: mentors from academia, business, healthcare, and local organizations

Establish a cadence that is realistic, trackable, and balanced.

Recommended cadence:

- Weekly cohort reflection circle (30 - 45 minutes)
- Biweekly one-on-one check-in (15 - 20 minutes) with near-peer mentor or coordinator

- Monthly leadership touchpoint (group Q&A with director or leadership guest)
- Simple meeting log for continuity and accountability

Publish a mentor playbook and formalize an intern-to-mentor pipeline.

The mentorship system should be documented so it becomes transferable and sustainable:

- What mentors do (coaching, feedback, accountability)
- Boundaries and escalation
- How to build intern confidence and professionalism (a key SPROUT outcome prioritized by 69.2% of interns, n = 13)
- A structured pathway for returning interns to become mentors, with recognition or certification

Cross-Cutting and Scalability Recommendations

Document the entire model as a replication toolkit, as documentation is the mechanism for scaling.

A replication-ready toolkit should comprise templates, checklists, SOPs, training modules, process maps, partnership memoranda of understanding (MOUs), engagement scripts, KPI definitions, and a cohort handoff package that becomes mandatory at season end.

Build role redundancy to avoid bottlenecks in small, grant-dependent organizations.

Replication should assume staffing fragility. Practical redundancy practices include:

- Two interns per critical process (primary and backup)
- Shared documentation requirements rather than solo ownership
- Rotating roles so knowledge spreads across the cohort

Link documentation and data submission to milestones, including stipend release where appropriate.

NSAS treated data submission as mission-critical, to the point that the final intern payment was released only after all required data was submitted. Replication guidance should include:

- Clear data submission protocol
- Defined completion criteria and timelines
- Reminder cadence and confirmation receipts
- Transparent, ethical linkage to stipend milestones (where stipends exist)

Make a diversified funding strategy a design requirement and align reporting to funder needs.

Given funding volatility, adopting organizations should plan for blended support (public grants, private sponsorships, academic partnerships) and maintain sponsor-ready reporting templates that reduce fundraising burden. This should also include micro-credential funding as a formal budget line item, ensuring that upskilling remains a sustainable initiative.

Align program KPIs to outcomes interns value most (SPROUT-informed).

SPROUT data identifies top outcomes to prioritize for replication (n = 13):

- Better career readiness after the internship (84.6%)
- Greater confidence and professionalism (69.2%)
- Higher-quality work (61.5%)
- Stronger leadership skills (38.5%)
- Faster onboarding (23.1%)

These outcomes should inform KPI design and be explicitly linked to the onboarding structure, modular training, and mentorship cadence, ensuring the model remains both mission-aligned and operationally measurable.

Governance and Risk Recommendations

Build a lightweight governance structure for clarity and continuity.

For replication, governance must be simple enough for small organizations, but structured enough to prevent drift.

Recommended governance tools:

- RACI (Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, and Informed) chart for onboarding, training, mentorship, events, data, and communications
- Risk register with triggers and mitigation plans (staffing, funding delays, event risks, documentation gaps)
- Quarterly review meeting to update SOPs and KPIs based on lessons learned

Operational risk controls that protect mission delivery.

During the weekly intern meetings, there was a consistent emphasis on clear delegation, minimizing duplicated effort, and using structured, solution-oriented problem-solving discussions. Convert these into replicable controls:

- standardized weekly planning agenda
- work tracking sheet (who owns what, by when)
- escalation protocol for missed deliverables

Equity and Inclusion Recommendations

Bilingual, accessible communication as a core replication standard.

Multiple sources reinforce that communication must be culturally sensitive and understandable to community members. Focus Group 4 also highlights the need for Spanish interpretation and language accessibility during program engagement. A concrete replication practice is to build bilingual capacity into programs and materials, as reflected in NSAS programming that contained Spanish-language components.

Replicable equity practices:

- bilingual outreach materials as the default where relevant
- interpretation support for community-facing sessions
- flexible hours and realistic workload planning
- stipends, reimbursements, and transportation-aware scheduling that account for commute time, transit availability, and participation-related costs

Inclusive outreach and trust-building through consistent presence

Intern-created community-facing materials and consistent programming build trust and visibility. Replication should include a communications rhythm (monthly community updates, event promotion templates, impact snapshots) so community stakeholders see continuity and value.

Where SPROUT Directly Changed or Strengthened These Recommendations

The SPROUT survey made the model more operationally realistic and measurable by clarifying:

- Time feasibility: The curriculum must fit a 1 - 2 hour weekly upskilling window for most interns.

- Platform selection: LinkedIn Learning and Coursera should be the default credential platforms.
- Priority content Includes Project management, event logistics, and program evaluation, which are the highest-leverage training investments.
- Outcome targets, including career readiness, confidence/professionalism, and higher-quality work, should be top-line KPIs for replication.

Potential Implementation Roadmap and Timeline

Project SPROUT is designed to be sustainable only if the model can outlive any one person's scaffolding bandwidth, consistent with the program's core sustainability principle articulated by NSAS Director Tobias Fox: "It is not a movement if I am the only one doing it."

The roadmap below translates observed strengths and friction points across the evaluation ecosystem (five focus groups, three director interviews, the full-cohort SPROUT survey, and weekly cohort meetings) into a staged, replication-ready timeline with clear "build first, execute next" sequencing. In addition to aligning with the practical realities raised by interns and community stakeholders, the roadmap is also consistent with established evidence on effective onboarding and organizational socialization, experiential learning, and mentorship. Structured socialization tactics reduce uncertainty and role ambiguity, thereby improving newcomer adjustment, while experiential learning accelerates skill transfer when paired with reflection and scaffolding (Bauer et al., 2007).

Mentorship, when implemented with a consistent cadence and clear role expectations, is associated with stronger career and performance outcomes for mentees (Eby et al., 2008).

Communities-of-practice approaches further reinforce peer learning and continuity, which is especially critical for small, grant-dependent organizations where institutional memory can degrade quickly without intentional systems (Wenger, 1998).

Implementation Phases

Phase 0: Replication Set-Up (6 to 10 weeks before Day 1)

The objective is to establish the minimum infrastructure so that interns do not have to start from scratch, and leadership does not need to recreate systems each season. Intern feedback highlighted the continuity risk posed by knowledge that is not centralized and emphasized the value of having organized, accessible prior work.

Key deliverables (replication toolkit foundations):

- **Program Hub (central repository)** with a "Start Here" landing page, standardized templates, and a simple file taxonomy to support continuity across cohorts.
- **Seasonal program calendar and milestone map** (events, reporting deadlines, training blocks) prepared in advance and published on Day 1.
- **Event "Program Kits"** for the first two major events (run-of-show, task list, vendors, communications templates, and data requirements). This directly addresses the risk described by interns of being asked to deliver a major event within roughly two weeks and with limited background context.
- **Weekly meeting operating system** (standard agenda, work tracking sheet, escalation protocol), reflecting the documented emphasis during weekly sessions on delegation, minimizing duplicated effort, and structured problem-solving.
- **Staffing redundancy plan** (primary and backup owners for critical processes), recognizing that staffing fragility is a predictable operational risk in small organizations.
- **Governance artifacts** are drafted early (RACI for core functions and a lightweight risk register), ensuring that responsibilities and risk mitigation do not depend on informal memory.

Decision gate to advance: Program Hub created, first two Program Kits finalized, weekly operating system ready, role coverage confirmed, and governance artifacts drafted.

Phase 1: Pre-Start Readiness (7 to 10 days before Day 1)

In this phase, the objective is to reduce Day 1 friction, raise readiness, and clarify expectations before interns are hit with live program demands.

Why this matters: Based on the results of the SPROUT survey, at the start of the internship, most interns reported only moderate preparedness, and a meaningful portion reported even lower preparedness, indicating a clear opportunity to increase readiness before Day 1.

Core actions:

- **Tool and access provisioning** (email, shared drive, calendar invitations, templates, Canva access, where and when applicable).
- **Pre-start package** including: seasonal calendar, "how we work" norms, role expectations, and "what to expect in the first two weeks."
- **Baseline skills and availability check** to inform task allocation and early scaffolding, consistent with observed practice of adjusting support based on intern needs and time realities.
- **Micro-credential readiness prompt:** SPROUT results indicate strong perceived value in completing 1 to 2 short certifications before starting, suggesting that even a small pre-start "credential menu" can improve early performance.

Decision gate to advance: All interns confirm access, review expectations, and complete the baseline check.

Phase 2: Launch and Week 1 Orientation Sprint (Week 1)

During this period, the goal is to establish shared norms, provide minimal operational training, and build team cohesion so that "hit the ground running" becomes a structured rather than chaotic process.

Evidence-based constraint: Interns described a fast start, with early major responsibilities, and noted the importance of a more transparent structure outlining what must be accomplished in the first week.

Week 1 deliverables:

- **Guiding principles and working agreements** (professionalism, communication norms, conflict resolution, escalation).
- **Operational tools bootcamp** (Drive structure, file naming, shared docs standards, calendar discipline, basic Excel skills).
- **Near-peer activation:** The coordinator or designated cohort lead functions as the daily anchor during Weeks 1 and 2.
- **Event Kit walkthrough** for the first major event: roles assigned, tasks sequenced, and reporting expectations made explicit.
- **Early peer-to-peer design requirement:** a buddy system and structured icebreakers to accelerate collaboration and reduce coordination drag.

Decision gate to advance: Interns can navigate the Program Hub, understand roles, and have a Week 2 work plan with task owners and clear deadlines.

Phase 3: Early Execution and Scaffolding (Weeks 2 and 3)

The primary objective of this step is to facilitate high-trust delegation while preventing "trial by fire" from becoming avoidable confusion.

Why this matters: Newark SAS interns reported being given meaningful responsibility quickly, including early event execution, which supported growth but increased risk without structured scaffolding.

Core actions:

- **Weekly cohort meeting as the coordination backbone** (planning, delegation, barriers, decisions), continuing the documented practice of emphasizing delegation, minimizing duplicated work, and structured problem solving.
  Two-layer accountability: every major task has an owner and a backup, with required documentation saved in the Program Hub.

- **Event execution support and rapid debrief:** Update the Event Kit with lessons learned within 72 hours, allowing the model to improve in real-time and become replicable.

Decision gate to advance: Post-event kit updated and next event workback schedule published.

Phase 4: Capacity-Building Cycle (Between Weeks 4 and 8)

The purpose of this phase is to convert execution into durable organizational capacity through documentation, data practices, and communications outputs.

Key components:

- **SOP production rhythm:** one SOP or template improvement per week added to the Program Hub, so program knowledge becomes institutional, not individual.

- **Data collection literacy and trust-building:** growers and community stakeholders emphasized that data collection becomes more acceptable when its purpose is explained and connected to impact reporting and resource allocation.

- **Practical metric discipline:** focus on a small set of high-value KPIs collected consistently rather than many low-quality metrics. Some examples include the number of finalized SOPs or templates added to the Program Hub, the percentage of required data submissions completed accurately and on time, and the number of completed, publication-ready communications assets archived for future use.

- **Communications outputs as capacity:** continue the practice of producing professional, public-facing materials (infographics, impact snapshots, program narratives) that support outreach, community awareness, and fundraising continuity.

Examples of these intern-produced communications outputs, including program infographics and impact narratives developed during implementation, are provided in Appendix E.

Decision gate to advance: SOP library grows measurably, data processes are documented, and at least one impact narrative product is completed and archived.

Phase 5: Mentorship Systemization (Weeks 1 through 10, layered across phases)

The objective of this stage is to preserve the benefits of a high-autonomy growth environment while ensuring interns are never unsupported.

Observed balance point: Interns described a model that did not "baby" them and required independence, while also emphasizing that support was available when needed.

Minimum mentorship cadence (trackable and realistic):

- **Weekly cohort reflection touchpoint** integrated into the standing weekly meeting structure.
- **Biweekly one-to-one check-ins** (15 to 20 minutes) led by the coordinator or near-peer lead.
- **Monthly leadership touchpoint** (group Q&A and mission alignment).

Mentorship ecosystem (three tiers):

- **Peer tier:** buddy system, near-peer coordinator.
- **Alum tier:** returning interns positioned as mentors for subsequent cohorts.
- **External tier:** partners from academia, business, healthcare, and community organizations who can expand mentor capacity without overloading core staff.

Decision gate to advance: The mentorship cadence is running, meeting logs are captured, and returning intern mentor roles (if available) are defined for the next cohort.

Phase 6: Closeout, Handoff, and Dissemination (Final 2 or 3 weeks, plus 4 to 8 weeks post-program)

The goal of this final phase is to ensure continuity and fundability by producing a cohort handoff package and sponsor-ready reporting assets.

Closeout deliverables:

- **Cohort handoff package** (updated Program Hub index, SOP library, event kits, templates, and a "what we learned" log).
- **Completion-based documentation and data submission protocol** with transparent milestones, reflecting the operational reality that reporting and data are mission-critical in grant-dependent environments.
- **Governance refresh:** Update the RACI matrix, the risk register, and the quarterly review cadence to ensure the model remains stable across leadership transitions and funding cycles.
- **Dissemination-ready assets include a** webinar slide deck, executive brief, and a reusable onboarding and training toolkit, all of which are consistent with the grant's intent to share a replicable model beyond Newark.

Decision gate to close: Handoff package completed, sponsor-ready reporting compiled, and dissemination assets finalized.

Summary Timeline - A Practical View of the Process

- **6 to 10 weeks pre-start:** Build Program Hub, file taxonomy, first two Event Kits, weekly operating system, redundancy plan, draft governance artifacts.

- **7 to 10 days pre-start:** Access provisioning, expectations package, baseline check, optional micro-credential readiness prompt informed by strong perceived value of pre-start certifications.
- **Week 1:** Orientation sprint, norms, tool bootcamp, near-peer activation, event role assignment, Week 2 plan.
- **Weeks 2 and 3:** Early execution with scaffolding, owner-backup structure, event debrief-to-documentation loop.
- **Weeks 4 through 8:** Capacity-building cycle (SOP rhythm, data literacy, communications outputs, KPI discipline), with stakeholder trust-building around why data matters.
- **Weeks 9 and 10:** Closeout, handoff package, sponsor-ready reporting, governance refresh, and dissemination assets.

This staged roadmap is intentionally lightweight, but it targets the specific operational bottlenecks surfaced across intern and stakeholder feedback, including early event pressure without sufficient structure, the need for centralized continuity assets, and the importance of explaining “why data matters” to sustain reporting and trust in under-resourced ecosystems.

Impact Measurement and Continuous Improvement

Project SPROUT is designed to be replicable only if it is measurable. The REACH Round 4 grant explicitly calls for a dissemination-ready white paper that translates findings into a model other communities can adopt, paired with dissemination activities, and supported by practical assets such as SOPs, toolkits, and measurable KPIs.

In alignment with this expectation, the impact framework below links intern development to organizational outcomes through a small set of high-value indicators, collected consistently and reviewed on a defined cycle.

Measurement approach and principles

To clarify the relationships between program activities, intended outputs, and longer-term outcomes, Project SPROUT employs an explicit logic model that links program inputs to outputs and subsequent outcomes in order to define what success looks like and to make impact reporting feasible for lean, grant-dependent organizations.

Logic models are widely recognized evaluation tools that help articulate causal pathways, make underlying assumptions explicit, and ensure that indicators are both meaningful and feasible to collect. Guidance from the U.S. General Services Administration emphasizes the role of logic models in supporting both planning and ongoing evaluation by transparently connecting resources, activities, and expected changes (U.S. General Services Administration, n.d.).

Similarly, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (2004) highlights that effective logic models strengthen program design by clarifying how activities generate measurable outputs and outcomes, while enabling organizations to use evaluation findings for continuous improvement over time. Embedding this logic model approach within SPROUT's measurement strategy ensures that key performance indicators are aligned with organizational goals and grounded in established, evidence-based practices for sustainability and replication.

To strengthen implementation discipline (without creating unnecessary burdens), the model also adopts a continuous improvement mindset, in which teams test small changes, review the results, and standardize what works. The Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle is a widely used method for this type of practical improvement loop and fits well with small organizations that need lightweight, repeatable systems (Institute for Healthcare Improvement, 2025).

Core KPI set for replication

To keep the model scalable across various settings, KPIs are organized into five categories that any small, mission-driven organization can adapt, while maintaining consistent measurement and reporting. This approach aligns with established implementation and evaluation guidance emphasizing the use of clearly defined outcome categories to support comparability, adoption, and long-term maintenance across diverse organizational contexts (Glasgow et al., 1999).

A. Intern pipeline and retention

- **Intern retention and completion rate** (percent who complete the whole program period).
- **Attendance and participation reliability** (meeting attendance rate and participation benchmarks). In Newark, cohort meetings were held weekly with full engagement documented across the internship period.
- **Alum continuation and placement** (education progression, employment, return as mentor, or continued volunteer engagement).

Evidence-based connection: Well-designed onboarding and role clarity reduce early ambiguity, supporting stronger newcomer adjustment, which can lead to improved retention and early performance (Bauer et al., 2024).

B. Onboarding readiness and early performance

- **Pre-start readiness score** (self-rated preparedness before Day 1, plus confirmation of access to tools and repository).
- **Time-to-productivity** (time to complete the first independent task to standard, supported by a defined quality rubric).
- **Onboarding completion** (percent who complete the onboarding checklist and required agreements within Week 1).

Evidence-based connection: Onboarding and socialization research emphasizes that structured tactics (clear expectations, information access, feedback) improve early adjustment and reduce preventable friction (Bauer et al., 2024).

C. Training and upskilling outcomes

- **Training completion rate** (percent completing required modules and tool bootcamps).
- **Micro-credentials earned** (count and completion rate, mapped to role needs).

- **Credential feasibility and fit** (hours per week interns can dedicate, and completion willingness when the content is relevant). The SPROUT survey achieved a 100% response rate among 13 interns, capturing familiarity with the platform, time availability for upskilling, and the perceived value of structured certifications.

- **Priority skill areas** (ranked training needs), translated into required modules and measurable completion.

Evidence-based connection: Many employer-aligned competency frameworks (for example, communication, teamwork, professionalism, and technology) provide a practical structure for training goals and measurement, especially when interns are asked to produce tangible work products that demonstrate these competencies (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2020).

D. Mentorship reliability and leadership pipeline

- **Mentor-mentee touchpoints** (weekly cohort reflection participation, biweekly one-on-one completion rate).

- **Near-peer support utilization** (requests for support, coaching logs, and resolution cycle time).

- **Intern confidence and professionalism growth** (self-reported growth, supported by an observation-based rubric).

- **Intern-to-mentor progression** (percent of returning interns serving in near-peer roles in subsequent cohorts).

Evidence-based connection: Mentoring research consistently links participation in mentorship with positive outcomes, such as improved performance, increased satisfaction, and enhanced career development, especially when mentorship is structured and sustained rather than ad hoc (Allen et al., 2004).

E. Community and program delivery outcomes

These indicators vary by program type, but the categories remain consistent:

- **Families served / participants reached** (unduplicated counts where possible).
- **Produce distributed / food access outputs** (quantity and distribution consistency, where applicable).
- **Events delivered** (number of community events supported, plus on-time completion of event closeout documentation).
- **Program quality and accessibility** (participant satisfaction, qualitative feedback themes, and barrier reduction measures).

Evidence-based connection: a communities-of-practice orientation strengthens peer learning and continuity by treating learning as a shared, social process, which is particularly useful when community-facing delivery and intern development must occur simultaneously (Wenger, 1998).

Data sources and collection cadence

SPROUT's measurement system intentionally leverages data sources already embedded in operations, reducing burden and improving sustainability.

- **Weekly cohort meeting field notes and planning artifacts** provide longitudinal indicators of engagement, task completion, and operational capacity building.
- **Post-program intern survey** provides quantitative signals about readiness, training priorities, platform fit, and upskilling feasibility.
- **Program artifacts** (event materials, infographics, SOPs, templates) serve as evidence of applied learning and communication capacity.
- **Qualitative sources** (focus groups, interviews, meeting notes) remain essential for interpreting why KPIs move and what should change.

Examples of these program artifacts, including intern-created infographics documenting community programs, events, and partnerships, are provided in Appendix E.

Review cycle and continuous improvement loop

To make continuous improvement practical in small organizations, SPROUT uses a lightweight cycle built around routine review, decision-making, and documentation updates:

1. **Weekly operational review (during program)**

- Track leading indicators, including attendance, task completion, training progress, event readiness, and documentation status.
- Run a brief barrier-resolution segment to enhance delegation quality and minimize duplicated effort.

2. **Monthly dashboard update**

- Update a small dashboard of core KPIs (approximately 5 to 12 metrics total).
- Flag risks (staffing, funding, stipends, mentor coverage) and assign mitigation actions.

3. **End-of-program evaluation and handoff**

- Compile a short outcomes brief (intern development, program outputs, mentorship reliability, community impact).
- Update the replication toolkit (SOPs, checklists, templates) based on what worked and what failed.

4. **Annual learning cycle**

- Review KPIs year-over-year to assess continuity and program maturity.
- Refresh training modules and micro-credential menus based on intern feedback and recurring capacity pinch points.

- Publish a short annual “model update” for dissemination.

This cycle is intentionally aligned with improvement science practices that emphasize small tests of change and routine learning loops (such as PDSA), making continuous improvement feasible without requiring a large evaluation staff (Institute for Healthcare Improvement, 2025).

How survey findings directly inform measurement

The SPROUT survey not only informs recommendations; it also provides valuable insights. It also clarifies what SPROUT should measure because it surfaces both feasibility constraints (time available for upskilling) and intern-defined value (what skills will most improve performance and career readiness). The survey’s complete participation (13 out of 13 interns) strengthens the credibility of these signals and supports using them as replication KPIs, particularly for micro-credential completion, communication skill-building outputs, and early readiness.

This measurement strategy is both funder-ready and implementable, producing credible outputs for reporting while also creating a continuous learning system that strengthens the internship ecosystem over time, consistent with the grant’s expectation that findings will translate into SOPs, toolkits, and measurable KPIs that other communities can adopt.

Framework for National Replication

Project SPROUT is designed to be disseminated and adopted beyond Newark as a practical, evidence-informed model that small, grant-dependent organizations can implement with limited staffing and high accountability. The REACH Round 4 grant calls for a dissemination-ready white paper that translates findings into actionable recommendations and replicable assets that other communities can adopt and implement.

To support national replication, the framework below organizes SPROUT into (1) core elements that should remain consistent across sites, (2) adaptable components that should be tailored to local context, and (3) a staged implementation approach. This structure reflects implementation science guidance that effective replication requires attention to the stages of implementation

(exploration, installation, initial implementation, and full implementation), along with the supporting infrastructure that enables consistent delivery (Elam & Schroeder, 2019).

Replication architecture: What must stay consistent vs. what can flex

Non-negotiables (should be consistent across sites):

- **A centralized Program Hub** (single source of truth) with standard file taxonomy, templates, and SOPs.
- **A structured onboarding sequence** (mission orientation, nonprofit basics, role clarity, and working agreements).
- **A modular training curriculum** tied to small-organization "capacity pinch points" (event operations, documentation, tools, and impact reporting).
- **A mentorship cadence** that is trackable and remains stable even when leadership bandwidth is limited.
- **A small set of high-value KPIs** is reviewed on a predictable cycle.

Adaptable components (should flex by location):

- Specific programs (food access, agriculture, community events, education initiatives).
- Local stakeholder partners and volunteers.
- Funding mix and stipend structure.
- Tool stack, as long as the functions remain consistent (repository, communications, registration, design, reporting).

This approach is aligned with evidence on newcomer socialization, as structured onboarding practices reduce ambiguity and accelerate early adjustment by clarifying expectations and norms (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2011b).

Summary Table for the Replication Process

SPROUT Core Element	What it Includes	Replication-Ready Assets	Minimum Implementation Standard
Onboarding Operating System	Mission and ecosystem orientation, nonprofit basics, role clarity, expectations, calendar visibility, working agreements	National onboarding checklist, nonprofit basics primer, pre-start packet, "Start Here" landing page	Program Hub Live before Day 1; Onboarding completed in Week 1
Training Operating System	Modular training aligned to capacity pinch points, tool readiness, event operations, and documentation habits	Week 1 training schedule, tool bootcamp guides, SOP templates, event "Program Kits"	Modules delivered in short blocks with weekly application
Mentorship Operating System	Near-peer support, alumn involvement, trackable check-ins, leadership touchpoints	Mentor playbook, intern-to-mentor pathway, meeting log template	Weekly reflection touchpoint + biweekly one-on-one check-ins
Execution and Documentation Loop	"Learn it, use it, document it" cycle that converts work into reusable assets	SOP library, template bank, program kits, closeout, and handoff package	One SOP or template improvement added per week

Impact Measurement and Learning	Small KPI set linking intern development to org outcomes	KPI definitions, dashboard template, data submission protocol, and annual review template	Monthly KPI update + end-of-program evaluation + annual refresh
Equity and Access	Inclusive outreach, flexible structure, and support for under-resourced interns	Bilingual templates, accessibility checklist, stipend guidance	Equity practices are documented and reviewed annually

Readiness checklist for adopting organizations

A replication effort succeeds when the host organization is ready to absorb the model with clarity. Use this checklist as a "go or pause" gate during the exploration and installation stages (Elam & Schroeder, 2019).

Minimum readiness requirements

1. **Program owner identified** (staff lead or coordinator function) with scheduled time allocation.
2. **Program Hub established** (Drive or equivalent) with permissions, file taxonomy, and baseline templates.
3. **Seasonal calendar drafted** (events, reporting deadlines, training blocks, mentor touchpoints).
4. **Intern roles are defined** with weekly outputs, quality standards, and escalation paths.
5. **Mentorship structure defined** (near-peer lead plus a realistic cadence).
6. **Data collection expectations defined** (what must be tracked, by whom, by when).

7. **Funding plan defined** (stipends if applicable, coordinator support, tool costs, micro-credential support).

Recommended readiness signals

- At least one external partner is committed (academic, community, workforce, or corporate).
- The organization has a plan for continuity (handoff package requirement at the end of the season).
- The organization is willing to operationalize learning through documentation, rather than relying on informal knowledge.

Adoption Toolkit for National Replication

The adoption toolkit is the "plug and play" package that allows other communities to implement SPROUT without reinventing the model. It should be distributed as a structured folder inside the Program Hub.

Toolkit components

1. **Onboarding modules**
    - National onboarding checklist
    - "Nonprofit basics" primer (grant-funded operations, deliverables, reporting, documentation)
    - Pre-start package (7 to 10 days prior): expectations, tool access, calendar, micro-credential menu
    - Working agreements and guiding principles templates

2. **Training SOPs and modules**
    - Week 1 training schedule (orientation sprint)
    - Tool bootcamp guides (Drive, Docs, Calendar, Canva, spreadsheets, registration workflows)
    - Event Program Kit template (run-of-show, task owners, materials list, data requirements, closeout)
    - Documentation standards (file naming, version control habits, photo documentation protocol)
3. **Mentor playbook**
    - Mentor roles and boundaries
    - Feedback and coaching guidance
    - Cadence expectations and meeting log template
    - Intern-to-mentor progression pathway and recognition guidance
4. **Measurement pack**
    - KPI definitions and dashboard template
    - Data submission protocol and milestones
    - End-of-program outcomes brief template
    - Annual review guide (refresh micro-credential menu, modules, SOPs)

This “community of practice” orientation is intentional: replication improves when cohorts and partner organizations share templates, examples, and lessons learned rather than operating in isolation (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2011a).

Maturity model for SPROUT adoption

A maturity model helps funders and adopting organizations assess progress over time and avoid unrealistic expectations in Year 1.

Stage 1: Emerging

Profile: The organization has adopted SPROUT basics; however, implementation remains person-dependent.
Indicators:

- Program Hub exists but is incomplete.
- Onboarding and training are delivered, but documentation is inconsistent.
- Mentorship is present but not reliably trackable.
- KPIs exist, but the review cadence is not consistent.

Minimum evidence of maturity at this stage

- Completed onboarding checklist for all interns
- Two event Program Kits were created and used
- First dashboard update completed

Stage 2: Developing

Profile: SPROUT is becoming a system, not an individual effort.
Indicators:

- The SOP library grows with each cycle; the handoff package remains standard.
- Mentorship cadence is routine and documented.
- Training is modular and tied to weekly execution.

- KPIs are reviewed monthly and used for improvement decisions.

Minimum evidence

- One SOP or template improvement is added weekly during the program period
- The biweekly one-on-one check-in completion rate is tracked
- End-of-program outcomes brief produced

Stage 3: Embedded

Profile: SPROUT is institutionalized and replicable across cohorts and sites.
Indicators:

- Cohort-to-cohort continuity is strong; minimal "reinventing" occurs.
- Returning interns reliably serve in near-peer roles.
- Funding plan includes coordinator and tool costs; reporting is sponsor-ready.
- Replication assets are shared externally through webinars or toolkit hubs.

Minimum evidence

- Intern-to-mentor pipeline functioning (returning interns in structured roles)
- Annual model refresh published (toolkit update, KPI trends, lessons learned)
- Adoption support materials ready for peer organizations

This staged approach aligns with implementation research that emphasizes building infrastructure and support during the early stages, before expecting consistent, high-fidelity delivery at scale (Elam & Schroeder, 2019).

Integration of SPROUT survey evidence into replication design

The SPROUT intern survey provides strong feasibility constraints and design guidance for national adoption. For example, intern preferences indicate strong platform fit for LinkedIn Learning and Coursera (with LinkedIn Learning rated highest), which supports including a micro-credential lane that is realistic for intern time and aligned with readiness goals.

This improves replication by ensuring the model is not only aspirational but also implementable within the time realities of interns and the staffing realities of small organizations.

Communications and Dissemination

Project SPROUT is designed to be adopted beyond Newark, which means the work must be packaged in formats that different audiences can quickly understand, trust, and apply. This aligns with the REACH Round 4 expectation that the project culminates in a dissemination-ready white paper and accompanying dissemination activities, enabling other communities to replicate the model.

1. Dissemination goals and primary audiences

Goal 1: Enable adoption (replication readiness).
Package the model as a "how-to" kit that small, grant-dependent organizations can implement with limited bandwidth, including templates, SOPs, and a readiness checklist.

Goal 2: Strengthen credibility (funder and partner confidence).
Communicate results with clear evidence, including qualitative insights and quantitative snapshots (such as focus group participation, meeting cadence, and a 100 percent intern survey response rate), to support funder reporting and future fundraising efforts.

Goal 3: Share practical learning (field building).
Dissemination should not be one-directional. Guidance on disseminating evaluation results emphasizes tailoring outputs to audience needs and enabling dialogue, including through in-person and digital engagement channels (Palen & Briggs, 2020).

Primary audiences include: (1) small nonprofits and grassroots organizations, (2) funders and philanthropic partners, (3) higher education partners and internship pipeline stakeholders, (4) municipal and community-based partners, and (5) peer organizations seeking replication.

2. Dissemination products

2.1 Final white paper (primary product)

The white paper remains the anchor asset, synthesizing findings into a replicable model and pointing readers directly to implementation tools and templates.

2.2 Publication-oriented outputs (credibility and reach)

Convert selected sections into shorter, publishable formats (practice briefs, working papers, or practitioner-facing articles) that highlight:

- A "replication model" summary (what to adopt, why it works, what to measure).
- A case example of intern-driven capacity outputs, including public-facing communications deliverables.

2.3 Practitioner brief and one-page model summary (fast adoption)

Create a two-page "SPROUT at a glance" brief that includes:

- Core elements of onboarding, training, and tutelage.
- Minimum viable operating system (weekly rhythm, repository, templates).
- KPI categories and a lightweight measurement cycle.

3. Webinars and a SPROUT Toolkit Hub

Dissemination research and implementation guidance consistently emphasize the use of multiple channels and the engagement of intended users, ensuring that materials are usable in practical settings. PCORI's dissemination and implementation framework work, including its webinar and toolkit efforts, reflects this emphasis on practical strategies designed for real-world uptake (PCORnet, 2025).

3.1 Webinar series (replication-focused)

Host a short sequence of webinars designed around adoption decisions:

- **Webinar 1: The SPROUT model and the "why."** The case for scalable onboarding, training, and tutelage in grant-dependent organizations.
- **Webinar 2: How to implement.** Walkthrough of the phased roadmap, with examples of "Program Hub," event kits, and meeting operating systems.
- **Webinar 3: How to measure and report.** KPIs, dashboards, and continuous improvement with a realistic cadence.

Each webinar should include a Q&A segment and a structured feedback prompt, consistent with dissemination guidance that stresses two-way communication with audiences (Palen & Briggs, 2020).

3.2 Website Toolkit Hub (the adoption destination)

Create a simple, publicly accessible hub that houses:

- Downloadable templates and SOPs
- Readiness checklist
- "Start Here" implementation guide
- Short explainer videos (5 to 8 minutes) for onboarding and training setup
- A sample reporting dashboard structure

This hub also aligns with how the internship operated in practice, where interns were trained on operational tools used for communication and delivery (Google Workspace, Canva, Eventbrite) and produced professional public-facing materials.

4. Templates library for peer organizations

A replication model becomes actionable when users can adopt assets without having to rebuild them. The templates library should be structured so that another organization can copy, rename, and deploy within days. Core categories include:

- **Onboarding:** welcome packet, guiding principles, working agreements, role descriptions, escalation paths
- **Training:** week-one schedule, tool bootcamp guides, SOP writing template, event "run-of-show" templates
- **Tutelage:** circle agenda template, biweekly check-in template, near-peer expectations, reflection prompts
- **Operations and reporting:** KPI definitions, data submission protocol, photo documentation standards, monthly summary brief template

This recommendation is reinforced by both evaluation dissemination guidance (clear, audience-tailored products) and SPROUT's own evidence that interns were actively producing communications outputs and operational artifacts that strengthened organizational visibility and continuity (Palen & Briggs, 2020).

5. Communications capacity as an explicit program outcome

Communications and dissemination are not only end-of-project activities. They are a capacity-building function that interns practiced during the summer through high-impact deliverables and public-facing narratives.

The intern survey results also support making communications skills a formal training priority, since interns signaled strong interest in storytelling and professional stakeholder communication as high-value skill areas.

Replicable best practice: require at least one "impact communication deliverable" per intern (infographic, brief, or stakeholder update template) that is added to the toolkit hub as an example artifact, creating compounding value across cohorts.

Budget and Resourcing Summary

Project SPROUT is designed to be replicable only if it is adequately resourced. The Newark Science and Sustainability (NSAS) internship ecosystem demonstrated that strong outcomes are possible in a lean, grant-dependent environment, but also that sustainability depends on funding the roles, tools, and continuity systems that prevent the program from relying on a single person's bandwidth.

1. Budget design principles for replication

1.1 Fund the "operating system," not only the interns.

Throughout the summer, the highest-leverage investments were the mechanisms that protect continuity across cohorts: coordinator capacity, shared repositories, standardized templates/SOPs, and basic accountability routines. These are the elements that prevent interns from "starting from ground zero" and reduce duplicated effort through clearer delegation and workflows.

1.2 Treat compensation as an equity and performance strategy.

For national replication, intern compensation should be planned as a core line item because it expands access for under-resourced participants and improves reliability. When a program selects an unpaid model, organizations must assess the legal and compliance risks under U.S. Department of Labor guidance (for example, the primary beneficiary framework for internships) (U.S. Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division, 2018).

1.3 Resource micro-credentials in a way that matches intern time reality.

The SPROUT intern survey indicates that upskilling is feasible when it is concise, relevant, and integrated into the program. Most interns indicated limited weekly availability for online learning, and they expressed clear platform preferences, which should guide procurement decisions and help avoid waste.

2. Recommended budget categories

2.1 Core staffing and program operations

Internship Coordinator (essential line item)
This role serves as the "near-peer anchor" that keeps the ecosystem coherent from week to week, encompassing onboarding logistics, delegation support, documentation discipline, intern coaching, and continuity across cohorts. For replication, budget this role as a **required** cost, not an optional add-on.

National budgeting guidance (replication-ready):

- **Cohort size 8 to 12 interns:** budget **0.4 - 0.8 FTE** coordinator capacity during the active period, plus lighter pre-start and closeout time.
- **Cohort size 13+ interns or year-round model:** budget **0.8 - 1.0 FTE**, or add a deputy/assistant coordinator role to prevent bottlenecks.

2.2 Intern compensation and participation supports

Intern wages or stipends (required for equity-focused replication)
Because the model is intended for under-resourced communities, compensation should be planned to reduce barriers and improve program reliability. While some students may choose to volunteer in mission-driven settings to gain experience or contribute to causes they care about, Project SPROUT is intentionally designed to avoid reliance on unpaid labor as a core operating strategy.

Research and practitioner guidance consistently caution that unpaid or underpaid internships can unintentionally exclude individuals from under-resourced backgrounds and place disproportionate burdens on those with fewer financial resources. The National Association of Colleges and Employers has explicitly noted that unpaid internships are often inaccessible to students who cannot afford to forgo wages, thereby reinforcing socioeconomic inequities and limiting access to career-enhancing opportunities for first-generation, low-income, and

financially independent students (National Association of Colleges and Employers [NACE], n.d.).

Accordingly, this model emphasizes paid participation wherever feasible and treats compensation not only as a legal or compliance consideration but as an ethical commitment to equity, dignity, and program reliability, particularly in mission-driven organizations serving under-resourced communities and operating with limited staffing capacity.

When volunteer roles do exist, they should be clearly defined, time-bound, non-substitutive of paid positions, and structured to ensure that learning value is not exchanged for essential labor.

National approach:

- Set pay at **no less than local minimum wage** and ideally aligned to local living-wage conditions where feasible.
- Use a transparent formula:
  Planned hours × local hourly rate = stipend or wage budget per intern
- Include participation supports where relevant, such as transportation, meals during long sessions, PPE/field supplies, and accessibility needs.

2.3 Newark implementation baseline (illustrative reference point)

In Newark, both interns and the internship coordinator were compensated at **$20 per hour** and worked **20 hours per week** for **13 weeks** (a total of **260 hours per person**). At this rate and schedule, the **direct wage investment per paid participant** was **$5,200** (**260 hours × $20 per hour**). This provides a practical benchmark for replication sites to estimate costs, while still allowing compensation to scale based on local wage standards and cost-of-living conditions.

Replication budgeting formula (plug-and-play)

- **Per-person wage investment** = *(hourly rate) × (hours per week) × (number of weeks)*

- **Total direct wage budget** = *(hourly rate) × (hours per week) × (number of weeks) × (number of paid participants)*

Replicable example (Newark baseline): At **$20 per hour**, **20 hours per week**, for **13 weeks**, the per-person wage investment is **$5,200**. If a replication site funds **N interns plus one coordinator** at the same schedule and rate, the total direct wage budget is **$5,200 × (N + 1)**.

Newark context for reference: New Jersey's minimum wage in 2025 is $15.49 per hour, which serves as a practical baseline example; however, the replication model should always use the local standard where implemented (New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development, 2024).

Wage Variability

It is important to note that wage standards vary by state, region, and year, and are subject to periodic legislative and market-driven adjustments. The Newark compensation structure presented here is intended as an illustrative reference point rather than a prescriptive benchmark. Replication sites should calibrate hourly rates based on current local minimum wage laws, prevailing living-wage conditions, and organizational capacity at the time of implementation. Accordingly, the Project SPROUT model is designed to remain flexible and adaptable, allowing compensation structures to evolve over time while preserving the core principles of equity, transparency, and sustainability.

2.4 Mentorship capacity

Alumn and near-peer mentor stipends (high-leverage, low-cost stability tool)
Mentorship at NSAS was meaningful, but it was not always formalized. A scalable model should budget modest stipends for returning interns who serve as near-peer mentors, since they preserve institutional memory and reduce strain on leadership.

Recommended national structure:

- "Near-peer mentor" stipend for returning interns who support onboarding and weekly check-ins.

- Optional honoraria for external mentors (academia, business, healthcare, civic partners) when expectations are structured and time-bound.

2.5 Technology and core tools

The Newark model demonstrated that interns effectively executed and communicated impact using basic, accessible tools. For national replication, the goal is a low-cost, standardized tech stack that supports operations, storytelling, and reporting.

Core tech stack categories (recommended baseline)

- **Collaboration and file system:** Google Workspace (many nonprofits qualify for no-cost or discounted offerings, which can materially reduce cost at scale).
- **Design and communications:** Canva (nonprofit access can be available through nonprofit programs).
- **Event registration and reporting:** Eventbrite (budget should account for platform fees when ticketing or paid registration is used).
- **Micro-credentials and upskilling licenses:**
  Survey preferences indicate that licensing decisions should prioritize platforms that interns will actually use.
    - Coursera for Teams is commonly priced per seat (budget should assume per-user licensing when negotiated institutionally).
    - LinkedIn Learning is typically priced through organizational licensing models.

SPROUT budget implication: Rather than offering many licenses, fund a smaller "menu" of highly relevant credentials and tie completion to applied outputs that benefit the organization (for example, an SOP, template, or impact infographic added to the repository).

2.6 Evaluation, reporting, and dissemination

Data collection and reporting support

To meet funder expectations and ensure replication, budget for the operational costs of measurement, including survey tools, transcription (where needed), documentation time, and lightweight dashboard maintenance.

Communications and dissemination line items

Replication requires dissemination-ready packaging (webinars, toolkit hub, template library). Even if content is produced internally, there are meaningful costs such as design polish, hosting, and facilitation support.

3. Diversified funding strategy (national replication recommendation)

For small, grant-dependent organizations, funding volatility is a predictable risk. The replication model should assume multi-source funding and build sponsor-ready reporting, making fundraising easier over time.

Recommended funding mix for replication:

- **Public funding:** local and state grants, federal pass-through programs
- **Academic partnerships:** universities, medical schools, extension programs, service-learning offices
- **Private sponsorships:** corporate social responsibility support, local employers, philanthropic donors
- **In-kind support:** meeting space, software credits, printing, food, and event supplies

This approach aligns with the program's demonstrated need to sustain the internship ecosystem beyond any single funding stream.

4. Minimum budget components for a replication-ready model

If a site is funding only the essentials, Project SPROUT recommends these as the "non-negotiables" for a sustainable launch:

1. Coordinator capacity (the continuity backbone)
2. Intern compensation plan (wage or stipend) plus basic participation supports
3. A standardized tech stack (collaboration, design, event workflow, and a limited micro-credential menu)
4. Light evaluation and reporting costs (so KPIs are feasible and funder-ready)

This structure protects the sustainability intent captured in the program's guiding principle: the work becomes a system that can scale across communities rather than a one-person effort.

Conclusion

Small, mission-driven organizations are essential anchors in under-resourced communities, yet many operate without formal systems to consistently onboard, train, and mentor interns in ways that can be sustained across cohorts and replicated across sites. As the REACH Round 4 evaluation documented, informal practices can generate strong relationships and meaningful short-term productivity, but they often leave organizations vulnerable to knowledge loss and operational instability when leadership capacity shifts or funding cycles change.

Project SPROUT responds to this gap by translating the Newark Science and Sustainability (NSAS) 2025 internship implementation and evaluation into a structured, replication-ready framework that preserves the relational strengths of community-based work while reducing reliance on a few key individuals. The model is grounded in a complete implementation cycle and a mixed-methods, qualitative-first evaluation approach, including focus groups, leadership interviews, weekly meeting field notes, and a full-response intern survey. As Tobias Fox's guiding sustainability principle makes clear, lasting impact requires systems that can outlive any one person's bandwidth.

By formalizing structured onboarding, modular upskilling, and multi-tier tutelage, SPROUT provides practical tools that peer organizations can adopt with limited staffing and infrastructure, including standard operating procedures, templates, micro-credential pathways, measurable KPIs, and governance supports. The accompanying implementation roadmap, measurement framework, and dissemination strategy are intentionally designed to convert learning into continuity through clear build-first sequencing, routine review cycles, and dissemination-ready assets that support credibility and national adoption. In doing so, this paper advances REACH Round 4's central objective: a sustainable, equity-centered model that strengthens internship ecosystems, builds leadership pipelines, and expands community impact beyond Newark through replication that is both evidence-informed and operationally feasible.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Focus Group Meeting Notes

Appendix A1

Focus Group 1 Meeting Notes: Former Intern Cohort (June 19, 2025)

Newark Science & Sustainability (SAS) Program Evaluation Study
Focus Group Notes

Focus group	1st Session
Date	6/19/2025
Time	5:25 pm-6:36 pm; Discussion began at approximately 5:32
Facilitator	Botticello, A
Notetaker	Lazzarino, J
Observing	Wirtenberg, J; De Abreu, L; Fox, T (brief hello)
Participants	TSB, CL, MP, FB, JN, EA

GENERAL

Observations about participants, atmosphere, and dynamics

- 6 female participants and a mix of recent graduates and current students. Most attended Rutgers and currently reside in Newark.
- Participants were enthusiastic, friendly, and upbeat.
- TSB, CL, MP, FB, JN: 5 of the 6 had worked together in the 2024 cohort and interned for the entire summer (~3 months). They were excited to see one another again and frequently referenced the strong bond the program gave them.
- EA: Despite not knowing the others, the 6th participant appeared at ease and comfortable chiming in on the discussion. Her experience differed in that it was a summer youth employment program of shorter duration and involved more hands-on involvement in the gardening. There was a mix of college and high school interns in her group.

Newark Science & Sustainability (NSAS) Program Evaluation Study

These notes summarize observations and discussion themes from a focus group with former interns who participated in the 2024 NSAS internship cohort.

Appendix A2

Focus Group 2 Meeting Notes: Community Program Participants (June 30, 2025)

SAS Focus Group Notes

Focus group	2nd Session
Date	6/30/2025
Time	5:28 pm-6:36 pm; Discussion began at approximately 5:32
Facilitator	Botticello, A
Notetaker	Lazzarino, J
Observing	Wirtenberg, J; De Abreu, L; Fox, T
Participants	PO, Shan, CR, Ar, KW, AO, Shar

GENERAL

Observations about participants, atmosphere, and dynamics

- 7 participants joined. All from Newark, 4/7 still living in Newark, 2 in the Oranges, 1 calling from London
- Participants were lively, vocal, and friendly. A few knew each other through common projects, and one was also a former student of JW.
- Experience with all categories of Newark SAS programs represented. Many did the CSA, and there was experience with the conferences, the meal, and the Garden Tour. 1 participant was a gardener/grower

Newark Science & Sustainability (NSAS) Program Evaluation Study

This focus group captured perspectives from community members engaged in multiple NSAS programs, including CSA participation, conferences, and community events.

Appendix A3

Focus Group 3 Meeting Notes: Growers and Food System Stakeholders (July 28, 2025)

SAS Focus Group Notes

Focus group	3rd Session (rescheduled)
Date	7/28/2025
Time	5:44 pm – 6:43 pm
Facilitator	Botticello, A
Notetaker	Lazzarino, J
Observing	LDA, TF
Participants	CR, CM, BGW, BW

GENERAL

Observations about participants, atmosphere, and dynamics

- 4 participants joined the full focus group
- 3 joined with the camera on, 1 joined with the camera off, but turned it on when speaking.
- Began with introductions amongst growers and the focus group leader
- CM is from Newark, volunteers for the Newark community food system
- CR is from Newark
- BGW is from Newark
- BW joined a bit late, missed the full intro, but seemed familiar with some of the others

Group participation challenges

- 1 person initially joined with an AI notetaking profile and then did not join again as a personal profile
- The meeting began late because of participants being busy/needing a last-minute reminder to join the meeting from TF

Newark Science & Sustainability (NSAS) Program Evaluation Study

This session focused on growers and food system stakeholders involved in Newark-based community food initiatives supported by NSAS.

Appendix A4

Focus Group 4 Meeting Notes: Community Members and Growers (July 31, 2025)

SAS Focus Group Notes

Focus group	4th Session
Date	7/31/2025
Time	5:40 pm – 6:44 pm
Facilitator	Botticello, A
Notetaker	Lazzarino, J
Observing	LDA, TF
Participants	CR, CM, BGW, BW

Participation Dynamics

- YW: joined ~ 5:34 with camera on
- KR: joined ~ 5:39 with camera off, is Spanish speaking (LDA translated after AB for each question and statement)
- KW: joined ~ 5:52 with camera off; Newark resident and participates in various community betterment programs; also a grower of fresh vegetables.

Newark Science & Sustainability (NSAS) Program Evaluation Study

This focus group examined participation dynamics, language accessibility, and program engagement among community members and growers.

Appendix B

Project SPROUT Intern Upskilling and Micro-Credentials Survey (2025)

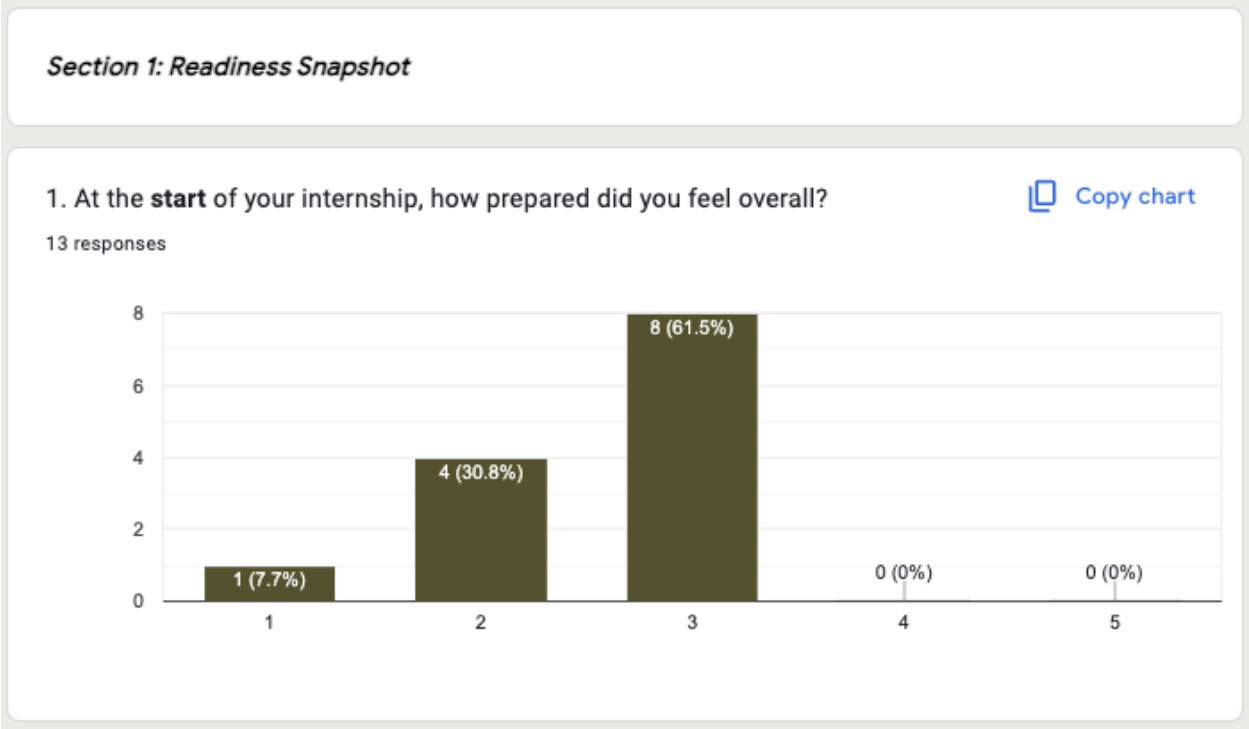
Appendix B presents selected summary outputs from the Project SPROUT Intern Upskilling and Micro-Credentials Survey administered at the conclusion of the Summer 2025 internship cohort. The survey captured intern perceptions related to onboarding readiness, training preferences, skill priorities, the feasibility of upskilling during the internship period, and perceived performance impact. Results informed the design of the SPROUT onboarding, training, and micro-credential framework.

Figure B1

Project SPROUT Intern Upskilling and Micro-Credentials Survey Introduction Screen

This figure displays the title and introductory description presented to interns prior to completing the post-program survey. The framing emphasized brevity, relevance to professional development, and the survey's role in informing future cohorts and national replication of the Project SPROUT model.

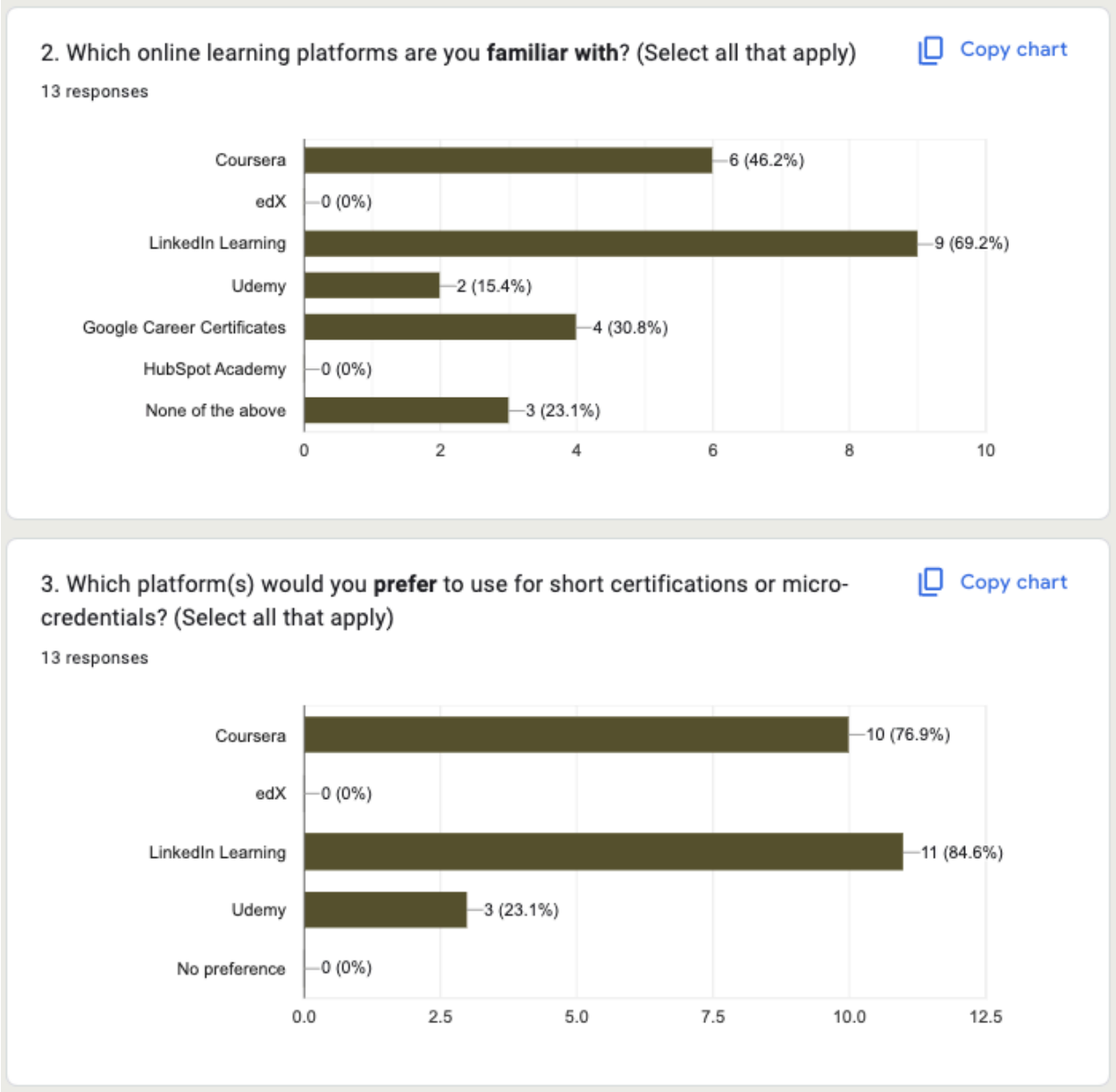
Figure B2



Intern Self-Reported Readiness at Program Start (n = 13)

Interns rated their overall preparedness at the beginning of the internship on a five-point scale. Results indicate moderate initial readiness, reinforcing the need for structured onboarding supports.

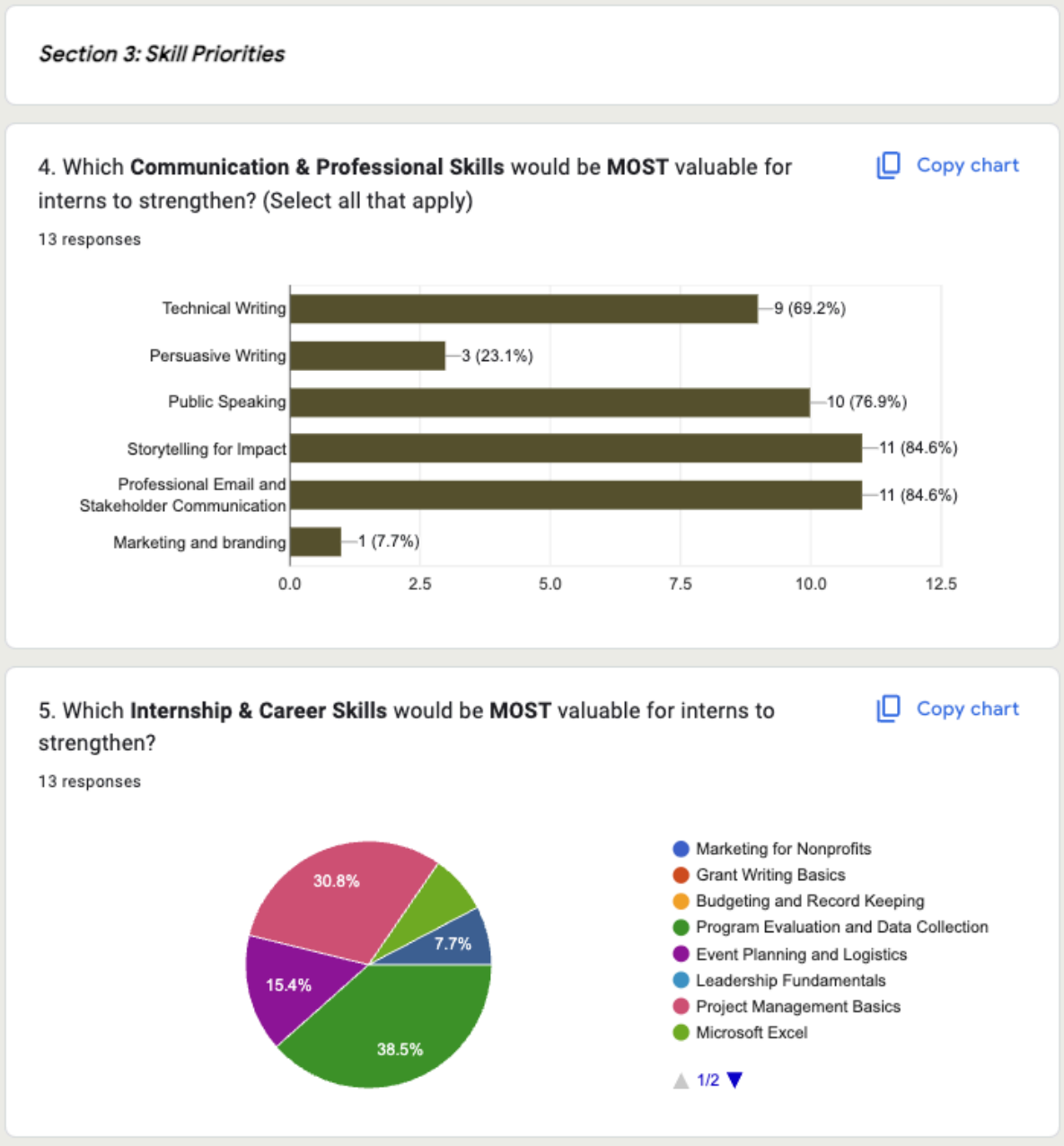
Figure B3



Intern Familiarity With Online Learning Platforms and Preferred Platforms for Short Certifications and Micro-Credentials (n = 13)

Participants reported familiarity with LinkedIn Learning and Coursera at higher rates than other platforms, informing platform selection for future micro-credential offerings. Also, demonstrated a strong preference for LinkedIn Learning and Coursera for short, skill-focused credentialing aligned with internship responsibilities.

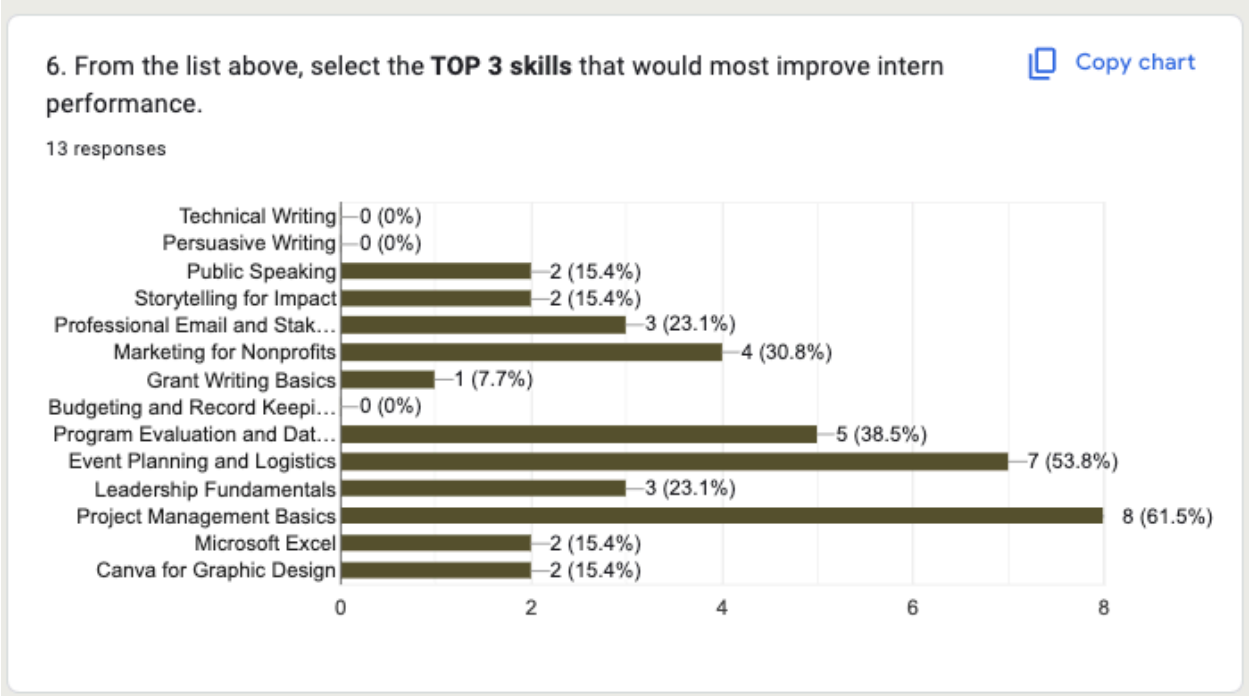
Figure B4



Priority Communication, Professional, Internship, and Career Skill Areas (n = 13)

Professional communication, stakeholder engagement, storytelling for impact, and public speaking emerged as the most valued skill domains for intern development. Also, Program evaluation, event logistics, project management, and leadership fundamentals were identified as high-value skill areas for strengthening intern effectiveness.

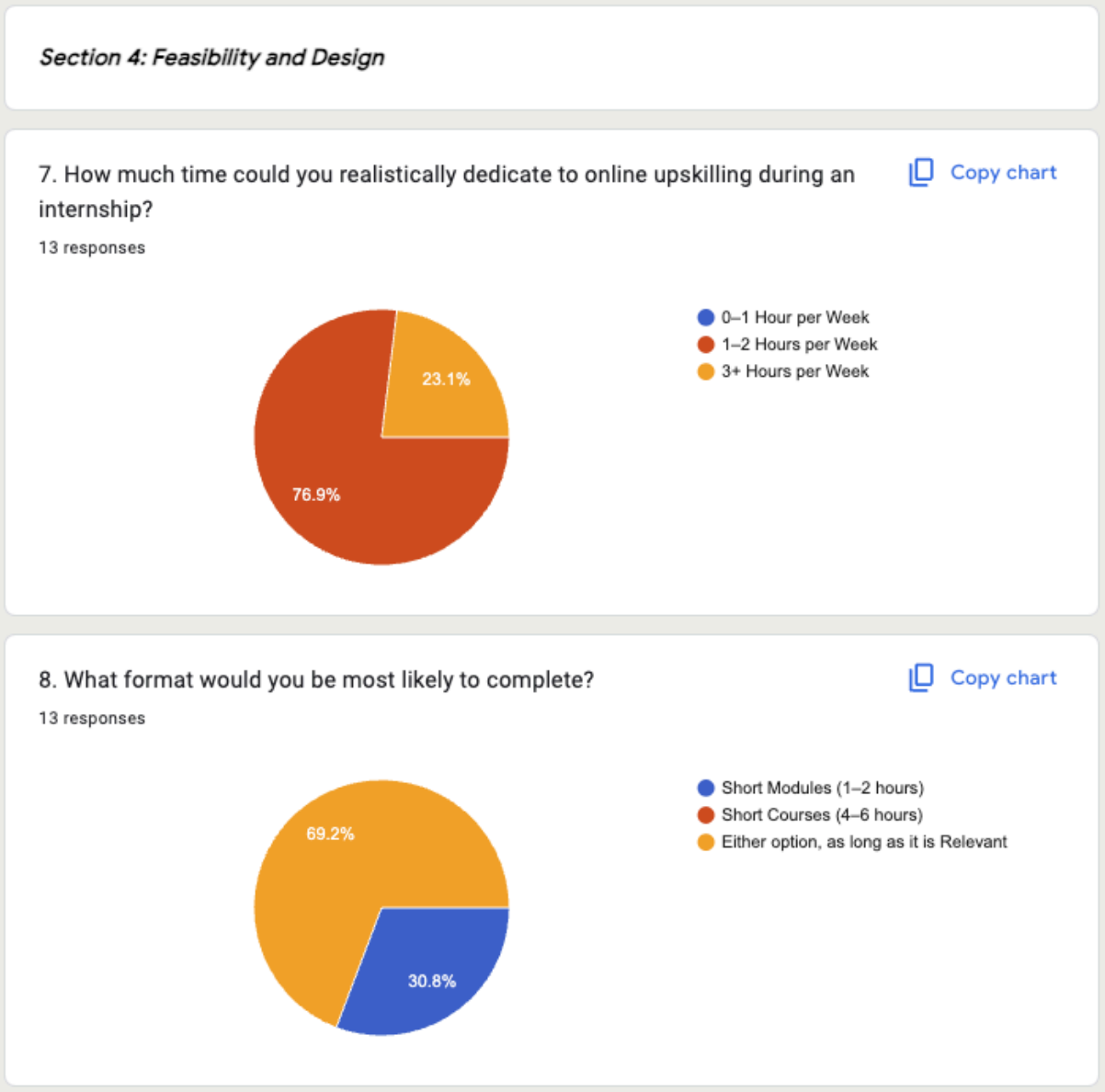
Figure B5



Top Three Skills Identified as Most Likely to Improve Intern Performance (n = 13)

This figure summarizes intern responses to Survey Item 6, which asked respondents to select the three skills that would most improve intern performance. Results are displayed as counts and percentages across the 13 survey responses. Because respondents could select up to three options, percentages do not sum to 100 percent. As shown, Project Management Basics, Event Planning and Logistics, and Program Evaluation and Data Collection emerged as the top three skill areas identified by interns as most likely to improve their performance, reinforcing the importance of structured operational, coordination, and data literacy training within the Project SPROUT model.

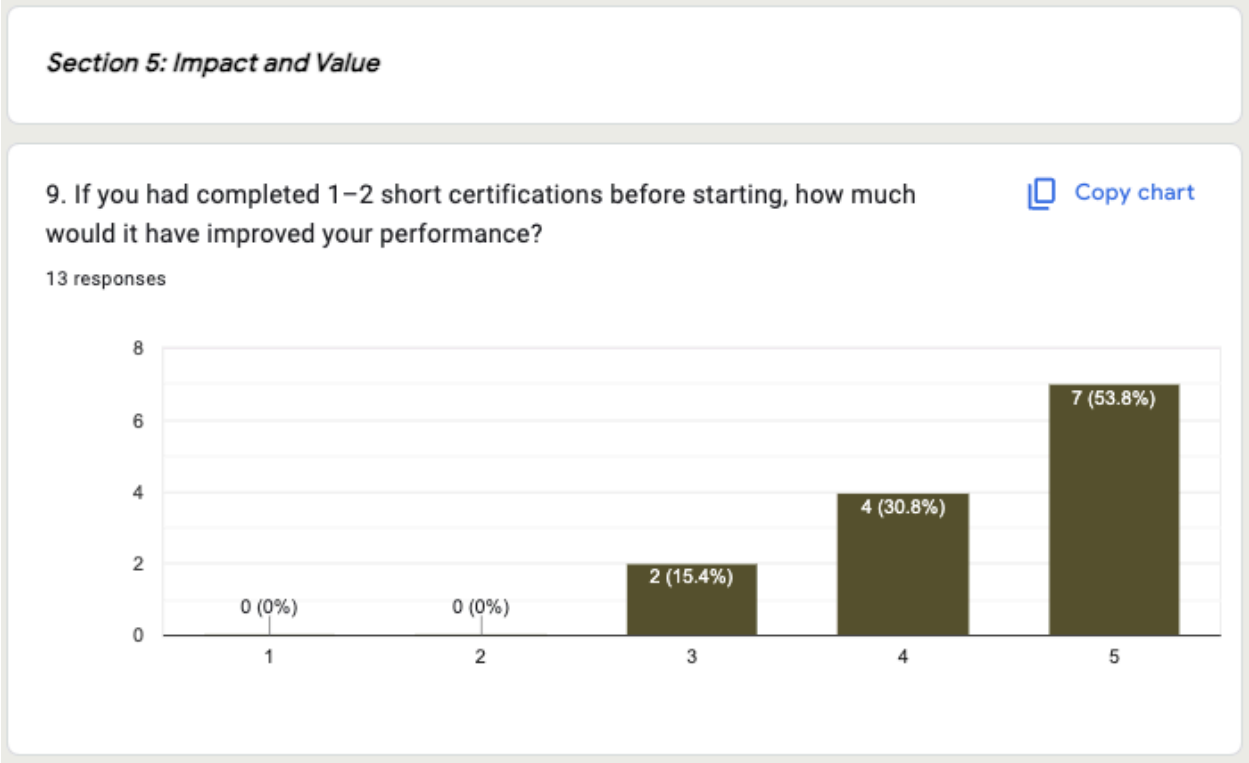
Figure B6



Feasibility of Online Upskilling and Preferred Learning Formats (n = 13)

Responses related to the feasibility and design of online upskilling within the Project SPROUT internship model. Question 7 shows that most interns reported the ability to dedicate 1-2 hours per week to upskilling, with fewer indicating capacity for 3 or more hours. Question 8 highlights a preference for short, modular learning formats (1-2 hours) or short courses (4-6 hours), particularly when content is clearly relevant to internship responsibilities. Together, these findings emphasize the importance of time-bounded, role-aligned training designs that align with interns' workload constraints and support feasible skill development.

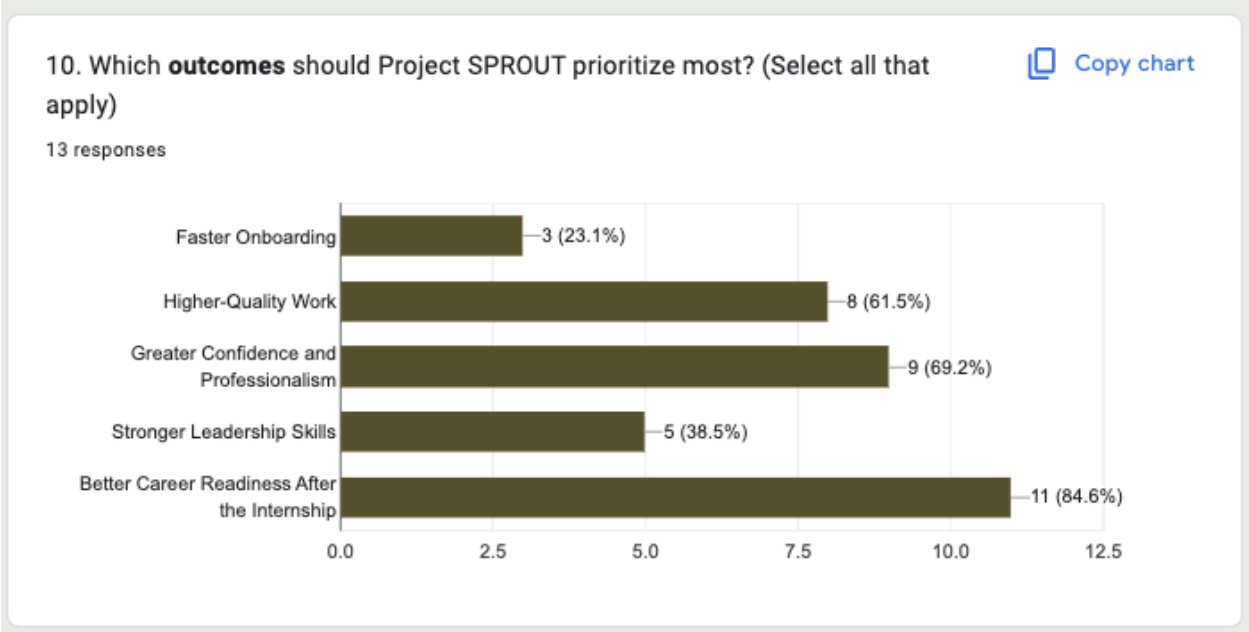
Figure B7



Perceived Impact of Pre-Start Micro-Credentials on Performance (n = 13)

Interns reported that completing one to two short certifications prior to program start would meaningfully improve early performance and confidence.

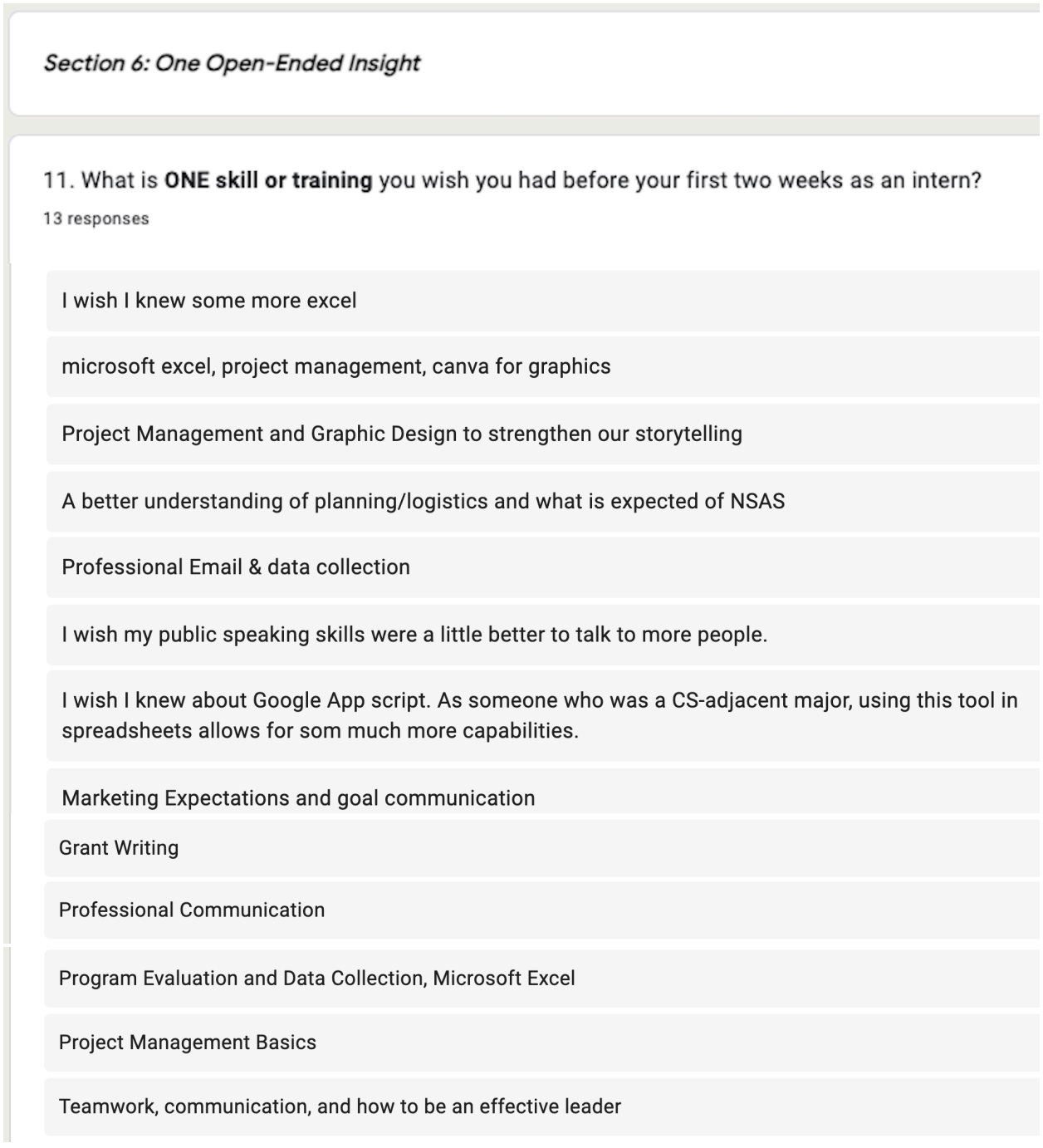
Figure B8



Intern-Prioritized Outcomes for Project SPROUT Replication (n = 13)

Interns most frequently selected better career readiness after the internship (84.6%), followed by greater confidence and professionalism (69.2%) and higher-quality work (61.5%). Lower-frequency selections included stronger leadership skills (38.5%) and faster onboarding (23.1%). These results reinforce the importance of designing the replication model around outcomes interns value most, while using training and mentorship components to translate those priorities into measurable skill and performance gains.

Figure B9



Open-Ended Skill Gaps Identified by Interns (n = 13)

Qualitative responses highlighted gaps in project management, data collection, professional communication, Excel, and leadership skills, reinforcing the quantitative findings.

Appendix C

Project SPROUT National Onboarding Checklist

Replication Template for Small, Mission-Driven Organizations

Purpose:

This checklist provides a standardized, low-burden onboarding framework to ensure interns do not "start from scratch," reduce reliance on individual leaders, and support continuity across cohorts. All items are designed to be completed **by the end of Week 1** unless otherwise noted.

A. Pre-Start Readiness (7 to 10 Days Before Day 1)

☐ Intern roster finalized and contact information confirmed
☐ Organizational email or access credentials issued
☐ Interns added to shared calendar and standing meetings
☐ Program Hub access granted (view or edit, as appropriate)
☐ Pre-start package distributed, including:
    ☐ Program overview and expectations
    ☐ Seasonal calendar and milestone map
    ☐ "How we work" norms (communication, meetings, escalation)
☐ Skills and availability self-assessment collected
☐ Core tools identified and access provided (Google Workspace, Canva, tracking sheets)

Pre-Start Completion Gate:
All interns confirm access to tools, calendar, and Program Hub.

B. Program Hub and Documentation Set-Up

☐ Centralized Program Hub created and accessible
☐ "Start Here" page posted with:
    ☐ Mission primer and ecosystem overview
    ☐ Key contacts and escalation paths
    ☐ Navigation guidance

☐ Standard folder structure in place:

- ☐ Onboarding
- ☐ Training
- ☐ SOPs
- ☐ Templates
- ☐ Programs
- ☐ Impact and Reporting

☐ File naming and version control conventions documented

C. Week 1 Orientation and Role Clarity

☐ Mission, values, and community context reviewed

☐ Nonprofit and grant-funded operations basics explained

☐ Intern roles, responsibilities, and boundaries clarified

☐ Expected weekly outputs and quality standards reviewed

☐ Operating glossary distributed (program names, tools, acronyms)

☐ Guiding principles reviewed and acknowledged

☐ Participation and professionalism agreements signed

D. Operational Readiness and Tools Bootcamp

☐ Shared calendar use and meeting rhythm reviewed

☐ Drive navigation and document standards reviewed

☐ Tracking and reporting expectations introduced

☐ Basic spreadsheet or data collection standards explained

E. Early Peer-to-Peer Integration

☐ Near-peer onboarding facilitator assigned (coordinator or returning intern)

☐ Structured icebreakers and paired introductions completed

☐ Strengths map completed to inform task allocation

☐ Week 1 buddy system implemented (brief daily check-ins)

☐ Day 5 handoff checklist introduced for documentation continuity

F. Early Visibility and Execution Alignment

☐ Seasonal calendar published on Day 1

☐ First major program or event reviewed at a high level

☐ Event or program "kit" walkthrough completed (roles, timeline, data needs)

☐ Week 2 work plan drafted with owners and deadlines

☐ Weekly meeting agenda and tracking system introduced

G. Onboarding Completion Indicators (for Replication Tracking)

☐ 100% completion of onboarding checklist by the end of Week 1

☐ All interns are able to independently navigate the Program Hub

☐ First independent task completed to standard within the first 7 to 10 days

☐ All required agreements and acknowledgments on file

Onboarding Lead (Name/Role): _____

Program Lead (Name/Role): _____

Cohort / Term: _____

Date Completed: _____

Note. This onboarding checklist is designed as a replication-ready tool and may be adapted to local organizational context, staffing structures, and program timelines while preserving the core sequencing and completion indicators outlined above.

Appendix D

Intern-Created Infographics: 13th Annual Sustainable Living Empowerment Conference

Appendix D Overview

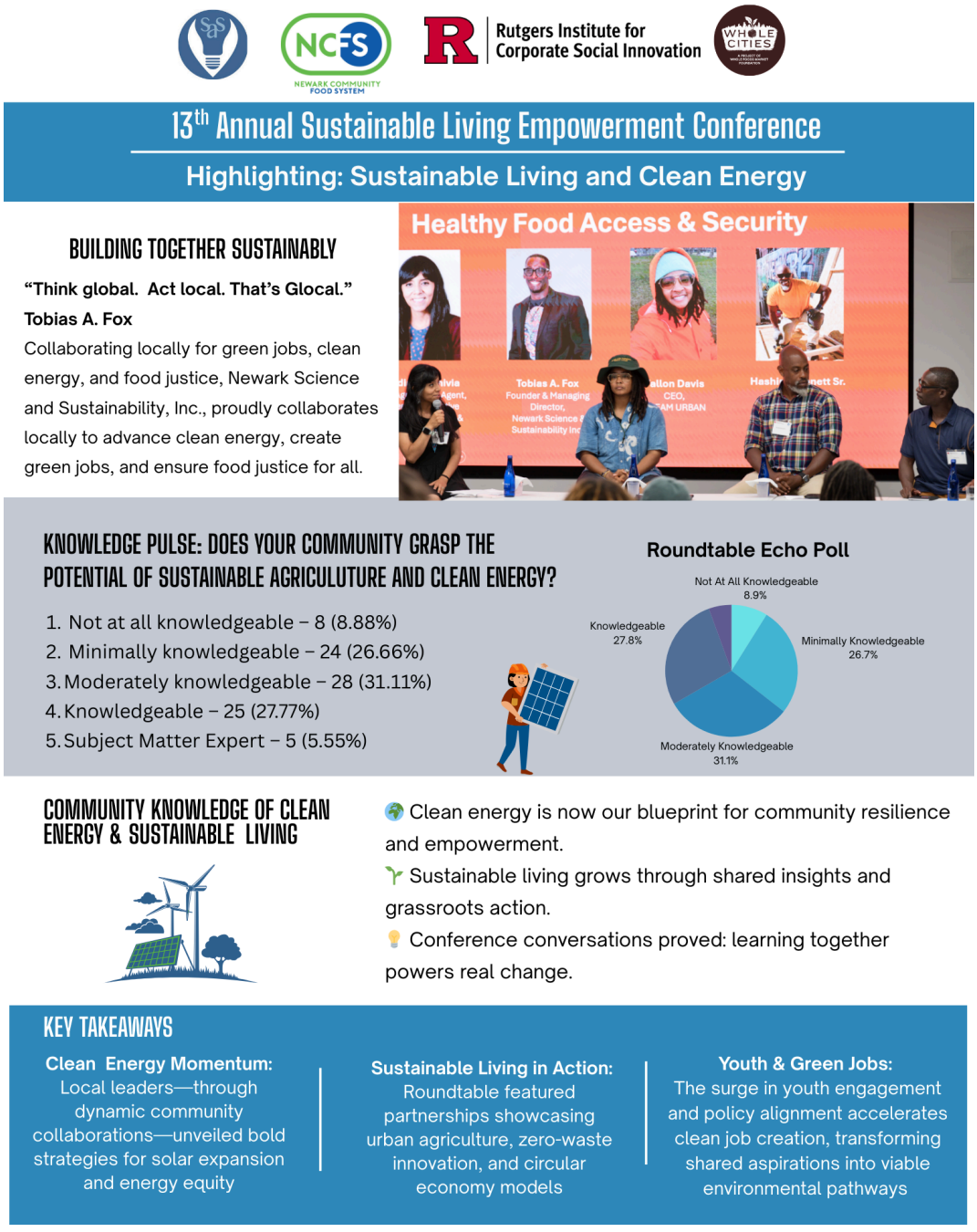
Appendix D presents a series of professional infographics created by Project SPROUT interns in support of the **13th Annual Sustainable Living Empowerment Conference**, a flagship community event organized by Newark Science and Sustainability, Inc. (NSAS) in collaboration with the Rutgers Institute for Corporate Social Innovation (RICSI) and regional partners. These artifacts document interns' applied contributions to event planning, communications, data synthesis, and public-facing impact reporting, and serve as concrete evidence of skill development in storytelling, stakeholder communication, and documentation practices emphasized throughout the internship model.

Figure D1

Overview and Participation Metrics of the Annual Conference (June 26th, 2025)

This infographic summarizes attendance, youth participation, speaker and panelist engagement, and geographic representation for the 13th Annual Sustainable Living Empowerment Conference. The figure was developed by Project SPROUT interns to translate event data into a clear, public-facing impact narrative, supporting outreach, partner reporting, and future grant documentation.

Figure D2



Community Knowledge and Dialogue on Sustainable Living and Clean Energy

This infographic highlights conference dialogue and audience feedback related to sustainable living and clean energy, including participant self-assessments of knowledge and key discussion themes. Interns synthesized poll data and session insights to demonstrate how community learning and engagement outcomes can be documented and communicated effectively.

Figure D3

Philanthropy, Community Engagement, and Partnership Building for Local Impact

This figure documents conference content focused on expanding philanthropy, community engagement, and cross-sector partnerships. Interns curated qualitative insights and survey responses to illustrate how inclusive collaboration, trust, and shared decision-making contribute to sustainable community impact.

Figure D4

Healthy Food Access in School Systems: Community-Led Solutions and Policy Dialogue

This infographic captures conference discussions on healthy food access in public schools, and community knowledge gains, policy-oriented dialogue, and youth engagement. Created by interns, the figure demonstrates applied competencies in program evaluation, data visualization, and mission-aligned storytelling.

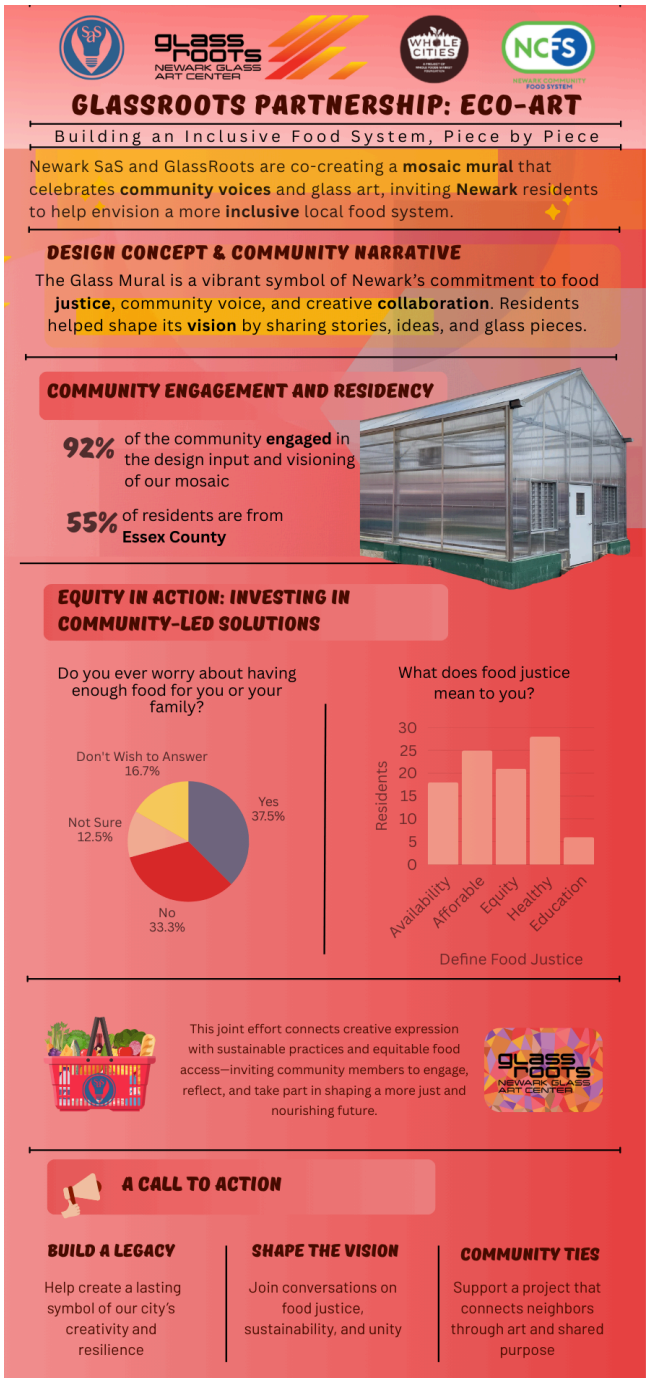
Appendix E

Intern-Developed Program and Community Engagement Infographics

Appendix D Overview

Appendix E presents a curated set of program-specific infographics developed by Project SPROUT interns to document, communicate, and visualize key activities, partnerships, and outcomes across multiple Newark Science and Sustainability initiatives. These materials reflect interns' applied training in data visualization, program evaluation, stakeholder communication, and community-centered storytelling. Collectively, the infographics demonstrate how interns translated foundational skills into tangible program outputs that supported event planning, reporting, outreach, and partner engagement, while reinforcing Project SPROUT's emphasis on experiential learning, operational readiness, and real-world nonprofit capacity building.

Figure E1



GlassRoots Partnership: Eco-Art and Community Food Systems Engagement

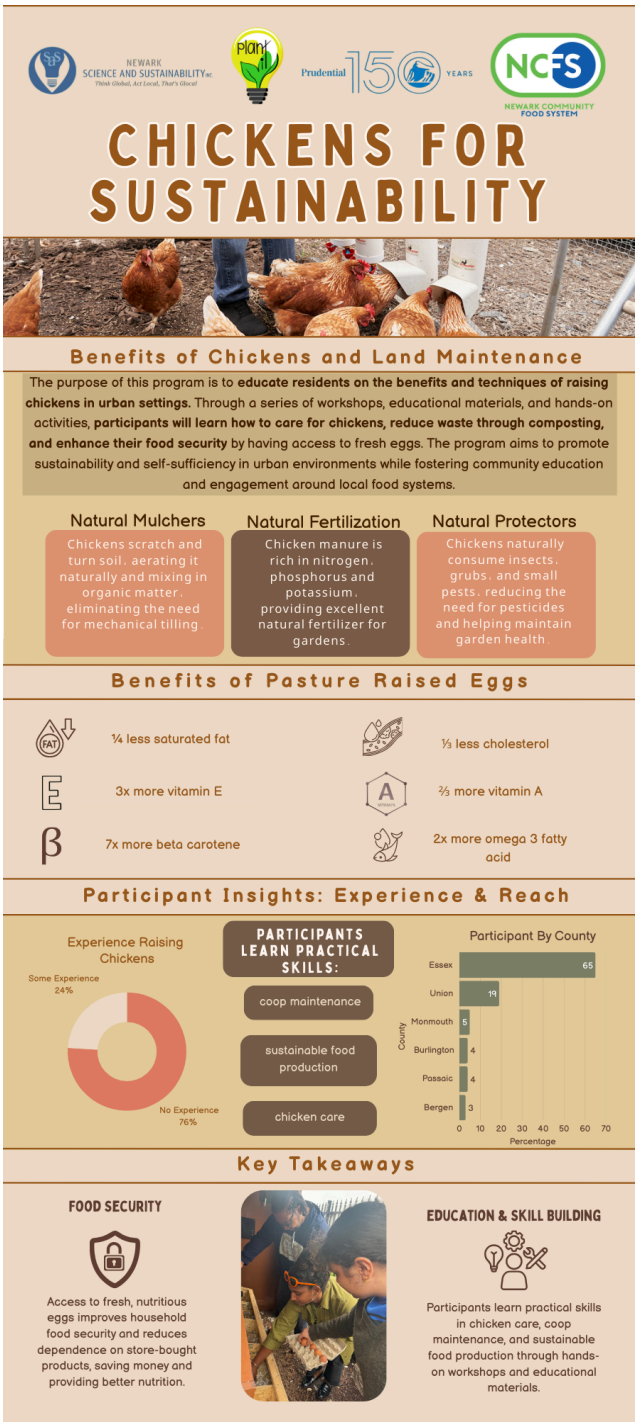
This infographic was developed by Project SPROUT interns to document a collaborative eco-art partnership between Newark Science and Sustainability, GlassRoots Art Center, and community partners. The visual summarizes community engagement outcomes, equity-driven design principles, and resident participation in a mosaic mural project centered on food justice and inclusive local food systems.

Figure E2

Newark's Harvest: A Citywide Garden Tour

This infographic, created by interns, highlights the planning, coordination, and outreach for Newark's Harvest, a citywide garden tour involving multiple urban farms and community partners. The graphic illustrates participation levels, partner organizations, and learning outcomes related to sustainable agriculture and community education.

Figure E3



Chickens for Sustainability: Urban Agriculture and Food Security Education

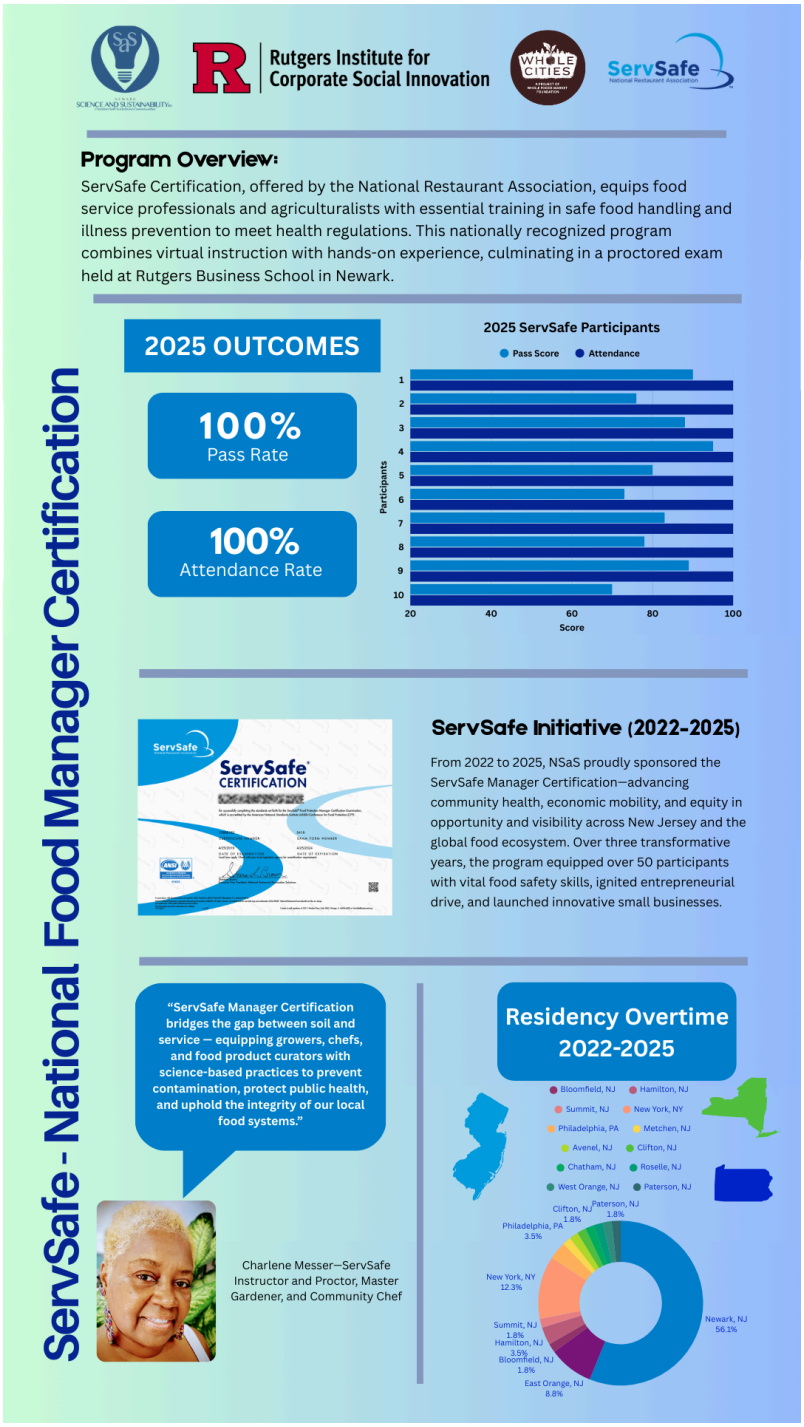
This intern-designed infographic presents program components and outcomes from the Chickens for Sustainability initiative, including resident education, skill development, and food security impacts. The visual reflects applied learning in data visualization, public communication, and program storytelling.

Figure E4

Health Is Wealth: Herbal Wellness Festival

This infographic documents the Health Is Wealth Herbal Wellness Festival and was produced by interns to capture event outcomes, vendor participation, and community health education impacts. The graphic emphasizes eco-entrepreneurship, wellness education, and community-based economic engagement.

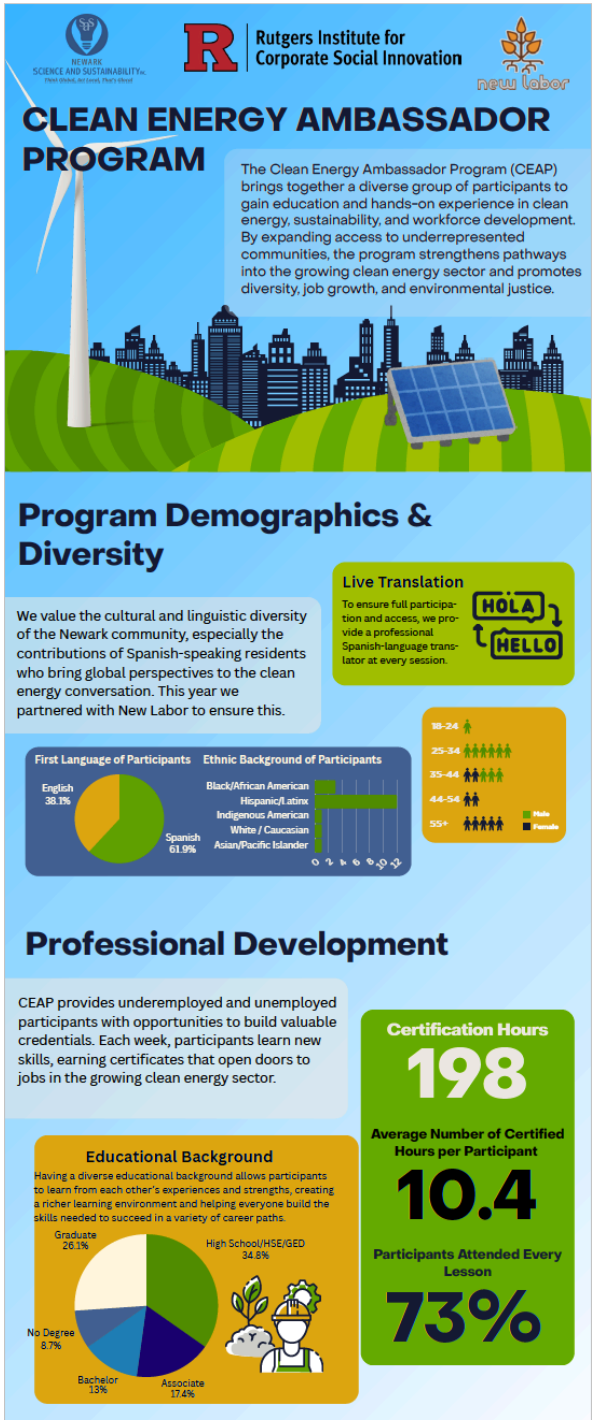
Figure E5



ServSafe Manager Certification Program Outcomes

This infographic summarizes outcomes from the ServSafe Manager Certification program and was developed by interns to communicate participation rates, certification outcomes, and geographic reach. The visual demonstrates interns' applied skills in program evaluation, data synthesis, and professional reporting.

Figure E6



Clean Energy Ambassador Program: Demographics and Professional Development

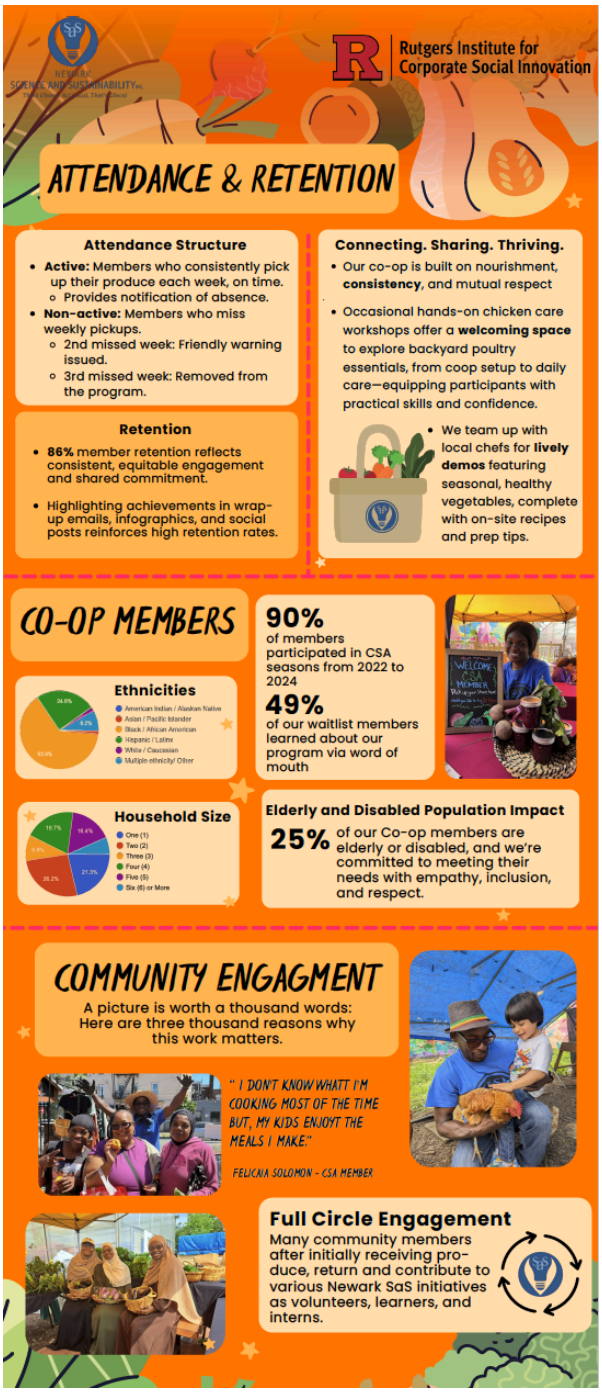
This intern-created infographic highlights participant demographics, certification hours, and workforce development outcomes from the Clean Energy Ambassador Program. The visual reflects applied training in equity-focused data representation and workforce pipeline communication.

Figure E7a

Farm to Table Co-Op: Community Supported Agriculture Model

This infographic was designed by interns to illustrate the structure, reach, and outcomes of the Farm to Table Co-Op initiative. The visual communicates food distribution metrics, partner farms, and community engagement strategies supporting local food access.

Figure E7b



Farm to Table Co-Op: Attendance, Retention, and Community Engagement

This 2nd part of the previous infographic expands on the Farm to Table Co-Op program by presenting attendance, retention, and participant demographics. The visual demonstrates intern application of data analysis, program monitoring, and accessible reporting for community stakeholders.