

U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation Receives \$1.5 Million Grant from American Student Assistance to Create More Career Pathways for Learners and Workers

The investment will support a new workforce initiative that will scale access to high-quality work-based learning experiences for high school and postsecondary learners and incumbent workers

AUSTIN, Texas, March 6, 2023 /PRNewswire/ -- The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation today announced a \$1.5 million grant from American Student Assistance® (ASA) – a national nonprofit changing the way kids learn about careers and navigate a path to postsecondary education and career success – to address the challenge of access to authentic work-based learning and soft or employability skill credentialing opportunities. [Research shows](#) that while 79 percent of high school students would be interested in a work-based learning experience, only 34 percent were aware of any opportunities for students their age — and just two percent of students had completed an internship during high school. The partnership is designed to prepare learners and workers for career advancement to address the worker shortage.

The grant will fund the launch of the pilot phase of the [Employer Provided Innovation Challenges \(EPIC\)](#) initiative, an online platform that brings high school and postsecondary learners and incumbent workers together to create solutions to real-world, employer-led work-based learning challenges. The challenges will be provided by regional and national partners, including large corporations, small and medium enterprises, governmental agencies and municipalities, and non-profit organizations. The pilot phase of the initiative will begin during the fall of 2023.

"EPIC will provide learners with opportunities to work as a team on real-world industry problems that not only promote career awareness, but also career preparation," said Jason Tyszko, vice president at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation. "We believe that EPIC will seed the infrastructure of the future to scale authentic project-based learning and will one day reach thousands of learners."

Through 2025, the U.S. Chamber Foundation will organize up to 50 challenges reaching as many as 500 learners, utilizing project management tools and infrastructure, frameworks, and rubrics. Micro-credentialing, such as digital badging and Learning and Employment Records (LERs), will also be designed and tested as a component of this phase. Unlike the traditional business case or entrepreneurship challenge where the focus is on new business creation with a reward, these work-based learning challenges will focus on the development and implementation of new ideas and new ways of doing things that create social value.

"Through our innovative partnership with the U.S. Chamber Foundation, we can better engage employers in work-based learning opportunities," said Senior Vice President, Advocacy and Corporate Social Responsibility, Julie Lammers, ASA. "Doing so provides support for career exploration and real-world learning, and increases the opportunity for more young people to build skills to become workforce ready."

Challenge experiences will be based on the needs and interests of local partners that are designing and hosting the challenges, and will reflect industries such as healthcare, information technology, manufacturing, transportation, logistics, government administration, and civic and community-based challenges. Challenge participants will also be able to stack their experiences and credentials they receive, which will enable learners and workers to pursue a pathway of challenges that go from broad career awareness to more specific career preparation, where challenges increase in sophistication and are part of a talent pipeline. Employers will be able to design and host challenges in a remote, hybrid, or face-to-face environment.

More details about this initiative will be shared by the U.S. Chamber Foundation and ASA during a panel discussion at SXSW EDU on the topic of "[Engaging Employers in High School Work-based Learning Opportunities](#)" on March 7 at 1:00 p.m. CT.

About The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation harnesses the power of business to create solutions for the good of America and the world. We anticipate, develop, and deploy solutions to challenges facing communities—today and tomorrow. To learn more, visit uschamberfoundation.org.

About American Student Assistance® (ASA)

American Student Assistance® (ASA) is a national nonprofit committed to helping students know themselves, know their options, and make informed decisions to achieve their education and career goals. ASA believes all students should have equitable access to career readiness learning, starting in middle school, so they can develop a plan for their future. ASA fulfills its mission by providing digital-first programming, resources, and experiences, including Futurescape® and Next Voice™, directly to millions of students, in addition to support for educators and intermediaries. To learn more about ASA, visit www.asa.org/about-asa.

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For further information: Sandy Dawkins, sdawkins@asa.org
