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CAREER NEXUS PILOTING INNOVATIVE CAREER ECOSYSTEM WITH PAID INTERNSHIPS TO PREPARE YOUNG ADULTS TO FILL HIGH-DEMAND, GOOD-PAYING JOBS IN THE GREATER FRESNO REGION

A Fresno Business Council program and a Fresno (CA) DRIVE initiative operating under shared community values, Career Nexus aligns efforts to foster diverse talent and industries with plans to scale program in the thousands by January 2022.

Fresno, California, April 27 2021 ...The Fresno Business Council (FBC) is proud to announce Career Nexus, a unique and comprehensive career ecosystem comprised of employers, education, training and support partners, and young adult interns. The program, currently in its pilot phase, is designed to support the high-demand employment needs in the greater Fresno region industry while developing a next-generation workforce that is prepared, diverse, confident and inspired to succeed. Operating under [Fresno's Community Values](#), Career Nexus aims to connect and align efforts to foster diverse talent and industries for an inclusive economic impact.

Career Nexus is one of 19 initiatives of Fresno DRIVE, an effort supported by the Central Valley Community Foundation to develop a vibrant and sustainable economy for the greater Fresno region. Kurt Madden will serve as CEO of Career Nexus, leading the effort along with Deborah Nankivell, CEO of the Fresno Business Council, and Genelle Taylor Kumpe, COO of the Fresno Business Council and CEO of the San Joaquin Valley Manufacturing Alliance. Initial three-year funding for Career Nexus has been provided by the James Irvine Foundation, along with additional ongoing funding from the Fresno Regional Workforce Development Board, a critical partner from inception, to underwrite the paid internships. Career Nexus has additional underwriting opportunities available to support its ongoing efforts.

"Career Nexus aims to fill a critical missing piece of the economic workforce engine puzzle, serving as the connector – the center point – between local employers, education, training and support partners, and interns, that will transform the existing workforce ecosystem by aligning efforts to elevate our young adults and our local industries," said Madden. "Career Nexus' innovative approach will help effect broad, long-term economic and social change in our community, one internship and one generation at a time."

While similar programs exist, what's often missing is the critical support needed for success with the ability to scale; Career Nexus' unique ecosystem provides these missing elements. From paid internship underwriting, co-designing and overseeing internships with employers to providing advanced career readiness training, coaching and ancillary support for interns, the Career Nexus model helps prepare a talented, local workforce for high-demand, good-paying jobs in the greater Fresno region while giving employers access to a more robust workforce pipeline.

"Career Nexus intends to close the gap between economic and human development. Both efforts require whole community participation and alignment," said Deborah Nankivell, CEO of the Fresno Business Council. "For too long the strategies were fragmented, leaving people behind and employers without a strong workforce. Working together across every boundary and enterprise, we as the 'Career Nexus ecosystem' can ensure everyone has a path forward and an opportunity to lead a quality life. This approach benefits everyone. It maximizes human potential, minimizes social costs, and advances inclusive prosperity and wellbeing for our community."

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Career Nexus interns must be referred by one of the program's referral partners upon completion of an introductory career readiness program. Once accepted into Career Nexus, interns engage in an interest and aptitude assessment which helps match them with employers that can provide the most meaningful internships. All Career Nexus interns must complete online lessons of employability, life skills and emerging technologies coursework leading to a *Career Nexus: Work Readiness Certificate* by the time their 100+ hours of internship experience are completed. The certificate coursework is completed online through Career Nexus' digital platform powered by IMAGO, the nation's leading education technology company specializing in social emotional learning (SEL), established and operated in Fresno, CA.

Career Nexus collaboratively works with its employer partners to design meaningful, work-based learning opportunities and identify the continuous skilling, reskilling and upskilling needs for the Fresno region industries' workforce. In turn, this provides valuable data to the program's educational and training partners to adapt curricula to address needed employment skills. This collaborative effort is intended to address the current problem faced by many local employers who have good-paying jobs available, but find there are few qualified local candidates to fill them:

20.5% poverty rate in Fresno County is double the national rate of 10.5%.

- U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 Data

Fresno County's unemployment rate is 10% (Employment Development Department) compared to the national unemployment rate of 6.3% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics) as of January 2021.

55.8% of Fresno's residents are under the age of 35.

- American Community Survey Data, U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 Data

60% of American employers complain of lack of preparation, even for entry-level jobs

- McKinsey & Company, 2017 Skills Gap Report

58% Interns that receive at least one job offer versus 44% of non-interns.

- National Association of Colleges and Employers 2019 Internship & Co-op Report

"Career Nexus is about more than internships. It's about opening doors for Fresnans and connecting them with employers who see their potential, believe in them, and provide life-changing training and economic opportunity," said Ashley Swearingin, President and CEO of the Central Valley Community Foundation.

Internships are structured to be mutually beneficial to the employer and intern, with measurable goals and outcomes. All internships through Career Nexus are underwritten with the goal of encouraging more businesses to enhance their existing – or develop new – internship programs, which is a strategic way to expose and train the future workforce. The program's digital platform gives employers a single, seamless access point to post opportunities with desired skill requirements that are matched with Career Nexus referred and internship-ready young adults who show both the aptitude and interest in their industry.

Currently in the development phase, Career Nexus internship pilots began in late 2020, initially focusing on small- to mid-size manufacturers, healthcare organizations and public institutions. Career Nexus will be expanding to include more employers in its next internship pilot cohort planned for summer and fall 2021; it is currently seeking employers in the greater Fresno Region to participate in the fall 2021 internship cohort. The program is then set to launch on a larger scale in January 2022, with anticipated funding of 1,000 – 3,000 internships per year over the next three years.

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“Our experience in the first pilot has been positive from both employers and interns. Employers are seeing the future impact of Career Nexus – confirming their participation in secondary pilots and eagerness to share the benefits with other industry peers. Career Nexus is a win-win for all; it is good for our community, for our interns and future workforce, and for the growth of our businesses,” said Genelle Taylor Kumpe, COO of the Fresno Business Council and CEO of the San Joaquin Valley Manufacturing Alliance.

Employers interested in learning more about Career Nexus and participating in future underwritten internships are encouraged to complete an Employer Interest Form here: <https://careernexus.org/employer-interest-form/>

Education, Training and Support organizations that are interested in joining the Career Nexus ecosystem are invited to complete this form: <https://careernexus.org/referral-partner-interest-form/>

Students and young adults interested in participating in Career Nexus’ work-based learning opportunities and training are encouraged to connect with one of the program’s [referral partners](#). Those not currently connected to one of these programs are encouraged to complete this form and expect a follow-up from the Career Nexus team: <https://careernexus.org/intern-interest-form/>

About Career Nexus

Career Nexus is a community initiative of the Fresno Business Council, and one of 19 initiatives of Fresno DRIVE – an effort supported by the Central Valley Community Foundation, with initial funding provided by the James Irvine Foundation, to improve the greater Fresno region’s economy. Career Nexus establishes an all-sector career ecosystem that supports local industry employment needs and fosters a workforce that is prepared, diverse and inspired to succeed through meaningful paid, work-based learning opportunities and enhanced career readiness training for inclusive economic impact. Operating under [Fresno’s Community Values](#), Career Nexus works on all levels to inspire future community stewards, working in alignment to elevate the community as a whole. For more details, visit www.careernexus.org