



NEXTGEN MENTORSHIP PROGRAM REPORT

SPRING 2025

Submitted by:

Suli Kenyatta

NextGen Program Leader

Judy Kruger

President & CEO

WHAT IS THE SANTA MONICA NEXTGEN MENTORSHIP PROGRAM?

Launched in the Fall of 2021, the Santa Monica NextGen Leadership Program is led by the Santa Monica Chamber of Commerce Foundation and Santa Monica College to partner students of color with Chamber members who have experience related to the student's field of study and cultural background.

This innovative program matches Santa Monica College students with mentors from the local community, including business owners, entrepreneurs, and industry professionals. Through six weekly 90-minute mentoring sessions, students gain invaluable guidance and insights to expand their professional development and career opportunities. To further strengthen leadership abilities, networking skills, and professional relationships, students complete reflective journal entries after each session. By facilitating meaningful connections with established local leaders, the program aims to empower students, unlock their potential, and equip them with resources to achieve their goals.

Santa Monica College Partners

Chris Baccus

Counseling Faculty
Adelante/Black Collegians

Sherri Bradford

Program Leader
Black Collegians

Destiny Johnson

Career Counselor
Adelante/Black Collegians

Maria Martinez

Program Leader
Adelante

Janet Tercero

Student Services Coordinator
Adelante

Jocelyn Winn

Student Services Coordinator
Black Collegians

Esmeralda Martinez

Career Counselor
Adelante/Black Collegians

Spring 2025 Program Structure

March 2025 - April 2025

At the start of the Spring semester, the NextGen interest form was distributed to members of the Santa Monica College Black Collegians and Adelante student groups.

The outreach yielded over **50** student responses, from which **32** students were selected to participate in the program. Additionally, **15** mentors were recruited from the Santa Monica Chamber of Commerce to support the student cohort.

The program is structured into three 90-minute breakout sessions, where mentors and mentees engage in meaningful discussions on various professional development topics. obstacles they have encountered.

One highlight includes a fireside chat, providing students the opportunity to ask pressing questions and participate in a community conversation addressing challenges and obstacles they have encountered.

This semester there were **25** graduates who met the attendance requirements for the program. To celebrate their achievement, the NextGen participants gather for a graduation brunch, during which students receive their certificate of completions and are celebrated in Community!



Mentorship



Network



Conversation



Professional Development Topics

Leadership (Corporate and Individual)

Students learned how to excel as leaders in corporate settings and as individuals through discussions on effective leadership principles. The breakout sessions also emphasized self-leadership, fostering self-awareness, resilience, and a growth mindset. By the end of the program students possessed the skills and mindset to make a positive impact by utilizing strategic decision-making and prioritizing social responsibility.



**George Burciaga,
Santa Monica Police Department**



**Andre Jackson,
Jonathan Club**



Networking Tips and Professional Associations

Students learned valuable networking techniques to enhance their career prospects. The breakout sessions also covered effective networking strategies, including building meaningful connections, leveraging social media platforms, and mastering the art of informational interviews. By the end of the program, students gained the tools and knowledge to confidently navigate networking opportunities to open doors to future professional growth and success.



**Josiah Clark,
Blizzard Entertainment**



**Chigo Chukwu,
Lionsgate**



**Cesar Sepulveda,
Blizzard Entertainment**



Learning How to Advocate for Yourself

Students learned how to excel as leaders in corporate settings and as individuals through discussions on effective leadership principles. The breakout sessions also emphasized self-leadership, fostering self-awareness, resilience, and a growth mindset. By the end of the program students possessed the skills and mindset to make a positive impact by utilizing strategic decision-making and prioritizing social responsibility.



Bryson Coleman,
Treyarch



Roger Garcia,
Blizzard Entertainment



Delana Gbenekama,
City of Santa Monica



Managing Interpersonal Relationships

Students discussed strategies to effectively navigate and foster positive relationships in professional settings. The workshop emphasized developing effective communication techniques, conflict resolution strategies, and the importance of building strong connections. By the end of the program students were well-equipped to navigate interpersonal dynamics of an office environment and cultivate collaborative relationships.



Danny Cizek,
Treyarch



Pema Choden,
St. John's Providence



Christian Enriquez,
Reality Experience Design



How to Research and Industry or Field

Students discussed systematic approaches to thoroughly investigate key aspects of a particular field or sector. In the conversations students acquired methods to dig deeper and find reliable information to make data-driven career decisions, identify emerging opportunities, and stay current with notable industry developments. By the end of the program participants had developed valuable research capabilities to inform both their career and industry knowledge.



Ismael Tavera,
Santa Monica Police Department



Keanna Pardassie,
Advantage Gold Financial



Carey Littlefield,
Blizzard Entertainment



Thank you to our Mentors and Chamber Partners!



On Saturday April 12th, the Spring 2025 program culminated with the 4th annual NextGen Brunch, hosted at the Jonathan Club Santa Monica.

The NextGen graduation provides the important opportunity for mentors and students to meet in-person for the first time and celebrate the completion of the program in Community!



Thank you to the Jonathan Club for hosting and catering the NextGen Brunch!



NEXTGEN GRADUATION BRUNCH



KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Matt Hill

**Battalion Chief "C" Platoon
Santa Monica Fire Department**

SPRING 2025 CELEBRATION

**SATURDAY, APRIL 12TH
11:00a - 1:00p**

**Jonathan Club Santa Monica,
850 Palisades Beach Rd,
Santa Monica, CA 90403**

Attire: Smart Casual

COME CELEBRATE IN COMMUNITY!



Student Journal Reflections

Following each NextGen Session, students are invited to complete a journal prompt reflecting on the most impactful insights and how they plan to implement these lessons in both their professional and personal lives. The testimonials below offer a glimpse into the transformative learning and growth sparked by the NextGen experience:

“ I will implement taking notes and jotting down the qualities I see in leaders, taking the first step to showing respect in hopes of getting it back, and leading by example. ”

“ I learned to treat intern opportunities as you would a job opportunity, to be honest with yourself and others about your skillset, the importance of building alliances, and a strong reputation to create change in your work environment. ”

“ I learned to empower others to step into the confidence we all have and help others discover that in themselves and always consider the team effort. ”

“ I learned some key leadership traits are empathy, confidence, and respectful. At the end of the day, you are working with people so it's always nice to show empathy to others. ”

“ I learned to advocate for myself and being able to express your feelings to others. It's okay to not feel well and express your concerns to others instead of being silent about it. ”

“ I learned that it could help to think of networking as having a regular conversation or making a new friend instead of a strictly business mindset. ”

“ I learned from my mentors the importance of having a work life balance and finding a schedule that works for you. ”

“ Success is different for everyone but for the most part, something that fulfills you in and out of work is a great start. ”

Congratulations to the NextGen Spring 2025 Graduates!

Christopher Acosta

Jesse Guadron

Kaitlyn Perez

Kiera Anderson

Jasmine Houston

Maliyah Ponce

Eleazar Ashebir

Shapri Hudson

Leilani Refugio

Samantha Barrera

Sabrina Korsnes

Tito Rosas

Ines Bourdette

Dexter Martin

Harmony Simpson

Steven Calderon

Lillian Guzman

London Tennell

Luis Castaneda

Ella Njonjo

Amanda Williams

Aalyiah Edwards

Kevin Giovanni Perez

Aaron Winston

Jozephine Gbadamosi

SAVE THE DATE

The Fall 2025 NextGen Program will be launching in October!

**To learn more about how to get involved, please contact
judy.kruger@smchamber.com**