MILRD & MindsOf Initiative
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The Illumina Corporate Foundation funds MILRD/MindsOf Partnership to mentor and train underrepresented minority students in genomics and data science

New York, New York—MILRD, an education organization that collaborates with research groups, companies, and nonprofits to create Virtual Training Projects (VTPs), and the MindsOf Initiative, a mentorship program that supports aspiring professionals of Caribbean heritage across a broad range of fields, today announced they were awarded a $30,000 grant from the Illumina Corporate Foundation, as an anchor donation to launch their joint effort to provide cost-free VTPs to underrepresented minority students from across the U.S. and the Caribbean.

"Illumina is proud to support MILRD and MindsOf Initiative with efforts to bring equitable access to STEM programming for high school and college students," said Jacquie Ross, Vice President of Communications and Corporate Social Responsibility. "We are thrilled to see their integrated Virtual Training Programs offer an opportunity to learn and explore career options around computational biology and data science."

Ultimately, MILRD and MindsOf hope this project contributes to reducing access barriers to the STEM workforce, where women and minorities are underrepresented. The Illumina Corporate Foundation grant will support the enrollment of the first 50 scholarship students in the initiative.

"We're very excited about this partnership," says Camir Ricketts, founder of the MindsOf Initiative, who wishes a program like this was available when he was young. "As a high school student in Jamaica, I spent so much time trying to figure out if I wanted to be a biologist or a software engineer, but I didn't realize there are careers that merge both disciplines. A few years later, I'm approaching the completion of a PhD in Computational Biology at Weill Cornell Medicine and I founded MindsOf to help more students from backgrounds like mine get exposed to emerging fields earlier in their academic journey."

To accomplish this goal, students from the MindsOf Initiative will complete virtual training projects from MILRD, whose chat and video-based platform enables participants to complete digital versions of real-life projects from industry and the academic research sector. The program simultaneously supports participants with different experience levels in the same cohort, and encourages them to collaborate. According to founder Paul Scheid, "Mixing experienced undergraduate and PhD students, trainees, and professionals with high school students presents a compelling opportunity for students to network and learn from individuals who have already entered the workforce or advanced training." He adds, "Being able to support cohorts with diverse educational backgrounds, work experience, and life experience along the axes of race, gender, socioeconomic status and geography is core to our mission and something that our program's structure really lends itself to."

As the world continues to be impacted by Covid-19, it is important to provide opportunities for underrepresented minority students to learn emerging skill sets—such as bioinformatics, data science, and genomics—that will be required to address 21st century problems.

If you are interested in learning more or supporting our efforts, please contact us at info@milrd.org and moj@themindsof.com.