



NEXTGEN MENTORSHIP PROGRAM REPORT

SPRING 2026

Submitted by:

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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

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Student Services Coordinator
Adelante

Jocelyn Winn

Student Services Coordinator
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Esmeralda Martinez

Career Counselor
Adelante/Black Collegians

Ann Marie Leahy

Career Services Advisor

Spring 2026 Program Structure

March 2026 - April 2026

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 dozens of responses, from which **25 students** were selected to participate in the program. Additionally, **11 mentors** were recruited from the Santa Monica Chamber of Commerce member organizations 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.



Mentorship



Network



Conversation

This semester, in addition to the regular 90-minute sessions, Metropolis Technologies, one of the Santa Monica-based companies that participated in the mentorship program, also hosted students in their office for a bonus session centered around the DISC framework, assessing work and communication styles.

This semester there were **22** 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!



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.



Christian Enriquez,
Reality Experience Design



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.



Marcus Marasco,
Metropolis Technologies



Rose Pelikan
Providence Health



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.



**Mallika San Augustin,
Metropolis Technologies**



**Shellie Goings,
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.



**Brian Lawrence,
Metropolis Technologies**



**Pinar Arslanapay,
Metropolis Technologies**



How to Find Internships and Entry Level Jobs

Students discussed systematic approaches to thoroughly investigate key aspects of a particular field or sector to find internships and entry level jobs. In the conversations students acquired new ways to identify emerging opportunities, find that first job to break into a field, and stay current with notable industry developments. By the end of the program participants had developed valuable research tools to find internships and entry level jobs.



Ernesto Rennella,
Metropolis Technologies



Maya Belay,
Columbia Bank

Thank you to our Mentors and Chamber Partners!



Graduation Brunch at the Jonathan Club

The NextGen graduation brunch on Saturday, April 11 provided an 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!





The graduation brunch was an opportunity to reflect on the program's success, emphasize the role that programs like NextGen play in the personal and professional development of students, and celebrate our community.

It was also an opportunity for students to network in person and put the knowledge and skills acquired during the program into practice!



The students and mentors also heard keynote remarks from April Mims, Vice President of Government Relations at Metropolis Technologies, on the importance of learning from one's mistakes when navigating professional life.



NEXTGEN GRADUATION BRUNCH

**SATURDAY, APRIL 11TH
11:00 AM
JONATHAN CLUB
850 PACIFIC COAST HWY, SANTA MONICA**



**KEYNOTE SPEAKER
APRIL MIMS
VP OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS
METROPOLIS**



DISC Framework Session at the Metropolis Headquarters



This semester, the students visited the Santa Monica headquarters of Metropolis Technologies, a computer vision and artificial intelligence company, where they had an additional session on the DISC framework to assess their work and communication styles. During the session and the working lunch, the Metropolis team covered the framework's basics, as well as allowed the students the opportunity to ask any questions they had about using the framework in the workplace, communicating well in their respective careers, and other career related questions.

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 learned about how to give an elevator speech as well as the importance of doing so. I also learnt how to connect and how my mentors have dealt with adversity in their careers.

Network, Network Network! Make the effort to develop yourself and stand out from the other applicants by actively reaching out and making that effort.

I learned that you as a person need to learn to be a professional in your work environment, control what you can and what it's your capacity, how we communicate to others is very important.

Leaders aren't about being in charge but taking care of the people who are in charge.

I learned about leadership development. Andre Jackson , one of the mentors, taught us that when it comes to being a good leader you must consider what's important to others and what motivates them.

I learned how to approach a cold call or email, as well as preparing myself for internships and knowing what questions I should be asking during the interview.

Great leaders influence with integrity, respect, courage, empathy, consistency. Leaders are adaptable and flexible.

Focus on People. Learn about them. Take the time to collaborate and accentuate their strengths, and by doing so you'll grow as well.

Congratulations to the NextGen Spring 2026 Graduates!

Abigail Juan	Sabrina Korsnes	Nabou Ramu
Steven Calderon	Daniela Pacheco Orozco	Kaitlyn Perez
Chris Augustin	Charles Nelson	Nicole Russell
Diego Adame	Sabrina Korsnes	Andre Vargas
Silvia Solano	Ines Bourdette	Cochise Seals
Yenay Cuevas	Adrian Rocha	Jenny Gonzalez
Veronique Briggs	Jesse Tinajero	Tiwana Floyd
	Gianluca Martinez	
	Guinevere Jones	

SAVE THE DATE

The Fall 2026 NextGen Program will be launching in October!

To learn more about how to get involved, please contact
NextGen@smchamber.com

