**Excellence in Innovation - Leadership Development**

**RBC Career Launch Program, RBC Learning (Rehana Ciriani, Director, RBC Career Launch Program)**

Program Objective: The RBC® Career Launch Program is a multi-year investment that provides a year-long first career experience for 100 recent college and university graduates. This paid internship is designed to help recent college and university graduates (age 24 and under) hone their skills and build their resumes by combining practical hands-on business and community experience with robust learning, mentorship and professional networking opportunities. As a result of the dedicated support, networking and robust learning and development opportunities, participants in this program will be able to point to a meaningful experience that is comprehensive, helps them make informed decisions about their careers, and increase their attractiveness to future employers.

The program is part of RBC’s broader commitment to Canadian youth through the RBC Kids Pledge. The RBC Kids Pledge is a five-year, $100 million commitment to improve the wellbeing of at least 1 million kids and youth, and setting them up for lifelong success. We believe kids are our future: for our economic prosperity, the health of the planet and the hope of humanity. Our holistic approach addresses the needs of the ‘whole’ child – mind, body and spirit. Rather than simply adopting a single issue, cause or charity, we’re pledging support to a wide-range of programs that will have a true impact on the overall well-being of kids and youth, including the arts, sports, education, wellness and employment programs.

Additionally, RBC is exploring the emerging trend of HR partnering with corporate volunteering to support the attraction & retention of top talent, increase productivity & performance levels and real world experience for the development of employees. The RBC Career Launch Program is an ideal example of how seconding employees to our charitable partners will help them to further develop both their professional skills in unique environments.

Problem: An increasing number of young people are having difficulty entering the workforce and establishing themselves in sustainable careers. Youth unemployment is a critical issue in Canada. RBC commissioned an Ipsos Reid survey to understand the issues by polling recent university and college graduates in August 2013. Some key survey responses include the following:

• 73 percent of graduates surveyed said that lack of job experience is, or was, a barrier to them finding their first job.  
• 77 percent said that lack of connections was a barrier to finding their first job.  
• Among those who found work, nearly half of recent graduates indicated that having applicable job experience helped them in starting their career.

These facts clearly show that making the transition from a formal education to finding meaningful work and making a contribution in the workforce presents many challenges to young people. The RBC Career Launch Program was created to break the ‘no experience-no job’ cycle that many young graduates face.  
Design: The program design incorporated the values important to young graduates such as learning, development, social connections, networking, innovative technology, and community giving. This program was created with a view of meeting young people where they are’. Throughout the year-long program, 100 Associates participate in a number of learning opportunities, including a formal mentorship program with RBC NextGen, a group of young professionals at RBC. A learning curriculum has been designed with a specific focus on career-building skills development, in addition to the professional networking opportunities that will be available to them throughout the year. These experiences will not only support Associates throughout their on-boarding, but allow them to build their networks, increase their organizational awareness and enhance their professional development.

During the program’s three work rotations, Associates will focus on the following:

Learning the ropes – Apply practical business skills and contribute value to both clients and branch objectives while working in our retail banking division. As the face of RBC, work directly on the front lines, serving clients, carrying out transactions, solving problems and spotting sales opportunities. This rotation is 6 months in length.

Helping the community – Gain exposure to the operations of a registered Canadian charity. Apply practical business skills to contribute value to a registered charity and the communities and causes they serve. Build networks and valuable relationships that extend beyond work boundaries. This is a unique aspect of the program. Participants are assigned to a local registered Canadian charity chosen by RBC for a period of 3 months. We believe this is a winning combination for the charity, the community and the participants by sharing skills and broadening networks.

Taking it to the next level: In the last 3 months of their internship, Associates gain broad-based business experience in areas such as finance, marketing, human resources, risk, technology and operations. They apply practical business skills to contribute value to the department and peers in a team-based environment. They provide project-based support within RBC’s business areas, and maintain ongoing business development and participate in learning activities.

Implementation: We had an aggressive goal of designing, developing and implementing a brand new, innovative, large scale, multi-million dollar national program in 5 months without a formal team in place. As a large organization with multiple business areas, we wanted to provide participants with broad exposure and experience. We had to influence and mobilize a large group of stakeholders across many cross-functional areas such as RBC’s personal and commercial business, technology and operations, corporate citizenship, corporate communications, brand and marketing, enterprise social media, recruitment, employee relations, government relations, our legal department, and human resource business partners, including external vendors and our partners within the charitable organizations across Canada. Using program management methodology and best practices, we created a program charter, role and responsibilities and design principles that enabled strong buy-in from our executive sponsors and broad stakeholders which focused on:

1) Providing tangible resume-building experience for the participants – this was the cornerstone of our program.  
2) Making it easy to implement by leveraging existing RBC content and approaches where possible; and making it seamless for the assigned local managers to support the Associate through touch points and a simple progress review document with dedicated support by the Career Launch Managers.  
3) Try something new by designing innovative approaches to sourcing, recruiting, onboarding, developing and engaging Gen Y that could have a broader enterprise application. We also wanted to reinforce the value of community engagement and corporate social responsibility.

We successfully launched the program on time and achieved excellent results to date in terms of our sourcing and recruitment campaign, onboarding and development, and engagement from the Associates, local managers and our external partners within the charitable organizations.

Skills/Competencies Development: This unique paid internship is open to recent graduates from any college or university educational background or discipline. Career Launch is not about developing a team of young bankers. It is about providing that first career experience to address the education to employment challenge that many young people face upon graduation. Three diverse work rotations equip participants with 21st century skills such as communication, collaboration and critical thinking.

Associates experience three diverse work rotations and robust learning and professional development and mentorship comprised of 42 days of professional development, 30 hours of mentorship and support, and access to a large network. They receive dedicated management support and an assigned mentor throughout their internship; and have access to a large network and the ability to build relationships with seasoned and influential professionals.

They take part in a comprehensive on-boarding experience where all 100 Associates from across the country spend 2 days at a commencement event in Toronto. Associates are introduced to RBC and the Personal & Commercial Banking world of work, including RBC’s vision, culture and values. This onboarding experience also serves to increase the Associate’s awareness and understanding of the Career Launch Program; develop core practical business and interpersonal skills such as collaboration, leadership, critical thinking and communication; and help them to cultivate relationships and strengthen employee networks. This is followed by a 6 week customer service training that is facilitated by an expert Client Advisor trainer; and this training sets them up for success in their first rotation. Associates work alongside colleagues, a local manager, and a workplace mentor to learn the role.

Learning is comprised of virtual training, business case simulations, technology and collaboration tools to enable participants to support community learning, and building networks and relationships. Associates complete three leadership simulations, one individual to build their managerial knowledge and two group simulations to build collaboration and financial acumen by enabling them to solve practical real-life business problems. Associates also take part in an innovative business challenge called the Next Great Social Innovator which is a team-based challenge where they work together in assigned groups to identify a real business revenue-generating business opportunity for RBC that has a social and/or environment impact.

Measured Outcomes:

The 2014 Program achieved targets of program quality, program support and readiness for employment based on feedback from Associates and internal/external partners.

The program results The 2014 Cohort of Associates valued their innovative and dynamic onboarding session rating 100% top two box scores for ‘orientation met expectations’, ‘would recommend this orientation’, and ‘overall satisfaction level’. We’ve been successful in creating a highly engaged group of Career Launch Associates who believe that RBC is delivering on our promise of providing them with a meaningful first career experience. The Associates’ responses to RBC’s employee opinion survey significantly exceeded the external high performing companies’ norm’s top box scores, against which RBC benchmarks itself, in all areas measured. Almost 70% of the associates say their experience exceeded their expectations, with the remaining 30% agreeing their expectations were met. More than double the number of Associates say we exceeded their expectations in comparison to other similar employee segments within RBC. Associates feel RBC’s vision and values are clear, they are treated with respect and are proud to be part of RBC. In fact, 97% would like to stay with RBC for the opportunities they feel are available for personal growth and development. Almost 100% felt more successful because of their manager’s coaching and the supportive, collaborative environment provided by both their colleagues and management. Therefore they were willing to put forth their best efforts and work beyond what was required to help RBC succeed. These results point to a high quality experience for the Associates. The overall results for all three work rotations and overall program experience (weighted average top 2 box scores): 87% satisfaction rate with overall program (learnings, networking, skill build, experience); and 87% likelihood to recommend to other college/university graduates.

Ease of Replication: We realize that 100 internships alone will not solve the challenge, but it’s an important first step in getting there. We encourage other organizations in the public and private sectors to join us in this endeavour to instil confidence and enthusiasm for young graduates entering the workforce. We would be happy to share all elements of our program publically, including its design, objectives, selection criteria, targeted outcomes and anything else that will inspire broader participation in this kind of initiative. This program is both replicable and scalable in terms of providing young college and university graduates with a meaningful first career experience to help them transition from education to employment and enable them to achieve life long success.

**What was the budget range of this project?**

High over $10,000

**What was the size of the team working on this project?**

5