



# **STAFF SCREENING & HIRING TOOLKIT**

**Fair**Futures ➤

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## SECTION 1: SUMMARY AND METHODOLOGY

The goal of the Fair Futures model is to provide young people with the long-term coaching, social/emotional, academic, career development, and independent living supports they need to:

- Build trusting relationships and a network of positive adult and peer supports
- Prepare for and graduate from high school
- Connect to and persist in post-secondary settings
- Engage in career exploration and career development experiences in line with their interests to help them eventually navigate onto a living wage career pathway
- Access and maintain stable, affordable housing if they are exiting foster care and gain independent living and life skills

To achieve strong results for young people, agencies have identified that **one of the most critical steps is to hire the right people**. Another critical step is to create a Coaching Culture (the [Fair Futures Program Manual](#) discusses this and there will be a number of trainings dedicated to this topic).

To that end, **this toolkit provides comprehensive, detailed, easy-to-use information on how to screen, interview, and hire the right Fair Futures staff**. It is organized into sections based on staff positions. For each Fair Futures position, the toolkit includes:

- An overview of the role;
- A description of desired qualities and competencies for the role;
- A detailed job description, in line with the Fair Futures manual/model;
- A synthesis of best practice screening and interviewing techniques, which have been implemented and refined over decades of combined practice across seven NYC non-profit organizations that have coaching (or tutoring) programs for foster youth.



### **A SUMMARY OF THE MOST IMPORTANT TAKEAWAYS FROM THIS TOOLKIT:**

**ALL FAIR FUTURES STAFF** must be able to work from a **STRENGTH-BASED, TRAUMA-INFORMED, YOUTH DEVELOPMENT LENS**.

**COACHES ARE NOT CASE PLANNERS.** Case Planners are required to focus on keeping the young person safe, making diligent efforts towards permanency planning, going to Family Court, ensuring well-being, and working according to court-mandated timelines. The primary job of a Coach is to form a trusting, authentic relationship with the young person (one that is not protocol-bound). The Coach's focus is on meeting the young person where they are, believing in them, and helping them achieve their academic, career development, and life goals.

**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE COACH AND THE YOUNG PERSON IS BOTH THE BACKBONE AND THE GLUE TO THE MODEL, AND WHAT OFTEN DRIVES YOUTH PROGRESS.**

**IF COACHES ARE NOT ABLE TO EFFECTIVELY ENGAGE YOUNG PEOPLE AND FORM A TRUSTING RELATIONSHIP, THEY WILL NOT BE ABLE TO HELP THEM MAKE PROGRESS TOWARDS THEIR ACADEMIC, CAREER DEVELOPMENT, AND INDEPENDENT LIVING GOALS!**

**THE COACH POSITION IS NOT AN ENTRY-LEVEL ROLE.**

Coaches need to have emotional maturity, professional skills, and formal experience working with young people (see [Section 3](#) for other requirements).

**TO BE EFFECTIVE IN THEIR ROLE, COACHES MUST HAVE STRONG RELATIONAL AND TECHNICAL SKILLS.** While the ability to form relationships with young people and families is at the core of this work, Coaches also need to have strong organizational, time management, and technical skills to help young people make progress toward their goals, track data/contacts, and navigate NYC's complex systems and resources. While Coaches will receive all the professional development support and training they need to do so, they have to have an ability and willingness to learn, not give up, be resourceful, and think outside the box.

**YOUNG PEOPLE SHOULD NOT JUST FEEL CONNECTED TO THEIR COACH, THEY SHOULD FEEL CONNECTED TO THE FAIR FUTURES PROGRAM ITSELF.** While it is critical for Coaches to have these qualities, all of the adults that interact with young people – Supervisors, Specialists, Tutors, and the Program Director - should be engaging, compassionate, supportive, and genuinely care about young people.

**ONE OF THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAYS TO SCREEN FOR THESE QUALITIES IS TO HAVE AT LEAST ONE YOUNG PERSON PRESENT DURING THE INTERVIEW PROCESS.** Young people have a radar that the adult interviewer will likely not have. If the young person cannot “vibe” with the candidate or feels they are not engaging, then it's likely that the candidate will not be able to engage other young people.

As young people are at the center of the Fair Futures model, they should be involved in the hiring process! To that end, **Fair Futures created a Youth Hiring/Screening Committee** comprised of young people who are familiar with coaching and sit on the Fair Futures Youth Board. Should any agency want to request a young person to help screen candidates, please see [Section 2](#).

**FOR THE PROGRAM TO BE SUCCESSFUL,** Coach Supervisors and the Program Director must be able to model pro-social behavior and the culture of building trusting relationships that forms the foundation of this model.

Organizations are at different stages of building and expanding their coaching programs. This toolkit is meant to inspire creative thinking and share best screening/hiring practices, rather than prescribe an exact approach. Please use whatever you find useful to help move your agency's important work forward.



# METHODOLOGY

To develop the toolkit, the following agency experts and young people were interviewed:

- **Georgia Boothe**, Children's Aid
- **Dawnette Artwell**, Children's Aid
- **Vincent Madera**, Children's Village
- **Liz Northcutt**, City Living NY
- **Elizabeth Garcia**, Good Shepherd Services
- **Denise Hinds**, Good Shepherd Services
- **Pilar Larancuent**, Graham Windham
- **Emil Ramnarine**, Graham Windham
- **Brooke Rosenthal**, HeartShare St. Vincent's Services
- **Dawnasia Freeman**, HeartShare St. Vincent's Services
- **Dr. Sylvia Rowland**, The New York Foundling
- **Michael Zink**, The New York Foundling
- **My Asia**, Youth Employment Program Graduate, Children's Aid
- **Richard**, Youth Employment Program Graduate, Children's Aid
- **Yannick**, Youth Employment Program Graduate, Children's Aid
- **Miguel Ortiz**, Fair Futures Youth Board
- **Alex Santana**, Fair Futures Youth Board
- **Jahlika Hamilton**, Fair Futures Youth Board

In addition to these interviews, this toolkit draws from significant documentation, including interview protocols, position descriptions, program manuals, and so on.

## **SECTION 2: HOW TO INCORPORATE YOUNG PEOPLE INTO THE SCREENING/HIRING PROCESS**

### **A. IMPORTANCE**

The relationship between the Coach and the young person is both the backbone and the glue to the model. If Coaches are not able to effectively engage young people and form a trusting, authentic relationship, they will not be able to help them make progress towards their goals. A young person must also feel connected to the program and all staff they interact with (Supervisors, Specialists, Tutors, etc.), not just their Coach.

**Therefore, screening Fair Futures staff for certain qualities/relational skills is paramount to the success of the program.** While staff will be trained in Motivational Interviewing and effective engagement practices, if they do not genuinely care or if they are unable to use a strength-based approach, young people will pick up on this immediately.

**All Fair Futures staff, and particularly Coaches, should have the following qualities:**

- Ability to work from a strength-based, trauma-informed, youth development lens;
- Compassionate, patient, and empathetic;
- A love for working with young people;
- Ability to relate to young people, engage them in conversation, and provide support and encouragement;
- Consistent and reliable;
- Values and promotes diversity;
- A belief that change is possible;
- Able to remain calm during moments of tension and stress.

**One of the most effective ways to screen candidates for these qualities is to have a young person on the interview.** Young people in foster care often have an acute, learned sense as to whether a person is authentic. All agencies with coaching programs uphold having at least one young person present on interviews as a best practice that should be adopted as often as possible.

### **B. RECRUITING YOUNG PEOPLE**

To help meet this need, **Fair Futures created a Youth Hiring/Screening Committee** comprised of young people across agencies who are familiar with the coaching model and sit on the Fair Futures Youth Board. Should any agency want a young person to help screen candidates during the interview, please reach out to Katie Napolitano at [katie.napolitano@fairfuturesny.org](mailto:katie.napolitano@fairfuturesny.org) to discuss the process. Young people will be prepped before the interview (see [Section 2C](#)) and will provide consultation to agencies after the interview is over.

When possible, agencies can and should use young people from their own agency. One best practice is to have young people enrolled in the agency's job readiness (YA WORC) program participate in the interview screening process. This helps the agency screen candidates while providing young people with an opportunity to observe and participate in a real-life interview. It can be both an empowering experience for the young person and educational for the agency.

## **C. PREPARING YOUNG PEOPLE**

Young people from the Fair Futures Youth Board will go through a training and be prepared to sit in on an interview. They will be educated on questions that should not be legally asked (e.g., about a candidate's justice involvement) and will practice asking questions/providing scenarios to potential candidates through mock interviews.

A day before the interview, young people will receive the candidate's resume to review.

## **D. LISTENING TO & INCORPORATING FEEDBACK FROM YOUNG PEOPLE**

During the interview, the young person will both listen and ask some of their own questions. Afterwards, the agency staff who conducted the interview should debrief with the young person and listen carefully to their feedback.

Some questions for the young person could include:

- What were the candidate's strengths and weaknesses?
- Would you be open to having that person as a Coach, or would you refer a friend to them? Why or why not?
- Did they feel they were engaging and really cared about working with youth?

While there are many other skills/qualities a Coach needs (see [Section 3](#)), if the Coach does not pass this critical youth engagement test, they likely will not be an effective Coach. Some agencies give strong deference to the feedback of youth in determining whether to hire a candidate hired.

## **E. HIRING TIPS FROM YOUNG PEOPLE**

Tips from Youth on the Fair Futures Board:

"You want to hire Coaches who care, not ones who are just doing it for the paycheck. You can tell if they are doing it for the paycheck by the tone of their voice or if they say they can't work past office hours. Their voice has to be really enthusiastic and genuine, we got to feel it not just hear it."

"We can't feel your walls. If we feel them, we will put up ours. If you want us to open up and be vulnerable and work with you, we need you to open up and be vulnerable too."

"Ask them for a youth reference. If they can't name 3 young people who would give them a good reference, then they never had a real relationship with youths."





# Tips from young people who graduated from Children's Aid Youth Employment Program and participated in the Coach interviewing process:

(see [Section 3](#) for more details)

## **YANNICK, AGE 20 | Children's Aid: Next Generation Center Job Prep Academy Graduate**

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**Q:** What does it mean to you to be asked to interview a potential staff member?

**A:** It means not only being asked to assess the job skills of the applicant, but also assessing the applicant's social skills and personality as well. It also means that the NGC program holds me in high regard and values my judgement.

**Q:** As someone who has interviewed potential staff before, what qualities are you looking for?

**A:** The required work skills, intuitiveness, passion, ability to work with young people, and strong social skills.

**Q:** As someone who has interviewed staff before, how can you tell if they are the right person for the job?

**A:** My own intuition as a young person. We know if we would get along with a staff person who understands us.

**Q:** As someone who has interviewed staff before, what are some red flags? What are some green flags?

**A:** Some red flags are lateness, and rude demeanor/poor social skills. Green flags are a calm and organized demeanor.

## **MY ASIA, AGE 19 | Children's Aid: Next Generation Center Job Prep Academy Graduate**

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**Q:** What does it mean to you to be asked to interview a potential staff member?

**A:** To be asked to interview a potential staff member was an honorable experience. It made me feel like part of the staff community, rather than just an intern. It gave me the experience to give an interview instead of taking one as I was taught in my NGC employment program. I was also able to have an opportunity to see other people's view on the job positions.

**Q:** As someone who has interviewed potential staff before, what qualities are you looking for?

**A:** Honesty and passion. If the interviewee was honest with themselves and passion about what they can do, I will give (it to) them rather than someone who just wants a check.

**Q:** As someone who has interviewed staff before, how can you tell if they are the right person for the job?

**A:** I can tell if someone is right for the job if they are willing to learn to try and experience new things. Accepting all challenges that come with the position.

**Q:** As someone who has interviewed staff before, what are some red flags? What are some green flags?

**A:** Red flags for me are someone who seems unsure and uninterested about the position. That means they will do a half-job while working.

## **RICHARD, AGE 21 | Children's Aid: Next Generation Center Job Prep Academy Graduate**

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**Q:** What does it mean to you to be asked to interview a potential staff member?

**A:** It means a lot to me to be able to interview a potential staff member. The opportunity to be in position to bring on excellent worker to this company feels amazing.

**Q:** As someone who has interviewed potential staff before, what qualities are you looking for?

**A:** Good character, engagement skills, passion and a solid reason to want to work here.

**Q:** As someone who has interviewed staff before, how can you tell if they are the right person for the job?

**A:** I can tell if they are the correct person for the job based on their humor and interest in the culture of the job. Also, if they have goals that will impact the program.

**Q:** As someone who has interviewed staff before, what are some red flags? What are some green flags?

**A:** Some red flags are if they answer the interview question quickly with no thought and rushed answers. Also, bad attitude is also a red flag. Some green flags are answers that create more probing questions, and also a great attitude.



### HOW CHILDREN'S AID INCORPORATES YOUNG PEOPLE INTO THEIR HIRING PROCESS

#### ACKNOWLEDGING THE EXPERTISE AND INSIGHTS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

The **Children's Aid Next Generation Center** utilizes a youth-driven model for all services, from coaching to employment to education. Young people are placed in the driver's seat and choose what they want to work on. Staff educate young people about their options, and then support and guide them on their journey.

This youth-driven practice is also central to the hiring process - every candidate who will work directly with young people is interviewed by young people. This is because young people have expertise and insight developed through their personal experience in systems and receiving services.

#### INTERVIEWING CANDIDATES AS A PART OF DEVELOPING JOB READINESS SKILLS

The Children's Aid has a large pool of young people with interview skills that they can draw from at any time through their five-week job readiness program. This program is offered multiple times per year, and the curricula include professional dress, mock interviews, and how to sell yourself to potential employers. Every graduate program is considered ready to interview candidates for employment at The Children's Aid, and they have never faced a shortage of young people who volunteer to participate in the interview process.

A day before the interview, young people who have agreed to participate receive the candidate's resume, and three to four sample interview questions. These questions are offered only as options and youth are not required to use them. Instead, youth are encouraged to develop their own interview questions.

After interviews with a recruiter and the Program Director, a candidate's final interview is always conducted by a panel of two to three young people. At their discretion, the young people may invite staff to sit in on the interview.

#### LOOKING FOR COMMITMENT AND PEOPLE WHO CARE

The interview usually takes from 10 to 15 minutes. After the candidate is thanked and leaves, the young people and the Program Director debrief. After the youth expresses their opinion about the candidate in the debrief session, the Program Director makes the hiring decision.

The Program Director explains that the primary job of all staff at the Next Generation Center is to motivate and inspire the young people, and as such, she has never contradicted the young people in the hiring process.

*"They pick up on things professional staff miss,"* she notes.

If the young people feel the candidate is not right for the role, she does not hire them. If there are two equally accomplished candidates for one role, she always uses the young people's input to make the final decision.



According to the Children's Aid Next Generation Center Program Director, in all interviews **young people invariably ask the same two questions, ten times, in ten different ways** until they feel they have received an authentic and direct answer:

**Are you going to stay?**

**Do you care?**

PHOTO CREDIT: THE CHILDREN'S AID | [WWW.CHILDRENSAIDNYC.ORG](http://WWW.CHILDRENSAIDNYC.ORG)

## SECTION 3: COACHES

### A. OVERVIEW OF THE COACH'S ROLE

Coaches are full-time, trained professionals who are matched with up to 15 young people ages 14 and older in foster care. Coaching is voluntary and there are no eligibility criteria; young people can decide to be coached for however long they need (until age 26).

Coaches meet young people “where they are” and build a trusting relationship with them using a caring, authentic, trauma-informed, strength-based approach. Coaches reach out to young people on a weekly basis to show that they are a consistent support in that young person's life. If a young person does not respond, Coaches employ creative, out-of-the box approaches and do not give up or take it personally.

In addition to providing weekly emotional support, Coaches help young people make progress towards their academic, career development, housing/ independent living, and other life goals. When a young person is unsure of their goals/interests, Coaches help them explore and expose them to potential opportunities. They then help young people connect to schools, programs, and opportunities in line with their goals/interests, persist in those settings, and plan/prepare for the next step on their journey.

Coaches celebrate young people's progress; if something doesn't work out, Coaches help young people reflect and connect to the next opportunity.

Coaches also build relationships and collaborate with the key adults in the young person's life to support their goals, including other agency and Fair Futures staff (e.g., Case Planners and Specialists), foster parents, school/program staff, and other significant adult figures.

Coaches will receive training in youth engagement, coaching, and how to navigate the educational, career, and housing systems and resources in NYC. They also have access to voluntary professional development supports, including 1:1 technical assistance, small group support, and access to the Fair Futures learning communities.

To track young people's progress, Coaches are trained on the “[Goals & Steps](#)” framework. They are required to track contacts, goals, and steps taken towards goals in an online platform called Care4. Full support will be provided on how to use Care4.

### B. QUALIFICATIONS, QUALITIES & COMPETENCIES OF EFFECTIVE COACHES

#### QUALIFICATIONS

The Coach role is not an entry-level role - Coaches need to have both emotional maturity and professional skills.

As helping young people enroll and persist in post-secondary settings is one of the goals of the Fair Futures model, it is important for Coaches to have a post-secondary credential. Agencies typically require Coaches to have either:

- A Bachelor's degree and at least two years of experience working with young people;
- An Associate or accredited vocational degree, and 3+ years of working with at-risk or system-involved young people.

Some exceptions could be made, however, if the candidate is a “credible messenger” (has a background in foster care), has some post-secondary experience (e.g., some college), has significant experience (4+ years) working with young people in a professional, paid role, and meets all other criteria below.



*Given the nature of their work, Coaches should also be able to be reached outside of a 9-5 office schedule.*

## ***TO BE EFFECTIVE IN THEIR ROLE, COACHES MUST HAVE STRONG RELATIONAL AND TECHNICAL SKILLS.***

While the ability to form relationships with young people and families is at the core of this work, Coaches also need to have strong organizational, time management, and technical skills to help young people make progress toward their goals, track data/contacts, and navigate NYC's complex systems and resources. While Coaches will receive all the professional development support and training they need to do so, they have to have to have an ability and willingness to learn, not give up, be resourceful, and think outside the box.

### **RELATIONAL SKILLS**

The relational skills of the Coach are critical to the success of the program. These include:

- Ability to work from a strength-based, trauma-informed, youth development lens;
- A love for working with young people;
- Strong ability to relate to young people, engage them in conversation, and provide support and encouragement;
- Ability to form collaborative, working relationships with parents/families, school and agency staff
- Consistent and reliable;
- Ability to think outside the box and employ creative approaches;
- Values and promotes diversity;
- Carries a belief that change is possible;
- Able to maintain healthy boundaries;
- Able to remain calm during moments of tension and stress.

### **TECHNICAL & PROFESSIONAL SKILLS**

**Successful Coaches have the following professional and technical capabilities:**

- Strong written and verbal communication skills;
- Strong time-management, organizational skills, and attention to detail;
- Ability to troubleshoot, advocate, and navigate obstacles where there is not always a clear-cut pathway;
- Open to learning how to use and interpret data to inform decision-making;
- Ability to effectively collaborate in team settings and build relationships with external partners;
- Ability to use Motivational Interviewing techniques;
- Ability to use trauma-informed techniques;
- Knowledgeable about youth resources and services;
- Ability to facilitate therapeutic peer groups;
- Flexible and can work independently.

## **C. COACH JOB DESCRIPTION**

### **COACHES REPORT TO COACH SUPERVISORS.**

#### **OVERALL, COACHES:**

- Build relationships with up to 15 young people;
- Provide ongoing social/emotional support;
- Work 1:1 with young people to develop individualized academic and career development goals based on their interests and strengths and take measurable steps towards their goals;
- Connect young people to quality schools, programs, resources, and opportunities in line with their goals;
- Help young people persist in these settings, navigate any challenges that arise, celebrate successes, and plan/prepare for the next step on their journey.
- Should a youth not be successful in any particular school/program setting, Coaches help young people reflect on the experience and work with them to set new goals and transition to the next opportunity.
- Collaborate with Case Planners, Tutors, Specialists, and foster/birth parents, as needed, to help youth achieve their goals and ensure their overall well-being;
- Connect young people to peer group supports and build positive relationships;
- Ensure young people who are aging out can access and maintain stable, affordable housing and build independent living skills.

#### **ACADEMIC JOB DUTIES CAN INCLUDE, BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO:**

- Re-engage disconnected youth by meeting them “where they are” and when they are ready, helping them re-enroll in a best-fit academic setting;
- Assess the fit between the young person and their current academic setting and help them transfer into a better-fit high school or high school equivalency (HSE) program, if needed;
- Visit the young person’s school/program and build relationships with school staff, review transcripts and academic data, provide educational advocacy, and discuss progress towards graduation/HSE obtainment;
- Ensure young people are attending school and have the supports and resources they need to be successful, such as tutoring, individualized educational plans (IEPs), 504 Plans, or other special accommodations;
- Conduct post-secondary exploration and expose students to post-secondary pathways, such college and/or accredited vocational programs, starting in the 9th grade (or as early as possible);
- Assist students with post-secondary planning, along with the guidance counselors and/or College Specialists and Career Development Specialists;
- Connect the student to the College Specialist to apply to colleges, opportunity programs, and all forms of financial aid, funding, and scholarships;
- Provide college persistence coaching, including ensuring students are receiving all of the financial and academic supports they need to succeed each semester;
- Assist students with planning for apprenticeship and vocational education paths, as appropriate;
- Collaborate with all relevant partners, such as Case Planners, guidance counselors, Specialists, Tutors, teachers, family members, and caregivers.



**CAREER DEVELOPMENT DUTIES CAN INCLUDE, BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO:**

- Conduct career exploration activities with young people, based on their interests and academic plans;
- Work with the young person and Career Development Specialist to identify potential longer-term career pathways based on the young person's interests, strengths, and academic/vocational plans;
- Assist young people with identifying career development experiences (internships, employment, job training, community service, leadership activities, etc.) each year that are in line with their interests and academic situation. Connect the young person to the Career Development Specialist, if needed, to explore potential workforce development programs, vocational programs, and for assistance with job applications;
- Connect young people, as needed, to agency-based job readiness and/or internship programs (e.g., YA WORC or the Mentored Internship Program);
- Provide persistence coaching to young people enrolled in any external program by checking in with them regularly.

**HOUSING AND INDEPENDENT LIVING JOB DUTIES CAN INCLUDE, BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO:**

- Help young people understand all of the various types of housing available to them and the pros/cons of each using coaching language;
- Ensure that the young person coordinates with a Housing Specialist (and/or Case Planner, if the agency does not have a Housing Specialist) to apply to housing; encourage them to apply to as many forms as possible (as young people can always refuse options!);
- Accompany the young person to visit supportive housing residences, when needed;
- Help young people move in and obtain furniture;
- Help young people maintain their housing by providing independent living and life skills supports such as budgeting, obtaining a bank account, and advocating with landlords, if needed.

***D. SCREENING, INTERVIEWING, & HIRING COACHES*****OVERVIEW**


Finding Coaches with the right combination of relational and technical skills requires the right combination of screening and interviewing techniques. What follows is a synthesis of approaches which have been implemented and refined over decades of combined practice among seven NYC organizations that have coaching programs for foster youth. Every step of the hiring process prioritizes the identification of candidates who have an understanding that this work requires staff to genuinely care about young people.

**SCREENING RESUMES**

The role of Coaches typically receives many applications with some combination of the following elements:

- Case Planners who are looking for a change with more freedom and connection to youth;
- School counselors who have not been able to secure a permanent position;
- Teachers who are working as permanent substitutes for the Department of Education and are looking for something more stable;
- Community-based organization afterschool program staff looking for a full-time position;
- Social work interns looking for their first job.

Turn to the next page for a chart which may help you make decisions about candidates at this stage.

<b>GREEN FLAGS</b>		<b>RED FLAGS</b>
✓ Familiarity with the child welfare system		✓ Little to no familiarity with the child welfare system
✓ Experience working with at-risk or system-involved young people		✓ No experience working with vulnerable young people
✓ Experience in educational or youth development setting		✓ No experience in an educational or youth development setting

## **INITIAL IN-PERSON INTERVIEW**

The initial in-person interview is typically a panel interview lasting 45 - 60 minutes with the following potential participants:

- Program Director and/or Coach Supervisor;
- Coaches;
- Young people;
- Any other Coaching program staff available the day of the interview.

The primary focus at this stage is learning about the candidate's professional experiences, skills, and goals. To accomplish this, both traditional and behavioral questions are asked. It is also important to ask situational questions or do role-playing scenarios to test what the candidate would do in certain situations – how they engage youth, support youth, navigate challenges, etc. Please find examples on [Page 16](#).

While it is always ideal to have a young person at every stage of the interview process, if it is challenging to find young people, then they should be saved for a later-stage or final interview. (See [Section 2](#) for tips on involving young people in interviews.)

**One of the most important questions that can be asked is if the candidate is willing to make at least a 2-year commitment to the program.** The interviewer should explain why constancy and consistency in relationships is so important to young people in foster care and how detrimental it can be to young people when people come in and out of their lives. After two years, young people will have formed strong enough relationships with other staff (and their peers) and should feel a deeper connection to the program itself.

It also takes about 1.5-2 years for Coaches to feel fully confident in their ability to help young people make real progress towards their goals. The interviewer should also tell the candidate that there are pathways for growth within the program.

**SEE THE FOLLOWING PAGE FOR EXAMPLES OF OTHER IMPORTANT QUESTIONS THAT CAN BE ASKED DURING THE FIRST INTERVIEW.**

## BEHAVIORAL QUESTIONS

The following are example questions that can be used to explore a candidate's implicitly held beliefs and gauge whether they would be effective Coaches:

- What are the contact options you give clients to reach you? What contact options do you give clients outside of 9-to-5, Monday through Friday?  
*Candidates should be easily reachable and widely available, with reasonable exceptions.*
- Are you still in touch with any clients from past roles? If yes, how did they reach out to you, and how did you respond?  
*Candidates should easily name clients they are still connected to, and ideally the former clients were able to reach out via youth-friendly channels like text and social media.*
- Tell me about a time you had to engage a young person who wasn't sure about engaging with you.  
*Candidates should have a thoughtful or creative process that they can easily share.*
- Give me an example of a success with a client.  
*Candidate's affect should be excited and positive, and they should have multiple stories they are eager to share.*
- Share a time with me when you had to deal with a challenging or difficult situation that a student/young person faced. What steps did you take? What worked or didn't, and why?  
*Candidates should have an empathetic lens when describing the situation and a clear and thoughtful answer as to how they helped that young person.*
- Share a time with me when you did not agree with something a colleague or supervisor did or shared with you. How did you react? What steps did you take?
- What is some constructive feedback you have received in the past, and how did you use it to grow?


## TRADITIONAL QUESTIONS:

- What do you know about the Coaching program, and how it fits within our larger organization?
- Why is it important for young people in foster care to have a Coach?
- What is it about this position that encouraged you to apply? What is it about working in this space with this population that inspires you the most?
- Tell me more about yourself.
  - Your educational background
  - Your work experience that is applicable to this position and role
  - Your career goals
- Please share more with me about your youth development experience, education experience, and experience working with young people.
- Are you familiar with NYC DOE schools? The college or workforce landscape?
- What is your working style?
- Do you prefer group work? Working alone?
- How do you stay organized? What are some techniques or tools that you use?
- What are some of the challenges you foresee in this role?
- What unique skills, vision, and out-of-the-box ideas do you hope to contribute to this team?
- Do you have any questions regarding this role, the organization, or in general?

## SITUATIONAL QUESTIONS/ROLE-PLAYING EXERCISES

1. *You were just matched with a young person who is 17 years old. In your first coaching conversation you get to know a little about one another. Overall, you feel like this first conversation went well, but since then you have not heard back from them. How would you approach this?*
2. *You are preparing to meet with a new young person who is in your coaching group. What do you do to prepare for this conversation? What would you do after the conversation?*
3. *You have been meeting with a young person for a few months now. In total you've had 6 coaching conversations. During this time the young person has not shared any goals that they are interested in pursuing. How would you approach this?*
4. *You are coaching a young adult who is 18 years old. They are struggling to complete high school and they are not employed. In your coaching conversations with them they share that they would like to be a professional YouTuber. How would you approach this?*
5. *You are coaching a young adult who is 20 years old. They share with you that they would like to go to college. They struggled academically and it took them some time to earn their HSE (high school equivalency). How would you approach this?*
6. *You are coaching a young man who is disconnected from school/work who says he doesn't ever want to go back to high school. He hopes to become a famous boxer or rapper (and does not have formal training in either). How would you approach this?*

The chart below may help you make decisions about candidates at this stage, based on their qualities and professionalism.

<b>GREEN FLAGS</b>	 <b>RED FLAGS</b>
✓ Arrives on time and dressed appropriately	✓ Shows up late and dressed inappropriately
✓ Prepared with copies of resume, notebook, and pen	✓ Unprepared with no copies of resume or notebook
✓ Understands importance of Coaching program	✓ No background on program and/or organization
✓ Clearly has a love of working with young people and an ability to engage them through the examples they share	✓ Does not seem passionate about working with young people and/or is not able to discuss examples of how they have engaged young people
✓ Can be easily reached past a 9-5pm work schedule	✓ Cannot be reached outside of regular office hours
✓ Shows a solid understanding of youth development and is able to explain effective engagement techniques and/or explain why some young people can be more challenging to engage than others	✓ Does not seem to understand key youth development principles and drivers (or barriers) to engagement
✓ Is able to think out-of-the-box and use critical thinking skills in answering the situational/scenario-based questions	✓ Is not able to think out-of-the-box and does not seem to have strong critical thinking skills in answering the situational/scenario-based questions
✓ Is familiar with educational and/or career development programs/resources for young people	✓ Has no familiarity with education, workforce, or youth development programs/resources
✓ Prefers to collaborate and work in teams	✓ Prefers to work alone
✓ Has passion for this work and has plans to stay in this field	✓ Long-term career goals are outside this field – e.g. school principal, guidance counselor
✓ Asks questions about program, population, and role	✓ Does not have any questions to ask when prompted

## WRITING EXERCISE

The purpose of the writing exercise is to assess the candidate's writing and critical thinking skills. It can be completed during the first in-person interview or as a take-home assignment afterward.

The candidate is asked to complete a one-page writing assignment on their own and submit it via email, typically as a step between the first and second in-person interviews. This option allows staff to learn more about the professional assessment skills of the candidate. The following is an example writing prompt (any situation could be used, but the general question should be along these lines).


### EXAMPLE PROMPT:

Please review the hypothetical situation below and write a one-page response outlining what approaches you would take in working with this young person.

*Theo is 17 years old and only has 4 credits on his high school transcript. He travels very far to school and has 60% attendance on average. Theo recently told you, his Coach, that he wants to drop out and get a job because he needs money. In previous conversations, he had expressed a strong interest in art and music.*

1. You are Theo's Coach. How do you react when he shares that he wants to drop out? What do you say, and what do you want to find out?
- 2) How could you help Theo explore his interests and take the next step on his journey? What specific steps could you consider, and what other information may you need?

Below is a chart which may help you make decisions about candidate based on the writing assignment.

<b>GREEN FLAGS</b>	 <b>RED FLAGS</b>
✓ Is clear, coherent, and without too many grammar mistakes	✓ Is incoherent, does not include full sentences, and/or is littered with grammatical errors
✓ Shows a thoughtful, organized line of thinking	✓ Is scattered or provides little critical thought
✓ Considers different drivers of what could be happening, and provides a variety of potential approaches that are in line with Theo's interests and where he is (e.g., helping him explore music and/or art programs, trying to understand more about the drivers of his decisions, etc.)	✓ Does not offer many solutions that are in line with the young person's situation or does not consider various drivers
✓ Some familiarity with the academic and/or workforce environment in NYC by suggesting specific educational pathways or career development programs.	✓ No familiarity with potential pathways or ideas on how to explore other supports



## FINAL IN-PERSON INTERVIEW

The final in-person interview is typically a panel interview, combined with a presentation, lasting an hour with the following potential participants:

- Program Director and/or Coach Supervisor
- At least 1 other Coach;
- At least 1 young person.

The primary focus at this stage is learning about the candidate's interpersonal and engagement skills. To accomplish this, a 10-minute presentation exercise is combined with a second panel interview. This moves the interview process beyond talking and into seeing the candidate's skills in action.


The following is example language for the email:

*For the interview, please prepare a 10-minute interactive presentation on a relevant topic to deliver to a group of program managers, staff, and young people.*

A presentation Q&A and panel interview typically follows, with the candidate given the opportunity to ask questions of the staff and young people. The same questions used in the first in-person interview can be used in this interview.

The young people should be given a chance to ask the candidate questions and give them scenarios, and ideally drive as many of the questions as possible. See [Section 2](#) on how to help young people prepare for the interview.

Below is a chart which may help you make decisions about candidates at this stage.

<b>GREEN FLAGS</b>		<b>RED FLAGS</b>
✓ Uses ice breaker to engage everyone from the beginning, or at least does a round of introductions		✓ Does not use ice breaker or do introductions
✓ Chooses a relevant and engaging topic		✓ Chooses an unrelated or uninspired topic
✓ Presentation focuses on young people		✓ Presentation focuses on professionals
✓ Presentation style is highly interactive		✓ Presentation style is monologue style
✓ Asks the young people questions		✓ Does not ask the young people questions
✓ Is able to engage with the young people		✓ Seems hesitant or nervous when directly engaging with the young people
✓ Is able to make young people and staff smile and/or laugh		✓ Is very serious and uneasy

## AFTER THE INTERVIEW

After the interview, the young person's feedback should be heavily weighted. Some agencies give young people veto power – if the young person does not believe they would be an effective Coach, and can justify why, then the agency does not hire that person.

## **SECTION 4: COACH SUPERVISOR**

### **A. OVERVIEW OF THE COACH SUPERVISOR'S ROLE**

Coach Supervisors support approximately five Coaches in helping young people progress along their academic and career development journey by providing ongoing management, direction, and support. Supervisors create a harmonious, strength-based work environment and use this environment to successfully monitor the progress Coaches are making with youth through regular, formal supervisory sessions, as well as during crisis situations.

### **B. COACH SUPERVISOR KEY QUALITIES & COMPETENCIES**

#### **COACH SUPERVISOR RELATIONAL SKILLS**

Coach Supervisors must support and model pro-social behavior and the trusting relationships that form the foundation of the coaching program. Thus, the relational skills of the professionals in this role are paramount to the success of the program.

- The relational qualities of a successful Coach Supervisor include:
- Ability to work from a strength-based, trauma-informed, youth development lens;
- Able to build and maintain harmonious working relationships with and among staff;
- Support staff in developing strong relationships with young people;
- Provision of emotional support to reduce stress and build resiliency in staff;
- A love for working with young people;
- Strong ability to relate to young people and engage them in conversation;
- Values and promotes diversity;
- A belief that change is possible;
- Able to maintain healthy boundaries;
- Able to remain calm during moments of tension and stress.

#### **COACH SUPERVISOR PROFESSIONAL SKILLS**

Coach Supervisors should have at least a Bachelor's degree and a minimum of three years of experience working with at-risk or system-involved youth. Supervisory experience and experience as a Coach is preferred.

Successful Coach Supervisors also have:

- Strong written and verbal communication skills;
- Strong time-management, organizational skills, and attention to detail;
- Ability to conduct outreach and build partnership with outside community agencies;
- Experience in or openness to interpreting data to inform decision-making;
- Experience in or openness to implementing evidence-based practices;
- Ability to use Motivational Interviewing techniques;
- Ability to use trauma-informed techniques;
- Ability to facilitate therapeutic groups.

## **C. COACH SUPERVISOR JOB DESCRIPTION**

Coach Supervisors report to Program Directors. The Supervisor's overall job is to help create a strength-based, trauma-informed environment and provide ongoing management, direction, and support to up to 4-5 Coaches in building relationships with young people and helping them progress towards their goals. To achieve this, Coach Supervisors perform a variety of supervision and management daily duties. However, the work changes often according to the needs of the young people served by the Coach Supervisor's team.

### **SUPERVISION DUTIES CAN INCLUDE, BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO:**

**MODEL BEHAVIOR:** The Supervisor should build trusting relationships with Coaches, as Coaches do with young people, and model a strength-based approach in their work.

### **COACH AND SUPPORT COACHES IN THEIR WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE:**

- Support Coaches in their efforts to build relationships with young people, including sharing effective engagement techniques;
- Guide Coaches to use Motivational Interviewing techniques to develop and follow action plans with young people;
- Support Coaches with the academic and career development goal-setting process, including walking through how to use the process maps and dashboards, and selecting goals based on that young person's situation;
- Help Coaches navigate the DOE and other systems, as needed;
- Help Coaches prevent and navigate crises, as they arise.

### **COACH SUPERVISION:**

Supervisors monitor the progress Coaches are making with young people through regular supervision sessions (typically weekly or biweekly), and ensure Coaches are taking appropriate steps to help young people progress and plan for the next step on their journey.

To prepare for supervision, the Supervisor should review key data in advance (including any progress notes, new academic data, and goals/steps completed over the last week). During the session, the Supervisor can debrief with Coaches on the status of their relationship with young people, any crisis situations, goal-setting progress, etc.

### **COACH PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:**

- Acknowledge and celebrate Coaches' strengths and progress;
- Identify areas for growth;
- Provide appropriate skill development opportunities;
- Conduct team meetings with Coaches and facilitate relevant conversations, such as:
  - Best-practice engagement and coaching techniques;
  - Shared challenges across the team;
  - Upcoming events, training, and/or group activities.

### **REPORTING TO THE DIRECTOR:**

The Supervisor will also meet with the Program Director regularly to receive supervision. During this session, the Supervisor can provide an overview on Coach progress, raise any concerns, and request assistance in any areas.

## OTHER KEY RESPONSIBILITIES INCLUDE:

- Meeting with young people and assigning Coaches;
- Matching young people to new Coaches, as needed;
- Working collaboratively with other professionals, such as foster care staff, school administrators, guidance counselors, etc., as needed;
- Participating in all Coach hiring;
- Working collaboratively with other staff and system providers driving towards similar goals in a coordinated fashion;
- Helping staff facilitate peer groups, which can focus on skills such as healthy communication, positive peer relationships, dealing with peer pressure, and service learning;
- Working with the Program Director to conduct outreach to outside community agencies and provide direction to all program staff;
- Ensuring that administrative and financial procedures are in place.

## D. BEST-PRACTICE SCREENING, INTERVIEWING, & HIRING TECHNIQUES

### OVERVIEW


Finding Coach Supervisors with the right combination of relational and professional skills requires the right combination of screening and interviewing techniques. What follows is a synthesis of approaches which have been implemented and refined over decades of combined practice among NYC foster care agencies that have coaching programs.

### SCREENING RESUMES

The role of Coach Supervisors is often promoted from within, but also receives many applications with some combination of the following elements:

- Case Planners who are looking for a change with more freedom and connection to youth;
- School counselors who have not been able to secure a permanent position;
- Teachers who are working as permanent substitutes for the Department of Education and are looking for something more stable;
- Community-based organization afterschool program staff looking for a full-time position;
- Social work interns looking for their first job.

Below is a chart which may help you make decisions about candidates at this stage.

<b>GREEN FLAGS</b>		<b>RED FLAGS</b>
✓ At least three years of experience in a formal, paid, professional role working with at-risk or system-involved young people		✓ No or limited experience working with at-risk or system-involved young people
✓ Experience in child welfare or an educational or youth development setting		✓ No experience in a child welfare or an educational or youth development setting
✓ Supervisor experience and/or previous coaching experience with the program and strong potential to supervise		✓ No previous supervisory experience or experience overseeing projects/people

## **INITIAL IN-PERSON INTERVIEW**

The initial in-person interview is typically a panel interview lasting 45 - 60 minutes with the following potential participants:

- Program Director;
- Coach Supervisor;
- Coaches;
- A young person;
- Any other Coaching program staff available the day of the interview.

The primary focus at this stage is learning about the candidate's professional experiences, skills, and goals. To accomplish this, both traditional and behavioral questions are asked. It is also important to ask situational questions or do role-playing scenarios to test what the candidate would do in certain situations.

While it is always ideal to have a young person at every stage of the interview process, if it is challenging to find young people, then they should be saved for a later-stage or final interview. (See [Section 2](#) for tips on involving young people in interviews.)

The following are examples of other important questions that can be asked on the first interview.

### **TRADITIONAL QUESTIONS:**

- What do you know about the Coaching program, and how it fits within our larger organization?
- What is it about this position that encouraged you to apply?
- What is it about working in this space with this population that inspires you the most?
- Tell me more about yourself.
  - Your educational background
  - Your work experience that is applicable to this position and role
  - Your career goals
- Tell me about your supervisory experience and style.
- Please share more with me about your youth development experience, education experience, and experience working with young people.
- Can you share with me some workshops that you have facilitated?
- How do you stay organized? What are some techniques or tools that you use?
- What are some of your engagement strategies?
- What are your strengths? What are your weaknesses or something you want to improve upon?
- What are some of the challenges you foresee in this role?
- How do you maintain life/work balance?
- What unique skills, vision, and out-of-the-box ideas do you hope to contribute to this team?
- Do you have any questions regarding this role, the organization, or in general?
- Please share with me some of NYC's youth services you've used in the past to assist youth. Can you share an example of success?




## BEHAVIORAL QUESTIONS:

- Why is it important for young people in foster care to have a Coach?
- Describe a time when you had to support someone you directly supervised (or a colleague) who was struggling. What approach did you take? What was the result?
- Name a time when you had to coach and/or support a young person who was struggling. What steps did you take? What was the result?
- What approaches you use to engage young people? What has been effective?
- Share a time with me when you did not agree with something a colleague or Supervisor did or shared with you. How did you react? What steps did you take?
- What is some constructive feedback you have received in the past, and how did you use it to grow?

## SITUATIONAL QUESTIONS/ROLE-PLAYING EXERCISES

- You are in a supervision meeting with a Coach. You have one hour. How would you structure that hour?
- Let's say a new Coach comes to you with a situation he/she does not know how to handle. A young person is not attending school at all and is involved in street activities.
  - How would you help guide this Coach? What approach would you use and what advice would you provide?

Below is a chart which may help you make decisions about candidates at this stage, based on both their qualities and professionalism:

<b>GREEN FLAGS</b>	 <b>RED FLAGS</b>
✓ Arrives on time and dressed appropriately	✓ Shows up late and dressed inappropriately
✓ Prepared with copies of resume, notebook, and pen	✓ Unprepared with no copies of resume or notebook
✓ Understand importance of Coaching program	✓ Zero to no background on program and/or organization
✓ Clearly has a love of working with young people and an ability to engage them through the examples they share	✓ Does not seem passionate about working with young people and/or is not able to discuss examples of how they have engaged young people
✓ Shows a solid understanding of youth development and is able to explain effective engagement techniques and/or explain why some young people can be more challenging to engage than others	✓ Does not seem to understand key youth development principles and drivers (or barriers) to engagement
✓ Displays an ability to support/empower and supervise others	✓ Does not display strong supervisory skills (e.g., does not listen well, is not able to effectively describe how they have supervised or supported other colleagues)
✓ Displays structured, critical thinking skills in answering the situational/scenario-based questions and can consider nuances	✓ Does not seem to have strong critical thinking skills in answering the situational/scenario-based questions
✓ Prefers to collaborate and work in teams	✓ Prefers to work alone
✓ Has passion for this work and has plans to stay in this field	✓ Long-term career goals are outside this field – e.g. school principal, guidance counselor
✓ Asks multiple questions about program, population, and role	✓ Does not have any questions to ask when prompted

## WRITING EXERCISE

The purpose of the writing exercise is to assess the candidate's writing and critical thinking skills. It can be completed during the first in-person interview or as a take-home assignment afterward.

The candidate is asked to complete a one-page writing assignment on their own and submit it via email, typically as a step between the first and second in-person interviews. This option allows staff to learn more about the professional assessment skills of the candidate. The following is an example writing prompt (any situation could be used, but the general question should be along these lines).

### EXAMPLE PROMPT:


Please review the hypothetical situation below and write a one-page response outlining what approaches you would take in working with this young person. How could you support this Coach to build a stronger relationship with this young person and take steps towards their goals? What other information may the Coach need?

*Theo is 17 years old and has 12 credits on his high school transcript. Theo entered foster care when he was a teen and the experience greatly impacted his education. He travels very far to school and has 60% attendance on average. He is engaged in extra-curricular activities which mean a lot to him, including art and music. When asked about his education goals, Theo says he wants to graduate when his friends graduate this June, so he can walk with them (in less than a year). He would consider college if he could study art/music.*

*Theo's Coach referred Theo for tutoring. Unfortunately, there have only been a few sessions held due to "scheduling conflicts." It's unclear if the scheduling issues are from the tutor or Theo himself. Theo's foster parent is difficult to reach and while she seems to appreciate the coaching program, she does not seem to encourage Theo to attend school more frequently.*

*The Coach has had conversations with Theo but does not feel like they can really engage Theo. The Coach has tried to explain the importance of attending school and tutoring to be able to graduate, but Theo's actions do not change. The Coach feels stuck.*

Below is a chart which may help you make decisions about candidate based on the writing assignment.

<b>GREEN FLAGS</b>	 <b>RED FLAGS</b>
✓ Is clear, coherent, and without too many grammar mistakes	✓ Is incoherent, does not include full sentences, and/or is littered with grammatical errors
✓ Shows a thoughtful, organized line of thinking	✓ Is scattered or provides little critical thought
✓ Provides the Coach with some specific ways to effectively engage Theo (e.g., through an experiential activity, or through engaging him via his interests – music and art)	✓ Does not have any creative or thoughtful ideas as to how the Coach could better engage Theo
✓ Considers different drivers of behavior/ performance and what could be happening with Theo, and provides a variety of potential solutions	✓ Does not offer many solutions that are in line with the young person's situation or does not consider various drivers
✓ Shows some familiarity with the academic and/or workforce environment in NYC by suggesting specific educational pathways or career development programs*.	✓ No familiarity with potential pathways or ideas on how to explore other supports

*\*In the example above, Theo could not graduate within 1 year with 12 credits; 44 are required. A transfer high school closer to Theo's home where he can graduate in a condensed timeframe may be one potential solution, particularly if his friends are graduating and he is struggling.*

## FINAL IN-PERSON INTERVIEW

The final in-person interview is typically a panel interview, combined with a presentation, lasting an hour with the following potential participants:

- Program Director;
- Coach Supervisor;
- At least 2 Coaches;
- A young person.


The primary focus at this stage is learning about the candidate's interpersonal and engagement skills. To accomplish this, a 10-minute presentation exercise is combined with a second panel interview. This moves the interview process beyond talking and into seeing the candidate's skills in action. The following is example language for the email:

*For the interview, please prepare a 10-minute interactive presentation on a relevant topic to deliver to a group of program management, staff, and young people.*

A presentation Q&A and panel interview typically follows, with the candidate given the opportunity to ask questions of the staff and young people. The same questions used in the first in-person interview can be used in this interview.

The young people should be given a chance to ask the candidate questions and give them scenarios, and ideally drive as many of the questions as possible. See [Section 2](#) on how to help young people prepare for the interview.

Below is a chart which may help you make decisions about candidates at this stage.

<b>GREEN FLAGS</b>		<b>RED FLAGS</b>
✓ Uses ice breaker to engage everyone from the beginning, or at least does a round of introductions		✓ Does not use ice breaker or do introductions
✓ Chooses a relevant and engaging topic		✓ Chooses an unrelated or uninspired topic
✓ Presentation focuses on young people		✓ Presentation focuses on professionals
✓ Presentation style is highly interactive		✓ Presentation style is monologue style
✓ Asks the young people questions		✓ Does not ask the young people questions
✓ Is able to engage with the young people		✓ Seems hesitant or nervous when directly engaging with the young people
✓ Is able to make young people and staff smile and/or laugh		✓ Is very serious and uneasy

## AFTER THE INTERVIEW

After the interview, all of the above factors should be taken into account. The young person's feedback should be heavily weighted.

## **SECTION 5: SPECIALISTS - COLLEGE, CAREER DEVELOPMENT, AND HOUSING**

### **A. OVERVIEW OF THE SPECIALIST ROLE**

At scale, agencies that are large enough should have College, Career Development, and Housing Specialists. Coaches with deep knowledge in a particular area could also play this role, if needed.

Specialists assist Coaches and young people in conducting specific, specialized, and targeted tasks that will help them achieve their academic, career development, and housing/independent living goals. Having Specialists expands the young person's network of positive staff and adult support and relieves the Coach of some of the more time-consuming, administrative tasks that often require specialized knowledge. It also helps ensure that there is at least one person with deep knowledge in the following critical areas:

- College;
- Career Development;
- Housing.

### **B. KEY QUALITIES & COMPETENCIES**

#### **SPECIALIST RELATIONAL SKILLS**

Specialists interact with young people from across the program. Thus, the relational skills of the professionals in this role are paramount to the success of the program.

The relational qualities of a successful specialist include:

- Ability to work from a strength-based, trauma-informed, youth development lens;
- Compassionate, warm, empathetic;
- A love for working with young people;
- Strong ability to relate to young people, engage them in conversation, and provide support and encouragement;
- Consistent and reliable;
- Values and promotes diversity;
- A belief that change is possible;
- Able to maintain healthy boundaries;
- Able to remain calm during moments of tension and stress.

#### **SPECIALIST PROFESSIONAL SKILLS**

The Specialist role is not an entry-level role.

As helping young people enroll and persist in post-secondary settings is one of the goals of the Fair Futures model, it is important for the Specialists to have a post-secondary credential. Agencies typically require either:

- A Bachelor's degree and at least two years of relevant experience working in college, career development, or housing services (depending on the role). Experience working with at-risk or system-involved young people is strongly preferred.
- An Associate or accredited vocational degree, and 3+ years of experience of relevant experience working in college, career development, or housing services (depending on the role). Experience working with at-risk or system-involved young people is strongly preferred.

## **SUCCESSFUL SPECIALISTS NEED:**

- Strong written and verbal communication skills;
- Strong organizational skills and attention to detail;
- Strong time-management skills;
- Ability to effectively collaborate in team settings and build relationships with external partners;
- Ability to troubleshoot, advocate, and navigate obstacles where there is not always a clear-cut pathway;
- Open to learning how to use and interpret data to inform decision-making;
- Ability to navigate complex educational issues, be resourceful, and work independently;
- Bilingual in Spanish preferred.

## **C. JOB DESCRIPTIONS**

Specialists report to the Program Director. The Specialists' overall job is to build positive relationships with young people and work in collaboration with Coaches to assist young people with their goals (in a specific area – college, career development, or housing).

Specialists can also provide “targeted services” (or specific services, such as filling out college or job applications) to young people who do not want to participate in longer-term coaching. The specific interactions are always driven by the young person, and where that young person is on their journey.

### **COLLEGE SPECIALIST JOB DUTIES CAN INCLUDE, BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO:**

- Meet with young people interested in college to have an exploratory and informational session, after they are referred by their Coach, and discuss what that roadmap/timeline would look like for them at their particular high school or HSE program;
- Monitor Pre-SAT/SAT scores of those students who do take them, and meet with them to discuss/refine college options;
- Organize college tours;
- Help young people apply to colleges in line with their interests, preferences, and performance;
- Assist students with college essays and personal statements, where needed;
- Review any college applications or financial aid forms filled out by the student's school/guidance counselor to ensure they are correct;
- Sit down with students and help them apply to FAFSA, TAP, ETV, and all applicable scholarships, including reviewing their essays and helping with letters of reference;
- Ensure that students apply to any Opportunity Programs available to them;
- Ensure students are signed up for any entrance interviews/exams;
- Fill out all of the required paperwork for the College Dorm Project and Foster Care Room & Board, if applicable;
- Reach out to students to ensure they are enrolled in the proper classes each semester, and assist with enrollment, if needed;
- Help young people reapply to all forms of financial aid and scholarships each year;
- Assist students with transferring colleges, if needed.

### **CAREER DEVELOPMENT SPECIALIST JOB DUTIES CAN INCLUDE, BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO:**

- Oversee any onsite job readiness program(s) (e.g., YA WORC), including enrollment and scheduling of program cycles;
- Oversee any onsite internship programs (e.g., Mentored Internship Program) and assist young people to identify, apply for and enroll in appropriate internship programs;
- Conduct careers assessments with young people;



- Help young people create, update and/or refine resumes;
- Meet with young people who are not on a college-bound track (or who have left college) to explore alternative post-secondary pathways and career paths in line with their interests and skills;
- Advise young people on vocational, training, other post-secondary programs and pathways other college;
- Help young people apply to external programs, including vocational and workforce development programs (after speaking with their Coach);
- Meet with young people who are enrolled in college to do career planning;
- Build relationships with external programs and employers to serve as pipeline;
- Assist with job applications, when needed;
- Check-in with employers after the 3-month, 6-year, and 1-year mark to verify persistence.

#### **HOUSING SPECIALIST JOB DUTIES CAN INCLUDE, BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO:**

- Work with young people who are aging out to submit all forms of housing applications by age 19;
- Check-in on young people's application status and follow-up with NYCHA and supportive housing residences, as needed;
- Help young people apply to permanent housing, when applicable, by helping them obtain [Section 8](#) vouchers, apply to the NYC affordable housing lottery, etc.

## **D. BEST-PRACTICE SCREENING, INTERVIEWING, & HIRING TECHNIQUES**


### **OVERVIEW**

Finding Specialists with the right combination of relational and professional skills requires the right combination of screening and interviewing techniques. What follows is a synthesis of approaches which have been implemented and refined over decades of combined practice among NYC foster care agencies that have coaching programs.

### **SCREENING RESUMES**

The Specialist role typically receives many applications with some combination of the following elements:

- Case Planners who are looking for a change with more freedom and connection to youth;
- School counselors who have not been able to secure a permanent position;
- Teachers who are working as permanent substitutes for the Department of Education and are looking for something more stable;
- Community-based organization afterschool program staff looking for a full-time position;

<b>GREEN FLAGS</b>	 <b>RED FLAGS</b>
<div data-bbox="110 1549 781 1612">✓ Experience working with at-risk or system-involved young people</div> <hr/> <div data-bbox="110 1644 781 1885">✓ Experience in the setting for which they are applying (e.g., college access/success experience for the College Specialist, career development/workforce development experience for the Career Development Specialist, and some housing or community development experience for the Housing Specialist)</div>	<div data-bbox="836 1539 1442 1612">✓ No experience working with vulnerable young people</div> <hr/> <div data-bbox="836 1749 1339 1780">✓ No experience in that relevant setting</div>

## **INITIAL IN-PERSON INTERVIEW**

The initial in-person interview is typically a panel interview lasting 45 - 60 minutes with the following potential participants:

- Program Director;
- Coach Supervisor;
- Coaches;
- A young person;
- Any other Coaching program staff available the day of the interview.

The primary focus at this stage is learning about the candidate's professional experiences, skills, and goals. To accomplish this, both traditional and behavioral questions are asked. It is also important to ask situational questions or do role-playing scenarios to test what the candidate would do in certain situations – how they engage youth, support youth, navigate challenges, etc.

While it is always ideal to have a young person at every stage of the interview process, if it is challenging to find young people, then they should be saved for a later-stage or final interview. (See [Section 2](#) for tips on involving young people in interviews.)

The following are examples of other important questions that can be asked on the first interview.

### **TRADITIONAL QUESTIONS:**

- What do you know about the Coaching program, and how it fits within our larger organization?
- What is it about this position that encouraged you to apply?
- What is it about working in this space with this population that inspires you the most?
- Tell me more about yourself.
  - Your educational background
  - Your work experience that is applicable to this position and role
  - Your career goals
- Please share more with me about your experience working with young people and your experience within \_\_\_\_\_ (insert applicable field, based on Specialist Role).
- As a follow up, ask them what colleges/workforce programs/housing resources, pathways, and policies they are familiar with.
- How do you stay organized? What are some techniques or tools that you use?
- What are some of your youth engagement strategies?
- What are your strengths? What are your weaknesses or something you want to improve?
- What are some of the challenges you foresee in this role?
- How do you maintain life/work balance?
- What unique skills, vision, and out-of-the-box ideas do you hope to contribute to this team?
- Do you have any questions regarding this role, the organization, or in general?

## BEHAVIORAL QUESTIONS:

- Name a time when you had to coach and/or support a student outside of typical practice. What steps did you take? What was the result?
- Tell me about a time you had difficulty engaging a young person. After they respond:
  - If not, why do you believe you haven't had any difficulty?
  - If so, can you describe what techniques/approaches you used? Why do you believe the attempts were not successful?
- Share a time with me when you had to navigate a challenging or difficult situation when assisting a young person. What steps did you take? What worked or didn't, and why?
- What does being resourceful mean to you? Give me an example of a time when you had to be very resourceful, organized, and perform many administrative tasks that required attention to detail.
- Share a time with me when you did not agree with something a colleague or supervisor did or shared with you. How did you react? What steps did you take?
- What is some constructive feedback you have received in the past, and how did you use it to grow?

## SITUATIONAL QUESTIONS/ROLE-PLAYING EXERCISES

### ***For the College Specialist Role:***

Let's say you are trying to help a student renew their financial aid and scholarships so that they can continue to persist in college. However, the student didn't show up to the meetings you scheduled and the deadline for one of their scholarships is fast approaching. You know that this particular scholarship provides them with the extra financial assistance they need to meet their independent living expenses and focus on college. The Coach said that the student fell into a spell of depression and has not been showing up regularly. What do you do?

### ***For the Career Development Specialist Role:***

You are meeting with a student who is in 11th grade. The student has decent academic performance but is adamant about not wanting to go to college – he wants to start working after high school. He is also not interested in any vocational pathways that involve “using his hands.” What questions would you ask the student? What are some pathways or opportunities you could recommend that could help the student build his skills while earning money after graduation, and hopefully move closer onto a post-secondary pathway?

### ***For the Housing Specialist:***

You are helping a young person apply to housing, but they refuse to apply to NYCHA – they only want supportive housing. In reviewing their supportive housing application, you notice that the psychosocial (that the Case Planner filled out when you were on vacation) is inconsistent with the supportive housing application. What steps do you take on both points? Who do you loop in, what questions do you ask?

Turn to the following page for a chart which may help you make decisions about candidates at this stage, based on both their qualities and professionalism.

## GREEN FLAGS



## RED FLAGS

✓ Arrives on time and dressed appropriately

✓ Prepared with copies of resume, notebook, and pen

✓ Understand importance of coaching

✓ Clearly has a love of working with young people and an ability to engage them through the examples they share

✓ Shows critical thinking skills in answering the situational/scenario-based questions

✓ Is able to give examples of how they can be resourceful, organized, and pay attention to detail

✓ Demonstrates some key knowledge (resources, pathways, policies) about the sector in which they are applying

✓ Displays an ability to think critically/ask good questions, work collaboratively and engage the young person and others (for the College and Housing Specialist scenarios), and help young people navigate opportunities/pathways (for the Career Development scenario)

✓ Has passion for this work and has plans to stay in this field

✓ Asks multiple questions about program, population, and role

✓ Shows up late and dressed inappropriately

✓ Unprepared with no copies of resume or notebook

✓ Zero to no background on program and/or organization

✓ Does not seem passionate about working with young people and/or is not able to discuss examples of how they have engaged young people

✓ Does not seem to have strong critical thinking skills in answering the situational/scenario-based questions

✓ Does not seem like they could juggle many administrative tasks and pay attention to details

✓ Is not knowledgeable about the resources and pathways within the Specialist sector for which they are applying

✓ Does not show an ability to think critically and present a process-oriented approach; does not suggest engaging others (including the young person); does not display knowledge of their sector

✓ Long-term career goals are outside this field – e.g. school principal, guidance counselor

✓ Does not have any questions to ask when prompted

## WRITING EXERCISE

The purpose of the writing exercise is to assess the candidate's writing skills and knowledge of the sectors in which they are applying to be a Specialist. It can be completed during the first in-person interview or as a take-home assignment afterward.

### COLLEGE SPECIALIST ESSAY QUESTION:

*Please outline your college advising philosophy and describe any college resources, programs, or policies you are aware of that can benefit students with a history of foster care involvement.*

### CAREER DEVELOPMENT SPECIALIST ESSAY QUESTION:


*Please describe various ways in which a young person can engage in career development activities. For each of the following, provide some concrete examples of potential career development experiences (and/or career exploration activities):*

- Students in high school who are college-bound;
- Students in high school who are interested in a vocational pathway;
- College students;
- Students who have a high school degree and want to work, but not sure of the areas they are interested in.

### HOUSING SPECIALIST ESSAY QUESTION:

*Please describe your knowledge of affordable housing resources/pathways for foster youth in NYC. What would you describe as three key challenges to accessing and maintaining housing?*

Below is a chart which may help you make decisions about candidate based on the writing assignment.

<b>GREEN FLAGS</b>		<b>RED FLAGS</b>
✓ Is clear, coherent, and without too many grammar mistakes		✓ Is incoherent, does not include full sentences, and/or is littered with grammatical errors
✓ Shows a thoughtful, organized line of thinking		✓ Is scattered or provides little critical thought
✓ Displays familiarity with the academic/ workforce/ housing environment in NYC by discussing specific programs/resources/pathways/opportunities		✓ Little to no familiarity with the sector

## FINAL IN-PERSON INTERVIEW

The final in-person interview is typically a panel interview, combined with a presentation, lasting an hour with the following potential participants:

- Program Director;
- Coach Supervisor;
- At least 2 Coaches;
- At least 1 young person.


The primary focus at this stage is learning about the candidate's interpersonal and engagement skills. To accomplish this, a 10-minute presentation exercise is combined with a second panel interview. This moves the interview process beyond talking and into seeing the candidate's skills in action. The following is example language for the email:

*For the interview, please prepare a 10-minute interactive presentation on a relevant topic to deliver to a group of program managers, staff, and young people.*

A presentation Q&A and panel interview typically follows, with the candidate given the opportunity to ask questions of the staff and young people. The same questions used in the first in-person interview can be used in this interview.

The young people should be given a chance to ask the candidate questions and give them scenarios, and ideally drive as many of the questions as possible. See [Section 2](#) on how to help young people prepare for the interview.

Below is a chart which may help you make decisions about candidates at this stage.

<b>GREEN FLAGS</b>		<b>RED FLAGS</b>
✓ Uses ice breaker to engage everyone from the beginning, or at least does a round of introductions		✓ Does not use ice breaker or do introductions
✓ Chooses a relevant and engaging topic		✓ Chooses an unrelated or uninspired topic
✓ Presentation focuses on young people		✓ Presentation focuses on professionals
✓ Presentation style is highly interactive		✓ Presentation style is monologue style
✓ Asks the young people questions		✓ Does not ask the young people questions
✓ Is able to engage with the young people		✓ Seems hesitant or nervous when directly engaging with the young people
✓ Is able to make young people and staff smile and/or laugh		✓ Is very serious and uneasy

## AFTER THE INTERVIEW

After the interview, the young person's feedback should be heavily weighted.



## **SECTION 6: MIDDLE SCHOOL EDUCATION SPECIALIST**

### **A. OVERVIEW OF MIDDLE SCHOOL EDUCATION SPECIALIST ROLE**

The Middle School Education Specialist works with up to 50 students at a time (including elementary students, if there are less than 50 middle school students at any given agency). The Specialist provides educational advocacy, conducts academic performance monitoring, and makes referrals to quality tutoring and extracurricular activities. The Middle School Education Specialist also provides individualized assistance with the high school selection processes to all 8th grade students and their families (and to all 5th grade students with the middle school process, when possible). The Specialist will ensure that the list of high schools the student is submitting are quality, best-fit schools.

*In this model, the Coach plays the role of the High School Educational Specialist, given the intensive 1:1 educational support that young people in high school often require to graduate.*

### **B. QUALITIES AND COMPETENCIES**

#### **MIDDLE SCHOOL EDUCATION SPECIALIST RELATIONAL SKILLS**

Middle School Specialists should have certain qualities to effectively engage students, families, and school staff, and advocate on the student's behalf.

The relational qualities of a successful Middle School Specialist include:

- Tenacious, independent, and resourceful;
- Proactive;
- Can follow detailed procedures;
- Engaging, strength-based, and collaborative;
- A love for working with children, youth, and families;
- Excellent interpersonal skills and easily builds relationships with children, families, and school partners;
- Values and promotes diversity;
- Able to remain calm during moments of tension and stress.

#### **MIDDLE SCHOOL EDUCATION SPECIALIST PROFESSIONAL SKILLS**

Middle School Specialists should have a Bachelor's Degree and at least two years of education-related experience in an instructional, administrative, or advocacy-related position. Experience working with students and families in foster care is strongly preferred.

Middle School Specialists should also have the following professional skills:

- Ability to navigate complex educational issues, be resourceful, and work independently;
- Ability to organize their time and prioritize responsibilities in order to plan and carry out all duties;
- Ability to effectively collaborate in team settings and build relationships with external partners;
- Bilingual in Spanish preferred.

## **C. MIDDLE SCHOOL EDUCATION SPECIALIST JOB DESCRIPTION**

### **THE OVERALL ROLE OF THE SPECIALIST IS TO:**

#### **WORK WITH UP TO 50 MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES, PROVIDING EDUCATIONAL ADVOCACY AND ENSURING STUDENTS ARE RECEIVING THE SUPPORTS/SERVICES THEY NEED TO SUCCEED.**

- Build and maintain collaborative relationships with schools; provide advocacy on behalf of students;
- Work with Case Planner, foster parent, birth parent/caregiver and tutor to address educational concerns;
- Request that the school make referrals for IEP evaluations and behavioral/academic supports within the school;
- Negotiate with DOE staff to ensure the implementation of recommended and appropriate educational services;
- Negotiate with ACCESS VR counselors for appropriate services;
- Ensure school stability if a student is relocating homes, in consultation with the Case Planner and parent.

#### **MONITOR THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF ALL STUDENTS IN MIDDLE SCHOOL.**

The Specialist will be able use the Online Platform to record progress and create automated reports.

- Collect, review, and track NYC DOE monthly data on attendance, grades, promotion status, school enrollment, tutoring history, transcripts, etc.;
- Use data to identify struggling students;
- Work with Case Planners and parents to ensure improved attendance, and/or provide additional academic supports.

#### **PROVIDE INDIVIDUALIZED ASSISTANCE WITH THE HIGH SCHOOL SELECTION PROCESS TO 8TH GRADE STUDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES.**

- The Specialist will ensure that the list of schools the student is submitting are quality, best-fit schools, and will record this list of schools (it will eventually be tracked in the Online Platform).
- It is the responsibility of the Specialist to try to guide the process as much as possible. This includes establishing trust, explaining why the process is so important, and providing information/guidance when a selection may not be appropriate.
- When possible, the Specialist should provide individualized assistance to all 5th grade students with the middle school selection process as well.

#### **REFER ALL STUDENTS TO IN-HOME, QUALITY TUTORING;**

- Follow up regularly with Tutor Coaches regarding the students' performance, needs, and any concerns.

#### **CONNECT STUDENTS TO AFTERSCHOOL AND SUMMER EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES.**

## ***SOME ADDITIONAL DETAILS INCLUDE:***

### **COORDINATING WITH OTHER STAKEHOLDERS:**

- **Parents:** It is the responsibility of the Specialist to outreach to parents for discussion about issues such as special education services, attendance concerns, behavioral issues in school, and school transfers.
- **Foster Parents:** It is important for the Specialist to include foster parents in educational planning because they will often interact with school staff on a regular basis.
- **Case Planners:** The Specialist should coordinate with Case Planners on the student's academic progress and follow up on any needs/concerns. The Specialist should provide a monthly report to the students' Case Planners that includes progress notes and key academic data. Case Planners should also be consulted about school transfers and any other significant educational advocacy activity.
- **The School:** The Specialist will collaborate with the school to explore options for students to improve and benefit from services offered such as afterschool tutoring, special education services, and other supports. The Specialist should also schedule school visits for students in order to meet with the student and counselor together.
- **External Providers:** The Specialist will work with community resources including tutoring programs, mental health services, and afterschool programs. Collaborating with these stakeholders allow for students to receive assistance and services on a broad spectrum that can foster continued success educationally as well as emotionally.

### ***GENERAL EDUCATIONAL ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES:***

**SHORT-TERM AND LONGER-TERM ADVOCACY:** The Specialist offers both long-term individualized interventions for students with complex or ongoing educational needs and targeted short-term supports to ensure that every student has access to a particular service or opportunity.

**SUSPENSION ADVOCACY:** The Specialist should secure representation for the student who is receiving the suspension.

### **ADVOCACY FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION AND STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:**

- **Response to Intervention:** The Specialist advocates for students to receive the most appropriate services available.
- **Individual Education Program (IEP) Referral Process:** The Specialist can request a referral from the school for students to receive a special education evaluation if it is believed that the student may benefit from additional services in school
- **Effective Advocacy for IEP Meetings:** Specialists can assist in developing an IEP that focuses on the best interest of the student as well as ensure that students are receiving the services they need to be successful.

## ***D. BEST-PRACTICE SCREENING, INTERVIEWING, & HIRING TECHNIQUES***

### ***SCREENING RESUMES***

The Middle School Education Specialist role typically receives many applications with some combination of the following elements:

- Case Planners who are looking for a change with more freedom and connection to youth;
- School counselors who have not been able to secure a permanent position;
- Teachers who are working as permanent substitutes for the Department of Education and are looking for something more stable;
- Community-based organization afterschool program staff looking for a full-time position;
- Social work interns looking for their first job.

Below is a chart which may help you make decisions about candidates at this stage.

<b>GREEN FLAGS</b>		<b>RED FLAGS</b>
✓ Experience working with system-involved or at-risk young people/students		✓ No experience working with system-involved or at-risk young people/students
✓ Experience in education		✓ No experience in education

### **INITIAL IN-PERSON INTERVIEW**

The initial in-person interview is typically a panel interview lasting 45 - 60 minutes.

The primary focus at this stage is learning about the candidate's professional experiences, skills, and goals. To accomplish this, both traditional and behavioral questions are asked.

The following are example questions for use at this stage:

#### **TRADITIONAL QUESTIONS:**

- What do you know about the Fair Futures program, and how it fits within our larger organization?
- How did you learn about this position?
- What is it about this position that encouraged you to apply?
- What is it about working in this space with this population that inspires you the most?
- Tell me more about yourself.
  - Your educational background
  - Your work experience that is applicable to this position and role
  - Your career goals
- Please share more with me about your education experience and experience working with young people/students and a variety of stakeholders (e.g., case planners, parents, foster parents, etc.).
- Are you familiar with NYC DOE schools? IEPs? 504 Plans? Special Education? EBPs?
- What is your working style?
  - Do you prefer group work?
  - Working alone? Are you able to work independently?
- How do you stay organized? What are some techniques or tools that you use?
- What are some of your engagement strategies with children and families, respectively?
- What are your strengths?
- What are your weaknesses or something you want to improve upon?
- What are some of the challenges you foresee in this role?
- Do you have any questions?
  - Regarding this role?
  - The organization? Or in general?


## BEHAVIORAL QUESTIONS

- Describe a time when you had to advocate for a young person (or anyone). What was the situation, how did you handle it, and what was the outcome?
- What does being resourceful mean to you? Provide an example of a time that required persistence and resourcefulness. What did you do and what was the outcome?
- Share a time with me when you had to deal with a challenging or difficult parent or administrative/school staff. What did you do? What steps did you take?
- What is some constructive feedback you have received in the past, and how did you use it to grow?

## SITUATIONAL QUESTIONS/ROLE-PLAYING EXERCISES

- Let's say you are following up on a young person to ensure they have all of the accommodations in place that their IEP outlines. You find out that they are not receiving most of the services they are entitled to. What steps do you take, and who do you communicate with?
- You are trying to refer a 7th grader who is struggling to a Tutor Coach. However, the parent says that she doesn't want a tutor in their home as there are too many workers coming in and out. What are some ways you could handle this situation?

Below is a chart which may help you make decisions about candidates at this stage.

<b>GREEN FLAGS</b>	 <b>RED FLAGS</b>
✓ Arrives on time and dressed appropriately	✓ Shows up late and dressed inappropriately
✓ Prepared with copies of resume, notebook, and pen	✓ Unprepared with no copies of resume or notebook
✓ Is able to point to examples of advocating on behalf of students/families and/or being resourceful.	Is not able to provide examples of being an advocate or resourceful, and/or does not seem to possess these traits
✓ Is able to work independently and also effectively engage others	✓ Does not like to work independently and/or is not able to provide examples of how they engage others
✓ Provides a thoughtful, compelling response to the situational scenarios that displays knowledge of the NYC educational system	Is scattered or provides little critical thought with regards to the situational scenario and has no knowledge of the NYC educational system
✓ Considers different options and provides a variety of potential solutions to the situational scenario	✓ Does not offer many solutions that are in line with the situation
✓ Has passion for this work and has plans to stay in this field	✓ Long-term career goals are outside this field
✓ Asks multiple questions about program, population, and role	✓ Does not have any questions to ask when prompted

## WRITING EXERCISE

The purpose of the writing exercise is to assess the candidate's writing and critical thinking skills. It can be completed during the first in-person interview or as a take-home assignment afterward.

The candidate is asked to complete a one-page writing assignment on their own and submit it via email, typically as a step between the first and second in-person interviews. This option allows staff to learn more about the professional assessment skills of the candidate.

THE FOLLOWING IS AN EXAMPLE WRITING PROMPT:

Please review the below hypothetical information and write a one-page response outlining how you would address this situation.

*You are trying to assist a student with the high school selection process and meet with that student's foster parent in the home. The student struggled in middle school and requires a more supportive, smaller high school environment. The foster parent insists on putting the local high school as the student's first option, however, as the foster parent wants the school to be as close as possible as she often has to visit the school due to the student's disciplinary issues. The birth parent did not have an opinion on this matter. The local school is a large, under-performing school with a very low graduation rate and safety concerns.*

*What steps could you take to convince the foster parent that another school environment would be more beneficial for the student and the parent, and how would you help ensure that the student attends a best-fit school?*

FINAL IN-PERSON INTERVIEW

The final in-person interview is typically a panel interview, combined with a presentation, lasting an hour. A young person should ideally be involved.


The primary focus at this stage is learning about the candidate's interpersonal and engagement skills. To accomplish this, a 10-minute presentation exercise is combined with a second panel interview. This moves the interview process beyond talking and into seeing the candidate's skills in action. The following is example language for the email:

*For the interview, please prepare a 10-minute interactive presentation on a relevant topic to deliver to a group of program managers, staff, and young people.*

A presentation Q&A and panel interview typically follows, with the candidate given the opportunity to ask questions of the staff and young people. The same questions used in the first in-person interview can be used in this interview.

The young people should be given a chance to ask the candidate questions and give them scenarios, and ideally drive as many of the questions as possible. See [Section 2](#) on how to help young people prepare for the interview.

Below is a chart which may help you make decisions about candidates at this stage.

GREEN FLAGS		RED FLAGS
✓ Uses ice breaker to engage everyone from the beginning, or at least does a round of introductions		✓ Does not use ice breaker or do introductions
✓ Chooses a relevant and engaging topic		✓ Chooses an unrelated or uninspired topic
✓ Presentation focuses on young people		✓ Presentation focuses on professionals
✓ Presentation style is highly interactive		✓ Presentation style is monologue style
✓ Asks the young people questions		✓ Does not ask the young people questions
✓ Is able to engage with the young people		✓ Seems hesitant or nervous when directly engaging with the young people



## **SECTION 7: TUTOR COACHES**

### **A. OVERVIEW OF THE TUTOR COACH ROLE**

In the Fair Futures model, the Tutor Coach's role is to build relationships, provide social-emotional support, and conduct weekly one-on-one tutoring sessions with 15 to 18 students in grades 6-12. Like Coaches, Tutor Coaches should also work from a strength-based, youth development lens.

Each Tutor Coach works towards the following goals with each student:

- Build trusting, strengths-based relationships;
- Build comprehension, confidence, and academic skills;
- Increase rates of grade promotion, credit attainment, and passage of Regents exams;
- Increase high school graduation and post-secondary readiness.

In Middle School, Tutor Coaches provide the individualized academic and social-emotional support students need to prepare for high school. Tutors report progress to the Middle School Specialist and work with the Specialist to help ensure young people are connected to extracurricular activities afterschool and in the summer.

In high school, Tutors should meet the student wherever they are most comfortable (in-home for in the community). Tutors report progress to the Coach and support students in building their academic skills and post-secondary preparedness.

Some agencies may choose to hire their own in-house Tutor Coaches, and others may choose to sub-contract with a quality tutor provider. For agencies interested in hiring their own Tutor Coaches, The Foundling offers consultation and implementation support aligned with the principles outlined in this document.

Section 6 of the [Fair Futures Program Manual](#) outlines potential approaches and implementation pathways.

### **B. QUALITIES AND COMPETENCIES**

#### **TUTOR COACH RELATIONAL SKILLS**

To build relationships with young people and engage them in tutoring, especially when they may be struggling in school, Tutor Coaches should have the following qualities:

- Calm, compassionate and patient;
- Engaging, strengths-based, and collaborative;
- Thoughtful, sensitive, proactive, and innovative;
- A love for working with young people;
- Strong ability to relate to young people and engage them in conversation;
- Excellent interpersonal skills;
- Values and promotes diversity;
- A belief that change is possible;
- Able to maintain healthy boundaries;
- Able to remain calm during moments of tension and stress.

#### **TUTOR COACH PROFESSIONAL SKILLS**

Tutor Coaches should have a Bachelor's degree and experience working with at-risk or system-involved youth in an academic setting, or a strong demonstrated ability to provide instruction to students in foster care (as evidenced by their performance in the mock tutoring interview described in [Section 7D](#)). Previous tutoring experience is strongly preferred.

### **SUCCESSFUL TUTOR COACHES ALSO HAVE:**

- Proficiency in middle school Common Core content and ability to quickly gain proficiency in other academic subjects, as needed;
- Ability to tailor lessons to meet the needs/strengths of each student;
- Ability to independently organize time and prioritize responsibilities in order to plan and carry out all duties;
- Flexibility to work around students' schedules, including early evenings and/or weekends as needed;
- Ability and willingness to travel, as needed

### ***C. TUTOR COACH JOB DESCRIPTION***

The Tutor Coach's overall job is to build relationships, provide emotional support, and conduct weekly one-on-one tutoring sessions with each student. To achieve this, tutor Coaches perform a variety of daily duties. However, specific interactions are always driven by the young person, and where that young person is on their academic journey.

#### **DAILY JOB DUTIES CAN INCLUDE, BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO:**

- Provide ongoing, trauma-informed emotional support, with a focus on any issues that may be holding a student back from academic success
- Create and tailor lesson plans to meet the needs and strengths of each student;
- Develop and refine materials such as practice problems and study guides that would be useful for a majority of students;
- Conduct one-on-one tutoring sessions once per week, primarily in foster home, to assist students with progressing in all core subjects;
- Use Motivational Interviewing techniques to inspire hope and motivate progress;
- Submit documentation on the key challenges and progress after each tutoring session;
- Monitor the student's grades;
- Collaborate with foster parents;
- Liaise with Middle School Education Specialist (for middle school students) and Coaches (for high school students) to discuss student progress, academic performance, and other needs/strengths;
- Work with the Middle School Specialists to connect students to quality afterschool and summer activities aligned with the student's interests.

### ***D. BEST-PRACTICE SCREENING, INTERVIEWING, & HIRING TECHNIQUES***

As mentioned above, agencies may choose to sub-contract with a quality tutor provider. In this case, they should screen the third-party tutoring provider for the following:

- Tutoring tailored to the social/emotional and academic needs of the foster care population;
- Tutors receive both academic and foster-care specific training and professional development;
- Tutors receive regular coaching on instructional and student engagement strategies;
- Tutors meet young people in their homes or in the community, wherever they feel comfortable;
- Tutors support students across all core academic subjects;
- Tutors work from a strength-based, youth development lens;
- Tutors track and are responsible for student progress and academic outcomes.

One tutoring program that meets all of these criteria is The New York Foundling's Road to Success program. Road to Success is a long-term, one-on-one tutoring program that supports youth in foster care with a full-time Tutor Coach who works with them in the home or community on any subject area. The program achieves strong academic outcomes for the students it serves and is tailored to the foster care population. Programs based on the Road to Success model have served students at 22 foster care agencies in NYC.


For agencies hiring their own Tutor Coaches, the following processes are best practices used by The Foundling in screening/hiring quality candidates.

## SCREENING RESUMES

The role of Tutor Coach typically receives many applications with some combination of the following elements:

- City Year AmeriCorps members who have completed their year of service;
- Saga Fellows who have completed 10 months of service.

Below is a chart which may help you make decisions about candidates at this stage.

<b>GREEN FLAGS</b>		<b>RED FLAGS</b>
✓ Experience working with vulnerable young people		✓ No experience working with vulnerable young people
✓ Experience teaching or tutoring		✓ No experience teaching or tutoring

## SCREENING CALLS


A full-time Tutor Coach is a rare professional role. To find the right candidate, a wider net must be cast, and rich information must be gathered from a larger group of potential candidates. A screening call is an ideal way to do this without expending too much time or too many resources. At this level, agencies should err on the side of opting potential candidates into the pool of screening calls, since the interview often reveals more about both the candidate and the role.

The screening call is conducted by the Tutor Supervisor, lasts about 15 minutes, and is focused on learning about the candidate's professional experiences, skills, and goals.

The following are example questions for use at this stage:

- What do you know about our program and the full-time Tutor Coach role?
- What subjects are you comfortable tutoring in?
- How do you rate yourself in math tutoring?
- What do you think about traveling around the city to different boroughs?
- What are your thoughts about providing tutoring in student's homes?
- What are your career goals for the next two years? Five years?

Below is a chart which may help you make decisions about candidates at this stage.

<b>GREEN FLAGS</b>		<b>RED FLAGS</b>
✓ Feels confident in tutoring all four core subjects		✓ Not confident in all four subjects
✓ Feels confident in tutoring math		✓ Not confident in tutoring math
✓ Expects to continue tutoring for at least two years		✓ Expects to leave the field in less than two years – e.g. back to school or no longer tutoring
✓ Comfortable traveling		✓ Not comfortable traveling
✓ Comfortable providing in-home services		✓ Not comfortable providing in-home services

## IN-PERSON INTERVIEW

The final in-person interview is typically a panel interview, combined with a mock tutoring session, lasting 1.5 hours with the following potential participants:

- Tutor Supervisor
- 1 – 2 Tutor Coaches


The primary focus at this stage is learning about the candidate's relational and professional skills. To accomplish this, a 30-minute panel interview is combined with approximately 60 minutes of role-play tutoring. This moves the interview process beyond talking and into seeing the candidate's skills in action.

## PANEL INTERVIEW

The following are example questions for use in the in-person panel interview:

- What is the most important attribute in a tutor?
- What is your tutoring philosophy?
- Engagement with foster parent?
- What do you do if a student isn't responsive to outreach?
- What is a common mistake that some tutors make?
- Why are you interested in this job?

Below is a chart which may help you make decisions about candidates at this stage.

<b>GREEN FLAGS</b>	 <b>RED FLAGS</b>
✓ Important tutor attributes are patience, ability to engage, and relatability	✓ Important tutor attributes are a focus on discipline and control
✓ Can articulate a strategy for engaging young people	✓ Cannot articulate a strategy for engaging young people
✓ Can articulate a strategy for engaging adult stakeholders	✓ Cannot articulate a strategy for engaging adult stakeholders
✓ Wants the job because they enjoy working with students and seeing their progress and improvements	✓ Wants the job for abstract/unclear reasons that have little to do with promoting student success (e.g. because the hours are flexible, or as a placeholder before going to grad school)

## MOCK TUTORING SESSION

For the mock tutoring session, a set of questions is typically sent ahead of time via email.

During the mock tutoring session, four questions are asked. One for the four questions was sent ahead of time via email, while the remaining three questions are new to the candidate. The purpose of this is to recreate the professional reality of showing up to tutoring session when young people need help with an unexpected assignment or test.

For each of the four questions, one staff plays the student while one staff assesses the session. The staff switch off on these roles, so by the end, each staff has played the student twice and assessed the session twice. When playing the role of the student, it's important to for staff to exhibit the range of behaviors that a Tutor Coach will face. The purpose exhibiting this range of behavior is to see how the candidate responds to student challenges and functions under pressure.


Some examples include, but are not limited to:

- Fidgeting
- Impoliteness
- Low confidence
- Moments of total disengagement
- A gap in the student's knowledge of the fundamental skills leading up to the topic being covered (e.g. struggling with an algebra problem because of not knowing how negative numbers work)

After each of the questions is asked and tutored, the staff who assessed the session provides immediate feedback on strengths and ways to improve. The purpose of providing immediate feedback after each of the four questions is to assess the candidate's ability to accept feedback, self-assess, and quickly adapt their strategies.

Since a full-time Tutor Coach is a rare professional role, it takes a rare person to do this well. If a compromise must be made, compromise on content rather than engagement, so long as the tutor demonstrates the ability and willingness to master the all of the necessary material. It's typically easier to train a Tutor Coach on middle school science than it is to train a Tutor Coach to have the right temperament and social/emotional skills for the job.

Below is a chart which may help you make decisions about candidates at this stage.

<b>GREEN FLAGS</b>	 <b>RED FLAGS</b>
✓ Constantly asks the student leading questions to help the student arrive at the correct answer	✓ Gives a lecture to the student or does all of the work themselves
✓ Remains calm and patient	✓ Shows frustration or becomes unfocused in challenging moments
✓ Gives positive feedback to the student	✓ Focuses on deficits/misses opportunities for positive feedback
✓ Able to redirect an unengaged youth	✓ Does not attempt to re-engage the student, or engages in a power struggle with the student
✓ Demonstrates mastery of the academic content	✓ Arrives at incorrect answers or needs the content explained before they can teach it
✓ Able to integrate feedback and improve over four questions	✓ Unable to integrate feedback and improve over four questions

## **SECTION 8: PROGRAM DIRECTOR**

### **A. OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAM DIRECTOR ROLE**

The role of the Program Director mirrors that of the Coach Supervisor, but at scale. Program Directors provide direct supervision to Coach Supervisors and Specialists in their work with young people, and also serve as the external face of the program.

### **B. QUALITIES AND COMPETENCIES**

#### **PROGRAM DIRECTOR SCHOOL RELATIONAL SKILLS**

The Program Director must create the culture of trusting relationships and that forms the foundation of the coaching program. Thus, the relational skills of the Director are paramount to the success of the program and include:

- Ability to create a warm, inclusive, strength-based, non-judgmental and trauma-informed culture;
- Ability to facilitate harmonious relationships among staff;
- Support staff in developing strong relationships with young people;
- Provision of emotional support to staff to reduce stress and build resiliency;
- Excellent interpersonal skills and ability to build relationships with community and governmental stakeholders;
- Values and promotes diversity;
- A belief that change is possible;
- Able to maintain healthy boundaries;
- Able to remain calm during moments of tension and stress.

#### **PROGRAM DIRECTOR PROFESSIONAL SKILLS**

Program Directors should have a Master's degree in social work, education, or related field, significant experience working with at-risk or system-involved youth, and 3+ years of management experience, ideally.

Exceptions can be made for candidates with Bachelor's degrees who have significant managerial experience and who are credible messengers.

#### **SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM DIRECTORS ARE ALSO ABLE TO:**

- Be self-directed, strategic thinkers;
- Lead and work under pressure and meet deadlines;
- Build external partnerships and meet with funders and government partners.

#### **OTHER CRITICAL SKILLS INCLUDE:**

- Excellent written and verbal communication skills;
- Strong experience using data to monitor program outcomes;
- Strong budgeting and fiscal skills.



## **C. PROGRAM DIRECTOR JOB DESCRIPTION**

Program Directors typically report directly to agency leadership.

### **DUTIES CAN INCLUDE, BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO:**

- Promote a youth development philosophy and framework and work cross-divisionally to infuse youth development principals and skills across the program and agency;
- Lead, manage, and directly supervise the Fair Futures staff;
- Provide direct, regular supervision to Supervisors and Specialists;
- Ensure all Coaches, Supervisors, and Specialists receive the proper trainings;
- Monitor youth goals & steps and key academic data monthly;
- Ensure peer groups are in place and running effectively;
- Serve as the outward face of the program with both public and private stakeholders;
- Partner externally to develop workforce, internship, and career exposure partnerships;
- Ensure that efficient administrative procedures are in place within the program and that financial and physical resources are effectively used.

## **D. BEST-PRACTICE SCREENING, INTERVIEWING, & HIRING TECHNIQUES**

The hiring and screening practices/techniques used for Coach Supervisors can also be applied to potential Program Directors, with a greater focus on managerial and performance management skills/experience.

### **TO ASSESS THESE SKILLS, SOME ADDITIONAL EXERCISES THAT AGENCIES USE INCLUDE:**

- A writing exercise that asks for the following:
  - Please provide your supervision management philosophy.
  - Your program receives a \$50,000 grant. What questions do you have and how would you consider using it to grow or improve program performance?
- An exercise where the candidate is given academic and career data on young people and asked to organize it, analyze it, and give a 10-minute PowerPoint presentation on the key takeaways.

Most agencies also have specific procedures in place for Director-level positions.