As the twin pandemics of COVID-19 and systemic racism rage on in America, interventionists in workforce development have gained newfound clarity on the complexity underlying economic injustice.

Advocates increasingly look to double-sided labor market solutions to address economic immobility. An emerging class of job-preparation schemes called “dual-customer training programs” show promise but have largely failed to scale. This research endeavors to answer why.

Through a design-led approach that balances conceptual rigor with emotional texture, the authors propose first steps on how we might work toward economic justice together.

August 2020
THINK. WERE YOU ASKED THE QUESTION: “WHAT DO YOU WANT TO BE WHEN YOU GROW UP?”

Notice that the question is not about who we want to be, but rather what kind of vocation we want to devote ourselves to—what kind of job we want. It is the million-dollar question that captures the American dream: you can be whatever you want to be! In America, who we are and what we do are two sides of the same coin. In America, your identity is interwoven with your occupation.

But some of us were never asked this question. We weren’t exposed to the environments or people that can help us develop a sense of what we like to do, what we believe we are good at, and where we feel like we belong. We weren’t exposed to the environments or people that can help us land a job with benefits, with stability, and with the ability to work from home.

But we are exposed now. We are exposed to the virus that has affected some of our loved ones and communities more severely than others. We are exposed to the lack of safety net that has forced some of us to keep working while others can safely shelter in their homes. We are exposed to—and exposing—the systemic racism that has kept us, our families, and our communities down for decades.

It caught us in a weak moment. In recent decades, as the forces of capitalism underlying our economy intensified, the working world cut corners—unpublished openings, personal referrals, automated screening practices that can perpetuate privilege—in order to yield short-term value. These shortcuts dictated what labor is worth, what a laborer can do, and which laborers belong. These shortcuts reinforced existing biases and perpetuated a rift between those who demand labor and those who supply it; those who employ and those who work; those who have and those who have not; those who are and those who are not.

But at the end of the day, we all work. All of us have this in common. As we publish this work, our shared identity is more apparent than ever. More than 60 million people have filed for unemployment insurance since mid-March, when COVID-19 first forced the economy into shutdown. It has affected people from all walks of life, from the corner-office executive to the dry cleaner down the street. It only took a global pandemic to see the cost of this rift, to see that “low-skill” jobs are actually essential jobs that keep us alive—the very bedrock of a functioning society. We forget that workers protect our kids, support our schools, and give back to communities in countless ways. Yet we don’t protect them or pay them a livable wage. When we put degree requirements on every job description even when the duties don’t require it; when we keep people on an hourly wage with no benefits even when they work nearly 40 hours or more; when we undervalue jobs and deem them “low-skill” simply because they are low-wage—it hurts us all. How can society be so indifferent to people it needs so very much? When shortcuts devalue labor, it hurts us all.

By exposing our stories, our lives, and our biggest struggles to you in these pages, we hope to elevate what we have in common: shared human experiences that are vital in making sense of the working world and communal society more generally, now and in the future. Our stories contain evergreen truths that will outlast this moment in time. These truths have helped us realize that our collective experience on both sides of the hiring table—our value as human beings—is what powers communities, economies, and nations. We hope this perspective will help people pause, notice what they are doing (or not doing) in the working world, and do things differently. We hope it will help people realize that we are all laborers—we all work—and we need to work together.
ABOUT SKILLUP COALITION

SkillUp is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit coalition helping the millions of workers impacted by COVID-19 get rehired for in-demand jobs in high-growth industries. The Coalition enables partners to share best practices, collaborate on shared challenges, and participate in public engagement campaigns that help COVID-affected workers begin a prosperous new stage in their careers. Consisting of leading training and education providers, employers, technology companies, job readiness nonprofits, and philanthropies, SkillUp provides career navigation, training programs, and job opportunities to help frontline workers secure their place in the economy of tomorrow. For more information, please visit www.skillup.org.

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NOTE ON TYPOGRAPHY

The fonts used in this document come from the Freight family of typefaces. Freight, well known for its historical innovation and sustained popularity, was designed by Black American designer JOSHUA DARDEN of Darden Studio.

“As far as I know, Joshua Darden was the first, and is still to this day the only prominent Black type designer in the world. Let’s pause here for a moment and think about the strangeness of that fact. How can it be that no other Black person has ever been brought into the culture and offered mentorship in this industry? There is no answer for this that doesn’t point toward an ugly truth. It can’t be explained away or disregarded. What does it say about our industry, and the socio-economic and racial dynamics of our world? I wonder how many other Joshua Dardens are out there. What kind of new ideas, perspectives, and styles would they bring to this field if given the opportunity?”

—LUCAS SHARP IN Rare Goods, 2017
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>VOLUME I: EXAMINE THE LANDSCAPE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>VOLUME II: SEE THE SYSTEM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>VOLUME III: BEAR WITNESS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>111</td>
<td>VOLUME IV: DESIGN FOR THE FUTURE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>New Workforce Development Models</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>System Insights on the Nature of: Workforce Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>System Insights on the Nature of: Labor Markets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>System Insights on the Nature of: Supply Chains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>System Insights on the Nature of: Labor Platforms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>System Insights on the Nature of: Buyers &amp; Sellers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>Needs of Working Adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>Hero’s Journey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td>Playing the Odds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71</td>
<td>Belongingness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>Positions of Power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84</td>
<td>Needs of Hiring Managers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85</td>
<td>Human Nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91</td>
<td>Group Dynamics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97</td>
<td>Power Moves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103</td>
<td>Cost of Doing Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>112</td>
<td>What Now?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>114</td>
<td>Can We Talk About Scale? An Imaginary Dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>117</td>
<td>Qualitative Research Methodology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>134</td>
<td>Qualitative Research Approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>147</td>
<td>Community-Based Feedback Sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>150</td>
<td>Detailed List Of Labor Platforms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>159</td>
<td>Quantitative Supply-Side Segmentation Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>178</td>
<td>Quantitative Survey Instrument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>209</td>
<td>References</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WE MET AKIL IN JANUARY OF 2020.

AKIL IS 28 AND BLACK. His mother was the first in her family to attend college, graduating from Cornell University and spending her career as a school teacher. She both preached and lived the power of education. Akil started his postsecondary journey at a nearby community college before transferring to the Rochester Institute of Technology, where he earned a degree in IT and cybersecurity. Shortly after graduation, he landed an internship at Tesla and moved to California to pursue his dream career.

This is where the story normally ends. It’s the story of the power of education across generations. The one that we workforce operators, education veterans, philanthropists, and impact investors feature in our annual reports and at fundraising dinners. It is the story that keeps us in this sector.

But that’s not where Akil’s story ends. After Tesla, he landed a full-time job in his field but was laid off after only eight months—and has struggled to find consistent, well-paying work since. When we met him, he was teaching capoeira to kids part-time to pay rent, make payments on his student loans, and help support his grandparents, who were both ill and fighting eviction after 30 years in the same apartment.

Akil is frustrated. He did all the things our society says you should to get ahead: He got a degree from a reputable university in an in-demand field. He got internships and entry-level experience at well-known companies. He networked. In other words, he’s highly qualified but can’t get a living-wage job. He heard about Per Scholas, a dual-customer training program that provides free full-time training for IT jobs, but he couldn’t risk losing his only source of income without a stronger job outcome guarantee. In Akil’s words: “It seems like I’m begging, you know.”

“Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice.” —NELSON MANDELA
As Christopher Jones, the Executive Director of Arkansas’ Regional Innovation Hub, said recently: “If this makes you uncomfortable, great. It makes me uncomfortable also. Staying in our comfort zones will not make our society or world any better. Working together, pushing through the discomfort, will.” This research will make you uncomfortable.

It is broken into four parts:

**VOLUME I:**
**EXAMINE THE LANDSCAPE**

What’s in it: Volume I examines the landscape of dual-customer training programs, disruptors in workforce development that seemed to have learned that, in order to help workers, they also must help employers, treating both as a kind of customer.

What you’ll walk away with: Insights on the emergence, innovation, and evolution of dual-customer training programs and how they’ve differentiated themselves from their predecessors. This will help you understand what may be inhibiting the scale of current programmatic solutions, from program operators’ perspectives.

Where to begin: page 19

**VOLUME II:**
**SEE THE SYSTEM**

What’s in it: Volume II focuses on the intangible, system-level frictions that help hold bad human experiences in place. Considering problems at the systemic level makes systemic solutions possible.

What you’ll walk away with: Ten systems-level insights that reveal major inhibitors of scale, along with an understanding of how to interrupt those persistent frictions. This will help you understand the structural architecture that holds bad experiences in place for both workers and employers, and thus prevents solutions from scaling.

Where to begin: page 25

**VOLUME III:**
**BEAR WITNESS**

What’s in it: Volume III bears witness to the felt needs of real working adults and hiring managers, especially as they pertain to dual-customer training programs. We were particularly inspired by programs that recognize hiring managers’ experiences are highly nuanced and that their stories affect outcomes, too.

What you’ll walk away with: Eight themes related to worker and employer needs, along with 16 opportunity areas for responding to them. This will help you understand the workforce challenge as a double-sided market problem by building empathy for working adults and hiring managers alike.

Where to begin: page 56

**VOLUME IV:**
**DESIGN FOR THE FUTURE**

What’s in it: To solve complex problems, we must design at both the system level and human level, simultaneously. As a field, we must learn to walk and chew gum at the same time. Volume IV is an invitation to do that. It serves as a jumping-off point for changing the way we do business day to day.

What you’ll walk away with: Recommendations for taking action, regardless of whether you are a policymaker, workforce operator, entrepreneur, writer, or funder. This will help you understand how to embark upon a long-term journey of redesigning the labor market, for both the buy side and the sell side, at both the system level and the human level.

Where to begin: page 111
ASKING WHY

We need more of these stories in our annual reports, more Akils at our fundraising dinners—because his story is not an outlier. Time and again throughout this research, we heard stories about how education and training were important, but alone simply weren’t enough to open doors. Even before the current economic downturn, 41% of recent college graduates were underemployed, and Black and female graduates were more likely to be underemployed than their white and male peers. Nearly every relevant statistic indicates that tens of millions of workers, particularly people of color and women, have been cut off from economic progress for decades in this country. The COVID-19 pandemic has only deepened, broadened, and quickened this chronic crisis.

On the flip side, businesses are struggling to fill jobs that pay living wages. In the months before COVID-19 hit the U.S., not a week went by without a new report on employers bemoaning a lack of talent, long hiring timelines, and the incompetence of recent graduates. Even amid record unemployment, many critical roles in healthcare, technology, and logistics are going unfilled. Every direction you turn, there is a solution for the “skills gap.” Bootcamps designed to bridge the employment gap have grown 11-fold since 2013. Professional certifications have boomed. Apprenticeships, traditionally the domain of construction and manufacturing, have grown by 140% in the last 10 years by expanding into healthcare, IT, and financial services. Everyone is focused on upskilling, reskilling, or outskilling. As Goldie Blumenstyk of The Chronicle of Higher Education writes: “The rhetoric is everywhere.”

WHAT YOU WILL SEE

To better understand this fraught dynamic between the two sides of America’s labor market, we’ll look deeply at the daily lives of both working adults and hiring managers. We will introduce you to Brenda, a lifelong family caregiver who after more than 30 years finally has the chance to pursue a livelihood of her own choosing, but is thwarted by job injury and disability; Katherine, a late-blooming entrepreneur trying to protect her new business in the face of the pandemic; and Dale, an aspiring filmmaker who found freedom and flexibility in the gig economy, before the economic shutdown forced him back into grocery retail. And of course, we’ll hear more from Akil, a millennial college graduate struggling to get traction in the market for tech careers. All of these people have had to start over many times, and now due to COVID-19 must start over again.

We will also introduce you to the buy side: rank-and-file hiring managers who are scattered across business units and job functions, typically with no formal training related to hiring and often only a few rungs up from the entry-level workers interventionists care most about. Too frequently in workforce development, the needs of individual people on the buy side are overlooked, misunderstood, or ignored. Sweeping generalizations or faulty assumptions about how employers work cause their needs to fall off many interventionists’ radar. Their day-to-day obstacles are deemed unworthy of exploration or inspection—let alone empathy.
But their problems and experiences are real. Tag is a small business owner who takes matters of employment into her own hands with careful attention to detail. Brooke is a lifelong human resources professional who sees her field’s untapped potential for human capital development. Peter is a dyed-in-the-wool people manager who takes ownership of the growth trajectory of new hires who come into his business unit. Tom is a high-ranking official in a professional services firm tasked with managing huge teams and keeping freshly sold client projects staffed. Their stories illuminate the way labor-market demand shows up in America today.

The narratives of all these people are autobiographical—glimpses at the longer arc of personal history. Each longitudinal narrative was co-created with the person being featured, crafted and informed by the practices of Equity-Centered Community Design and Liberatory Design (see Research Approach in the Appendix). The stories reveal the more nuanced realities of what we commonly see as the collective worker experience or the collective employer experience. Workers like Brenda, Akil, Katherine, and Dale can’t seem to get ahead and struggle to find living-wage jobs. Hiring managers like Tag, Brooke, Peter, and Tom are perennially frustrated by long hiring times and positions that continue to go unfilled. The two sides need each other and badly want to transact but for one reason or another cannot. This research looks more deeply at why and offers steps for taking action.

**DRIVING FORCE**

There has never been a more urgent time than now. Given the more than 60 million jobless claims filed since mid-March,8 an efficient, effective, and equitable labor market is critical to our nation’s future—to human beings’ futures. The crisis of COVID-19 and the ongoing awakening after George Floyd’s death have catapulted systemic anti-Black racism and centuries-old systems of oppression into the spotlight—where they belong. We started this work with a focus on economic opportunity achieved through training; this process has taught us that there is no economic opportunity at scale without economic justice.●
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WHY WE EMBARKED ON THIS RESEARCH

PRIOR TO COVID-19, U.S. jobless numbers roughly matched job openings for years on end, hovering around 6 million on both sides. We hypothesized that it was a labor-market matching problem and a skills problem, simultaneously: workers couldn’t clear the job-matching transaction because they either didn’t have the skills, didn’t know what skills hiring managers were looking for, or weren’t being matched to the right opportunities. We were inspired by “dual-customer training programs,” disruptors in workforce development that seemed to have learned that, in order to help workers, they also had to help employers, treating both as a kind of customer.

Dual-customer training programs come in many forms. Most are unaccredited, short-term training programs free from the usual regulatory structures of higher education. They made major inroads during and after the Great Recession, as millions of Americans were looking for education and training designed to immediately translate into jobs. Initially, many of the programs served professional career-switchers and recent graduates with bachelor’s

Definition of Poverty (or Lack Thereof)

POVERTY RESEARCHERS AND POLICYMAKERS have long debated how to measure poverty. Official poverty measures in the United States date back to the 1960s during President Lyndon B. Johnson’s war on poverty and are anchored to dollar-value thresholds that depend on family size and composition. Although these measures, such as the Federal Poverty Level, have been subject to much criticism, they are still the lens through which we see and support the poor. So who is poor? Who should be considered poor? Who is poor enough to deserve intervention?

The measurement of poverty in dollar terms of income or cash on hand is a narrow view into poverty. The research nonprofit United for ALICE, which began in 2009 as a single study to understand the struggles of families in one New Jersey county, explains that, “Traditional measures of poverty do not capture the magnitude of people who are struggling financially.” The acronym ALICE stands for asset-limited, income-constrained, and employed—a descriptive summation of countless families for whom the cost of living outpaces what they earn. The succinct, striking characterization anchors what United for ALICE calls “a new way of defining and understanding the struggles of households that earn above the Federal Poverty Level, but not enough to afford a bare-bones household budget.” Similarly, Mary O’Hara, author of The Shame Game: Overturning the Toxic Poverty Narrative, argues that traditional poverty measures also exclude other dimensions that affect poverty, including what kind of life your income can afford you in the society in which you live, accumulation of wealth, access to social capital and networks, and access to affordable housing, healthcare, and education.

Furthermore, poverty affects more people than we think. In June 2020, the Poor People’s Campaign published “The Souls of Poor Folk,” an empirical study of how America’s attitude toward poverty has evolved since 1968. It cuts right to the chase: “These issues demand that we dispel the notion that systemic racism, poverty, ecological devastation and the war economy hurt only a small segment of our society. More than 40 million Americans subsist below the poverty line... There are close to 140 million people dealing with some combination of these crises every day. Nearly half of our population cannot afford a $400 emergency, which presents a structural crisis of national proportion that ties poverty to things like healthcare and housing. The devastation cuts across race, gender, age, and geography. It has carved a dangerous and deepening moral chasm in America and inflicts a tragic loss of purpose, even among the affluent.”

For these reasons, we have specifically not defined “poor” or “low-income” by a quantitative measure like median household income. To be poor is to live in scarcity. In fact, researchers have found that “being poor requires so much mental energy that those with limited means are more likely to make mistakes and bad decisions than those with bigger financial cushions.” The people we interviewed experience financial scarcity in some way, shape, or form that negatively impacts them day to day, whether psychologically, physically, and/or emotionally.

People define their own economic instability and injustice as they experience it.
degrees before expanding to serve adults without degrees or steady, continuous work histories. On-ramps, which often adhere to the WorkAdvance model, were the first dual-customer training programs to emerge from the workforce development sector, evolving from “demand-driven” approaches like sector strategies and sectoral training.

While the service model exemplified by on-ramps was pioneered by the workforce development sector, it was largely the private sector that figured out how to adjust the cost structure and revenue streams undergirding the service model in a way more conducive to scale. During and after the Great Recession, the publicly funded workforce and postsecondary sectors were getting gutted by deteriorating funding formulas. For-profit upstarts that weren’t tethered to that type of revenue model gladly stepped in to absorb booming worker demand for training. Instead of leaning on public workforce funding—notoriously underfunded compared to other federal spending priorities and other industrialized countries—dual-customer training programs were experimenting with earned revenue from employers and innovative financing mechanisms like pay for success. At this point, the education-to-employment sector realized that there was a sizable market for non-governmentally-funded “direct-to-consumer” training programs.

Almost simultaneously, the sector came to understand that “direct-to-consumer” does not necessarily mean a direct hit to consumers’ wallets or debt burdens upfront, as the rise of deferred tuition and income share agreement (ISA) models has shown. Legislation to legitimize ISAs was introduced in the U.S. House and Senate as early as April 2014. Paid training like Revature and Techtonic, in which the worker earns a wage while learning, are an extension of this trend—working adults, given the choice, would rather not pay out cash, take on debt, or reduce wage-earning hours in order to train, especially in the absence of any proven or guaranteed job outcomes. Programs that understood this psychology did well and began to grow.

These programs were helping workers acquire a combination of technical skills, soft skills, and job-readiness skills, similar to their predecessors; they were also helping employers assess workforce gaps, rewrite job descriptions, and source hidden talent, especially in occupations with the biggest labor shortages. They were fighting for job quality on behalf of the worker, and they were responding to business needs on behalf of the employer, a feat the workforce development and postsecondary education systems had long struggled to achieve. Even before COVID-19, these programs were leveraging technology to improve operational effectiveness and program delivery, despite a “long-held view... that hands-on personal attention was necessary to lift up students,” as The New York Times noted.

But they didn’t scale. Despite bootcamps’ 11-fold growth since 2013, they collectively graduated only 36,000 students in 2018, while on-ramps and apprenticeships served about 100,000 and 600,000 respectively. Less than 1% of job seekers who visit an American Job Center enroll in apprenticeships, and the majority of participants are white men. Not only are on-ramps and other dual-customer training programs serving very few Americans, they are not reaching many of the Americans who most need new pathways to economic opportunity.

WHAT IS SCALE?

Given the driving question behind this research—Why haven’t dual-customer training programs scaled?—it’s important to note what we do (and do not) mean by the terms “scale,” “scaling,” and “scalability” in this work. When we use these terms, we mean them in the management-science sense, not the nonprofit replication (i.e., “field of scale-up studies”) sense. To be clear: when we say scale, we’re talking about money.

Scale means adding revenue at a rapid rate while adding expenses at an incremental rate. For example, an organization that is scaling may gain $20,000 in new revenue that it spent only $2,000 to obtain. The following period, it may gain $30,000, again only spending $2,000 to obtain it. Its operating margin—the degree to which revenues exceed expenses—is increasing, enabling it to not just grow but scale.

WHAT’S THE POINT OF SCALE?

The fiscal breathing room produced by scaling enables the organization to begin to control its own innovation destiny. All routes are now available to it: reinvest in existing users, go after new users, reinvest in existing offerings, go after new offerings, reinvest in the existing business model, go after a new...
business model, or some combination, as depicted in the “Ways to Grow” matrix first proposed by Ryan Jacoby and Diego Rodriguez on behalf of IDEO in 2007 and later expanded upon by Lisa Baird on behalf of IDEO in 2015.

Newfound financial wherewithal and operational efficiency represent a kind of freedom—freedom to choose from among any and all strategic options that might enable serving exponentially more people. For an organization that has worked long and hard to find market-product-model fit, getting traction toward scale feels like getting the keys to the car.

WHAT ISN’T SCALE?

It’s equally important to describe what we do not mean when we discuss scale. A 2018 Wallace Foundation report, “Strategies to Scale Up Social Programs: Pathways, Partnerships, and Fidelity,” defined scale as “a process for significantly increasing the number of sustained implementations of a successful program, thereby serving more people with comparable benefits” enabled primarily by distribution-model choice: branching, franchising, or partnering with a larger organization for program diffusion.

To be clear, this is not how we define scale; we call this replication and distribution. Distribution (i.e., channels) is one of nine components of basic business model design, but it is not necessarily the only (or most important) lever for scale. Organizations of all kinds must make distribution channel decisions, whether they’re scaling or not. Choice of distribution channel and broader replication strategy can unlock growth, but as we’ve discussed, growth is not the same as scale.

POWER OF THE PEOPLE

Incidentally, a different component of business model design does represent a high-leverage point for scale: customer segments. This research adheres closely to the guiding principle that scale flows forth from an unyielding commitment to meeting customer needs, which requires uncovering, understanding, and empathizing with them. This is accomplished through user research and operationalized through the identification of three things: an ideal customer segment, an ideal customer persona within that segment, and an ideal use case worth addressing for that customer within that segment. In other words, scale requires veritable obsession with the customer—knowing who they are, how they select services, what they care about, which processes
they use, and which substitute or replacement services are available to them. Only through deep connection to the customer in these areas can an organization develop a compelling value proposition, which is literally and figuratively the center of any business model. In the case of dual-customer training programs (and any double-sided platform offering), such an effort is particularly hard because dual-customer means dual-obsession. Nurturing two at once in a way that is authentically balanced is challenging work.

**SCALE IN THE CONTEXT OF MISSION-DRIVEN WORK**

Maniacal commitment to such specific customer segments, personas, and use cases can feel discomfiting in the social-impact space because it calls for specialization. The pursuit of scale can also feel disorienting because it de-prioritizes the kind of specialization that provides operational strength and conditioning. Enterprise efficiency is both rewarding and elusive—one must work very hard at it. It’s grueling and strenuous because it requires widening the aperture of what the organization has traditionally felt it could or should do—e.g., embed technology internally, run customer-facing technology externally, produce a physical product, train the trainers, or some combination. These are often thought of as somehow off-limits for nonprofits, perhaps because they don’t look like direct service, but they are all strategies that mission-driven groups have utilized to transform their organizations to serve exponentially more people.

Historically, specialization has been difficult for the social sector to embrace. It can feel antithetical to mission-driven work at times because it requires a kind of radical focus that can feel narrow; it requires a kind of service-offering concentration that can feel unambitious; and it requires a kind of delivery discipline that can feel indifferent. But the promise of scale in mission-driven work is anything but narrow, unambitious, or indifferent. It’s simply hard. This is partly due to the fact that it’s both a painstaking process and a deployable, tool-like outcome.

The process of scaling is an exercise in operational strength and conditioning. Enterprise efficiency is both rewarding and elusive—one must work very hard at it. It’s grueling and strenuous because it requires widening the aperture of what the organization has traditionally felt it could or should do—e.g., embed technology internally, run customer-facing technology externally, produce a physical product, train the trainers, or some combination. These are often thought of as somehow off-limits for nonprofits, perhaps because they don’t look like direct service, but they are all strategies that mission-driven groups have utilized to transform their organizations to serve exponentially more people.

The outcome of achieving scaled operations is a powerful enterprise not easily knocked from its chosen path—an enterprise with a great deal of agency in selecting the ways and means of innovation and impact-making, which is itself a rare and formidable tool in the fight against economic injustice. Abraham Lincoln is credited with saying, “The best way to predict your future is to create it.” Achieving scale lets mission-driven organizations start creating the future—for everyone—instead of reacting to it. The difference between scaled organizations and others is that scaled organizations decide what the future will look like.

The nine-component Business Model Canvas was made famous by authors Alexander Osterwalder and Yves Pigneur in their 2010 book *Business Model Generation: A Handbook for Visionaries, Game Changers, and Challengers*. Collectively, these nine components describe how any organization—nonprofit or for-profit, large or small, growing or not growing, scaling or not scaling—creates, delivers, and captures value.
WHAT WE LEARNED FROM REAL PEOPLE

In the introduction, we told you about Akil, the young Black man living in Brooklyn, struggling to find stable, high-quality work despite having done everything right. Akil’s story is compelling. His struggles are real. So are the stories and struggles of individuals who don’t have bachelor’s degrees; who care for multiple dependents; who are older Americans; or who’ve been involved with the justice system. Akil’s story and dozens of others helped us understand why dual-customer training programs have struggled to scale.

Our research scanned the past and present landscape (Volume I), then uncovered both the systemic limitations and the messy, human experiences that often get lumped together under the banner of “workforce development challenge” or “barriers to economic opportunity.” This work addresses those factors in order, first uncovering the systemic flaws that ensure anemic outcomes (Volume II), then elevating stories of real human beings—working adults and hiring managers—who sit on either side of the hiring equation (Volume III). Ultimately, the work concludes with recommendations for moving forward (Volume IV).

We set the stage in Volume I with a detailed landscape review. Volume II then illuminates systemic challenges in the realm of economic mobility that we, as a country, have yet to adequately address. In fact, we’ve pretended they’re not there, leaving it to programmatic interventions to attempt to do the work that policy and cultural mores should be doing. It’s possible that more than half of all barriers to scale for dual-customer training programs (and other promising labor platforms and intermediaries) could be resolved if we, as a nation, first took a hard look at underlying systemic root causes. While certainly analytical in nature, these system-level insights are very much rooted in human experience and reflect the voices of the dozens of real people we spoke to in this research.

Then, Volume III looks deeply at the human experience on both the buy side and sell side of the labor market. Among all economic resources, labor is unique in that it is not severable from its owner. This can make talking about the labor market hard because it can be easy to forget that we are talking about the buying and selling of the labor commodity, not the owner of that commodity. To discuss a market with clear eyes, especially when trying to resolve some of its dysfunction, we need the leeway to discuss the thing being bought and sold—how it gets priced, who is buying it, who is selling it, and how they do their buying and selling. This necessarily means we must discuss people and their stories. As Aristotle is quoted as saying, “Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all.” Thus, human stories in Volume III serve to balance the analytical nature of Volumes I and II.
## 10 System Insights

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workforce Development</th>
<th>Labor Markets</th>
<th>Supply Chains</th>
<th>Labor Platforms</th>
<th>Buyers &amp; Sellers</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td><strong>9</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>A Focus on Discrete Demographic Groups Contributes to a Duplication of Services.</td>
<td>The Value of a Labor-Market Intermediary Derives from Facilitating the Exchange.</td>
<td>Hiring is Part of a Labor-Market Supply Chain.</td>
<td>Labor Platforms Exist in the Spaces Along the Labor Supply Chain—and the Shorter the Chain, the Better.</td>
<td>Employer Firms Are Not a Monolith.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public funding may be systematizing duplication, thereby preventing the workforce development industry from capturing economies of scale.</td>
<td>Prioritizing job preparation ahead of job-matching efficiency may be limiting scale.</td>
<td>Hesitation to treat workforce development solutions as part of a standard supply chain may prevent some approaches from scaling.</td>
<td>An emphasis on additional training may be forcing more supply-chain nodes than necessary, adding risk and instability for both the worker and the employer, reducing their willingness or ability to engage, and thus inhibiting scale.</td>
<td>A bias toward large employers, perhaps rooted in unease around the hiring practices of smaller businesses, may be inhibiting scale.</td>
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<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
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<td>Comprehensiveness in workforce service models may be inhibiting scale.</td>
<td>A reluctance to embrace worker and employer de-risking behaviors, especially those carried out via consumer technology, may be inhibiting scale.</td>
<td>Overlooking the needs of hiring managers, the linchpin decision-makers in labor-market transactions, may be inhibiting scale.</td>
<td>Matching efficiency is sequentially more important than participant volume, and the absence of true platform characteristics—such as dual-sided financial accountability and job function/task specificity—may be stymying efficiency and thereby inhibiting scale.</td>
<td>A failure to appropriately value the time and opportunity cost of people struggling with economic stability may be inhibiting user adoption, and thus program scale.</td>
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## NEEDS OF WORKING ADULTS

### THEMES

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<th>HERO’S JOURNEY</th>
<th>OPPORTUNITY AREAS</th>
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| 1 | Every person is on a hero’s journey, facing their own problems and slaying their own dragons. It’s a part of the human condition; we all share common psychological and functional needs that transcend demographics. Addressing these needs is how we grow, self-actualize, and reach our full potential. | **1** | CHANGE THE LOCUS OF CONTROL.  
People who seek economic mobility need agency to select particular solutions to their particular problems—the ability to say yes to what they need and no to what they don’t need. |
| 2 | People who seek economic mobility need their resource deprivation acknowledged and addressed, in a way that pays it forward to the community, before headway can be made on their personal growth. |

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<th>#</th>
<th>PLAYING THE ODDS</th>
<th>OPPORTUNITY AREAS</th>
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| 1 | Economically, we are all playing the odds, but the deck is stacked against some. Fortune may favor the prepared, and it also greatly favors the privileged. Odds of economic success can be improved a thousand ways, but only if those ways are known and available. Access to edge-gaining tactics and strategies is a privilege that can be busted open and shared. | **1** | TRUST THE SYSTEM OR BUST THE SYSTEM.  
People who seek economic mobility need to climb above the Maslow treeline, toward self-actualization, and trust that their efforts will prevent them from slipping back down. |
| 2 | People who seek economic mobility need opportunities designed for their existing valuable talent, knowledge, abilities, and assets—especially assets like time—before asking them to develop additional ones or give up invaluable time. |

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<th>#</th>
<th>BELONGINGNESS</th>
<th>OPPORTUNITY AREAS</th>
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| 1 | For some, belongingness is survival. Despite their strength, an overwhelming number of people who struggle with economic stability also struggle with physical and emotional scars of all kinds. Feeling that you belong is crucial in coping with intensely painful traumas. Because of this, communities and intimate relationships are crucial. | **1** | INVEST IN WHOLE COMMUNITIES.  
People who seek economic mobility need to feel a sense of true belonging surrounded by intimate relationships as they undertake difficult journeys that force them to work through long-standing traumas. |
| 2 | People who seek economic mobility need help elevating and fortifying the inherent value and advantages of their own communities, not interventions that alter, project unfamiliar values, or act to separate people from place. |

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<th>#</th>
<th>POSITIONS OF POWER</th>
<th>OPPORTUNITY AREAS</th>
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</table>
| 1 | Privileged people hold positions of power. There can be no honest conversation about economic opportunity for all without addressing how structural systems of oppression confer benefits and power upon privileged people. The hard work of reversing systems of oppression must not fall to those oppressed. | **2** | BRAVELY FACE THE MUSIC.  
People who seek economic mobility need partners in power, especially philanthropists, who can master the art of radical self-awareness and system-awareness with courage, even in the face of controversy. |
| 2 | People who seek economic mobility need partners in power, especially philanthropists, to continually seek out and obtain a deep and intentional education on the nuances of their experience. |

### OPPORTUNITY AREAS

- **1** Change the Locus of Control
- **2** Do First Things First
- **1** Trust the System or Bust the System
- **2** Get People Off the Back Foot
- **1** Invest in Whole Communities
- **2** Take a Closer Look Around
- **2** Listen Intently and Often
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

NEEDS OF HIRING MANAGERS

1. HUMAN NATURE
   There is a great deal of human nature in people, as Mark Twain observed. Business managers are obliged to comply with the basic premise of the American economy: self-interest. Despite personal misgivings, managers are incentivized to make choices that maximize shorter-term business growth, not necessarily human potential.

2. GROUP DYNAMICS
   Firms are groups, subject to group dynamics like social loafing—the tendency of individuals to put in less effort when working in a group context. Members of a group often perceive that neither rewards (in case of success) nor blame (in case of failure) will be attributed properly. This attribution concern is important to address.

3. POWER MOVES
   Even small decisions can feel like unfair power moves to a job seeker. Many business managers don’t realize the power they wield because it was unintentionally acquired. This can be dangerous, like a giant who doesn’t know his own strength.

4. COST OF DOING BUSINESS
   The cost of doing business refers to all expenses incurred in producing and selling—like labor budgets, inclusive of hiring, training, and reskilling. As long as a firm is producing and selling, it’s incurring these expenses, which is to say: always. This is why employee growth should be treated as a regular expense, not a special, discretionary opportunity—a subtle but important shift in mental model.

OPPORTUNITY AREAS

1. TAKE EMPLOYERS AS THEY ARE.
   People who make hiring decisions need their humanity recognized, accepted, and addressed, not swept under the rug.

2. BRING SEXY BACK TO TALENT-RELATED TASKS.
   People who make hiring decisions need the potential personal upside of hiring and talent development to meet or beat the potential personal downside.

1. MAKE THEM BELIEVE THEY CAN TAKE CALCULATED RISKS.
   People who make hiring decisions need to see their home organizations develop and espouse a collective “growth mindset” with respect to people operations, including a culture of acceptable risk-taking in hiring.

2. SHOW THE RISK OF DOING NOTHING.
   People who make hiring decisions need to viscerally understand what the business and human consequences are of maintaining the status quo.

1. PUT UP FRIENDLY GUARDRAILS.
   People who make hiring decisions need gentle but effective checks on their own power whenever they’re on the hiring side of the interview table.

2. HELP THEM STOP MOVING (OR HIDING) GOAL POSTS.
   People who make hiring decisions need the psychological safety to make hiring decisions based on absolute suitability instead of relative impressiveness.

1. FREE UP TIME SPENT ON LOWER-VALUE HIRING TASKS.
   People who make hiring decisions need the total time they spend on dealing with their talent needs to remain fixed.

2. REFRAME L&D AS A REGULAR EXPENSE, NOT A RARE “INVESTMENT.”
   People who make hiring decisions need assurances that training someone isn’t a waste, even if the person leaves their immediate team or group.

THEMES

OPPORTUNITY AREAS
Moving through education, career, and life is not a sterile, straightforward process. It involves deeply human needs, fears, hopes, goals, and biases. In this volume, we present the personal stories of four working adults—Brenda, Akil, Katherine, and Dale—along with themes and opportunity areas inspired by each. We do the same with four hiring managers—Tag, Brooke, Peter, and Tom. Across all eight individual narratives, we focus on human needs and propose ways to meet them.

We undertook both quantitative and qualitative research methods to uncover new insights into an old problem. Throughout Volumes II and III in particular, you will find countless first-person quotes and narrative vignettes from our qualitative design research—stories from real people, which qualify as real data, arguably the richest kind. The short answer—the spoiler, if you will—is that more and better training isn’t the sole solution. In many cases, it isn’t the answer at all. And if we’re going to build better pathways to economic mobility, we must first acknowledge that. The Center for American Progress put it succinctly in its recent paper, “A Design for Workforce Equity”:

“[P]olicymakers have promoted an expansion of skills training to help workers keep up in the changing economy. While previously, retraining responsibilities may have fallen to businesses that wanted to ensure their workers were prepared for the future, businesses are now investing less in workforce training. Retraining programs can often be of low quality, and they are not necessarily responsive to labor market demands.

As a consequence, workers have become obligated to discern the quality and labor market prospects of a training program; take time off from working; and contend with the costs not only of the training but also of books or fees, as well as childcare, transportation, housing, health care, and all the other demands of adult life. Importantly, all workers are not starting from the same position: Income and wealth inequality continue to rise. The reality is that even after considering protective factors such as increased education and training levels, wealth remains unevenly distributed as structural biases reinforce institutional barriers to employment.”

As a sector, we might’ve fallen too in love with the romance embodied in the first half of Akil’s story. As a society that cares deeply about postsecondary education, we wanted a quality degree in an in-demand field to be enough to put a Black man on an upwardly mobile path and keep him there. Maybe we were blinded by the promise of the American dream—or maybe we didn’t understand the problem at all.

As Nikole Hannah-Jones recently noted in The New York Times, “when it comes to truly explaining racial injustice in this country, the table should never be set quickly: There is too much to know, and yet we aggressively choose not to know it.” We’d add economic injustice to Hannah-Jones’s formulation. Indeed, the title of her piece says it all: “What Is Owed: Without Economic Justice, There Can Be No True Equality.” We’ve come to realize that economic mobility and opportunity are euphemisms for economic justice. And in this country, referring to justice of any kind means a journey into the heart of systemic oppression. We must embark.

STAY WITH US

Yes—this document is long. It will highlight the enormity of the system challenges and the diversity of the human lives buffeted by them. It will be overwhelming and uncomfortable, and in many ways it will leave you with more questions than answers.

Our aim is to inspire you in small, malleable ways throughout, not instruct you in grand, concrete ways at the end. Ultimately, it will make three recommendations that are less about new designs and more about you, the designers: (1) embrace complexity, (2) embrace self-examination, and (3) embrace more nuanced roles.

As Nikole Hannah-Jones recently noted in The New York Times, “when it comes to truly explaining racial injustice in this country, the table should never be set quickly: There is too much to know, and yet we aggressively choose not to know it.” We’d add economic injustice to Hannah-Jones’s formulation. Indeed, the title of her piece says it all: “What Is Owed: Without Economic Justice, There Can Be No True Equality.” We’ve come to realize that economic mobility and opportunity are euphemisms for economic justice. And in this country, referring to justice of any kind means a journey into the heart of systemic oppression. We must embark.
“A map is not the territory it represents, but, if correct, it has a similar structure to the territory, which accounts for its usefulness.”

—ALFRED KORZYBSKI

VOLUME I

EXAMINE THE LANDSCAPE
THE LAST TWO DECADES HAVE SEEN A PROLIFERATION OF NEW WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT MODELS THAT WORK DIRECTLY WITH WORKERS AND EMPLOYERS TO IMPROVE WORKERS’ EMPLOYABILITY.

We started this research by examining one category called “dual-customer training programs,” which offer a combination of services including technical skills, soft skills, job-readiness skills, coaching, and wraparound services, as well as sourcing, screening, and matching workers to meet employers’ needs.

Although similar to many community college programs or coalitions of community colleges (e.g., Kentucky Federation for Advanced Manufacturing Education) that engage employers to increase the likelihood of worker success, for purposes of this research, the definition of “dual-customer training program” excludes accredited, degree-granting institutions eligible for such Title IV funding as Pell Grants and federally subsidized student loans.
The idea of being “demand-driven,” or incorporating employers into program design or delivery, is not new to workforce veterans. Particularly in the last decade, “sector strategy” has made significant progress in response to broader criticism that many workforce and postsecondary entities are unresponsive to labor market needs. Sector strategy involves organizing employers and industry associations in a specific sector with education and workforce professionals through a regional intermediary, often a chamber of commerce or workforce board, to discuss talent needs, determine what skills are required to meet those needs, and identify which education or training programs can prepare workers accordingly.

In a robust volume of evaluation studies and case studies from prominent workforce and philanthropy leaders, Maureen Conway and Robert P. Giloth capture the significant progress and opportunities around sector strategies, finding that “many states have adopted a sector framework for workforce development,” resulting in “hundreds of workforce sector partnerships serving hundreds of thousands of workers and job seekers.” A 2017 McKinsey & Company report echoed these findings, noting that “the best workforce-development solutions happen when leading employers come together to address the talent problem for an entire sector” and that “the most promising approach... is to identify sectors with high growth potential where there are shortages or a high turnover of workers.”

Sector strategy shouldn’t be confused with “sectoral training,” which involves working directly with employers (e.g., not through an intermediary) to identify and train workers in targeted in-demand occupations. Longitudinal studies conducted by MDRC have shown that one model in particular, WorkAdvance, has produced long-term positive impact on job stability and earnings. The WorkAdvance model is characterized by several intensive services that are tightly bundled together, as described in the table to the right. While the model has proven successful, particularly for working adults with the most complicated, intersectional economic challenges, it has also proven difficult to scale. It may be that the complete, fully integrated service bundle, while extremely important and helpful for some, is overkill for others.

Both approaches have demonstrated success but are not widely adopted by employers. Conway and Giloth attribute the major challenges of sector strategies to lack of big policy wins, a dearth of business champions, faulty sustainable-funding assumptions, and growth of low-wage jobs. The authors went to say that, despite sector strategies being “positively received” by business leaders, “financial support of sector initiatives from business has rarely been substantial, and episodic federal grants often lead to starts and stops of initiatives rather than sustained efforts.” In other words, sector strategy and sectoral training were too much effort for too little return. This combination of programmatic, infrastructural, and policy-driven funding challenges helps us understand the emergence of a new wave of solutions: dual-customer training programs.

**WORKADVANCE SERVICE MODEL**

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1. Intensive screening of program applicants for motivation and readiness
2. Sector-appropriate pre-employment and career-readiness services, including orientation to the sector and career-advancement coaching
3. Sector-specific occupational skills training aligned with employer needs and leading to certifications that are in demand in the regional labor market
4. Sector-specific job development and placement services based on strong relationships with employers
5. Post-employment retention and advancement services, including ongoing contact, coaching, skills training, and rapid reemployment help if needed
In response to the perceived shortcomings of sector strategies, sectoral training, and other “demand-driven” solutions, dual-customer training programs emerged in the early aughts as a type of labor platform focusing on the provision of skills, especially job-readiness skills, technical skills, and/or soft skills. Aside from offering training, these programs are also characterized by two key features of labor platforms: (1) they coordinate the market of workers and requesters of work for defined tasks or projects; and (2) they promote information symmetry between the buy side and sell side of the labor market. As previously mentioned, on-ramps represent one of the earliest types.

Although dual-customer training programs share goals with earlier types of “demand-driven” approaches (e.g., placing workers into in-demand jobs by working with employers), dual-customer training programs were forged under a different set of circumstances and needs. Through detailed landscape analysis of more than 100 dual-customer training programs, we identified six major trends that help us understand how and why dual-customer training programs emerged as they did:

1. **Growth of for-profit programs, primarily after 2010:**
   Forty-six percent of all programs we studied in landscape analysis are for-profit, the majority of them founded after 2010. In fact, we found that the percentage of for-profit entities increased from 14% of all organizations founded before 2010 to 69% of all organizations founded after 2010. This can be explained by the increase in demand for programs after the Great Recession, as millions of Americans sought education and training designed to immediately translate into jobs, combined with the unprecedented mismatch in supply and demand of labor in particular occupations and industries, like software development, construction, and healthcare. Simultaneously, the Great Recession saw the rapid decline in public funding for workforce development and postsecondary education, allowing for-profit programs to capture more of the market.

2. **Growing venture capital, dominated by a few players:**
   Our estimates show that roughly $1 billion of venture capital (VC) funding has been invested into dual-customer training programs since 2011. Notable capital raises include Kenzie Academy, Andela, Galvanize, General Assembly, and Catalyze. We expect this to grow. Despite the increase in private capital, total VC funding is still relatively small in this space compared to other sub-sectors within education technology and employment technology, such as professional/corporate learning and K-12 learning.

3. **Revenue diversification to include employers as payers, not just governments and learners:** Our landscape analysis showed that 22% of programs founded before 2010 rely primarily on earned revenue and 73% of programs founded after 2010 do. The shift away from public workforce funding streams can be explained by the decrease in total funding over the last 30 years, the fragmentation of the public funding streams which are often distributed through multiple layers of state and regional entities, and the rise of for-profit programs after the Great Recession. For programs generating revenue from employers, we found two primary revenue-generating strategies: pay-for-placement and pay-for-service. The former is analogous to staffing agencies that are paid on the successful placement of a candidate, either as a flat fee or as a percentage of the candidate’s first-year salary. The latter can take multiple forms: employers either pay dual-customer training programs for the business and/or recruiting services that they are providing (e.g., akin to outsourced professional-services and/or recruiting firms), or they pay them for training new and existing employees. Some programs, like NextStep and Pursuit, use a combination of these strategies.

4. **A focus on occupations with the most persistent labor shortages:** Not surprisingly, the most common occupations addressed by dual-customer training programs are those that are marked by significant labor shortages but don’t necessarily require a four-year degree, primarily in software development, construction, and healthcare. Specifically, our landscape analysis revealed that the top seven occupations addressed by dual-customer training programs were software developer, construction worker, web developer, computer-support specialist, mobile applications developer, and nursing assistant. Although not currently in the list of top occupations, we expect adjacent occupations like cybersecurity and registered nursing to continue to grow. Information technology in particular will continue to drive growth in dual-customer training programs.

5. **Geographic concentration and in-person emphasis are poised to change dramatically:** Our landscape analysis revealed that geographic distribution differs by type of program; however, the vast majority of dual-customer training programs are in California and New York, primarily owing to the prevalence of venture capital activity and predominance of labor supply/demand mismatches in those places. Bootcamps have grown in states like Illinois, Colorado, and Georgia. Only about a quarter of programs are fully online. Accelerated by COVID-19, we expect more fully online or hybrid models that are open to employers and workers from across the country.

6. **Significant outcome differentials between white male and non-white, non-male participants:** Despite making inroads with working adults lacking a college degree, our landscape review revealed that there are significant occupation and wage differences between predominantly white and male audiences and non-white and non-male audiences enrolled in dual-customer training programs. For example, we found women were overrepresented in lower-wage occupations like nursing assistants, while men were overrepresented in higher-wage occupations like software developers and construction workers. Similar differences can be found in apprenticeship programs.
The landscape of dual-customer training programs is not static; it’s a living ecosystem that has rapidly changed in the last decade and is likely to continue to mature, especially during COVID-19 recovery. We identified four distinct categories: on-ramps, paid training (i.e., trainees are paid a wage), bootcamps, and joint labor-management programs. These various types of dual-customer training program differ in target population; length and modality of training; whether the training comes before, during, or after employment; and services offered to workers and employers. We call out a few illustrative examples in each category here.

While dual-customer training programs come in all shapes and sizes, they share common characteristics that allow them to serve people with limited incomes, many of whom do not have a college degree. And compared to their workforce predecessors, dual-customer training programs are continuing to innovate in several ways:

- **Increasing flexibility** for working adults: This means allowing them to learn on their own time and earn while they learn, often by leveraging technology. For example, NextStep, an on-ramp that prepares workers for certified nursing assistant (CNA) jobs, delivers training through skills-based, mobile-native courses that students can complete asynchronously in 10–15 minutes per module.37

- **Increasing support** for working adults: This means helping them address academic, career, or personal needs in the form of mentors, coaches, childcare, and/or transportation assistance. For instance, SV Academy, a sales bootcamp, pairs students with three types of coaches: a communications coach to help students build their brands, a mindset coach to help students identify strengths and weaknesses and develop a growth mindset, and a career coach to help students navigate the job search and first year on the job.38

- **Incorporating worker voice** into program design: This means protecting the interests of working adults. For example, WRTP | Building Industry Group Skilled Trades Employment Program (WRTP | BIG STEP), a joint labor-management program that was the subject of a high-quality randomized controlled trial in 2010, has been successful in augmenting workers’ earnings. WRTP | BIG STEP has “credited labor-union involvement for its success in training and placing workers into well-paying manufacturing jobs,” according to research by the Center for American Progress.39

- **Incorporating signals** that have labor-market value: This means certifications, industry certifications, Department of Labor registered apprenticeships, credit toward a college degree, or other portable forms of signaling. For example, online work portfolios allow workers to transfer their skills and experiences to other employers.40 While the range of credentials available to workers is vast and the research on their long-term value is often contested, many dual-customer training programs, like the bootcamp Kenzie Academy, recognize that access to credentials and/or portfolios can boost working adults’ long-term employability.41

- **De-risking participation for workers and employers**: This means moving from merely involving employers in curriculum design to integrating directly into talent-management processes. This phenomenon was studied extensively by Ryan Craig in his 2018 book *A New U: Faster + Cheaper Alternatives to College*, in which he describes models that guarantee interviews or job placements for workers (e.g., paid training Techtonic), and models that generate revenue only when workers’ and/or employers’ desired outcomes are achieved (e.g., bootcamps from App Academy and Kenzie Academy, with deferred tuition and income share agreements, respectively).42

### Types of Dual-Customer Training Program

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<tr>
<th>Types of Dual-Customer Training Program</th>
<th>Illustrative Examples</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>On-ramps</strong></td>
<td>PER SCHOLAS, STRIVE, InVent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Programs that combine intensive assessment and screening, pre-employment and career-readiness skills, technical and soft-skills training, and job-placement and advancement services</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Paid training</strong></td>
<td>APPRENTI, Springboard</td>
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<tr>
<td>Earn-and-learn programs in which apprentices earn wages while performing productive work and undergoing supervised, work-based training with related academic instruction</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Bootcamps</strong></td>
<td>TECHNION, TLK, et al.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short, intense, and workforce-aligned training programs that focus on exactly the technical skills employers need (as demonstrated in job descriptions) while helping workers with the search process</td>
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<td><strong>Joint labor-management programs</strong></td>
<td>WRTP</td>
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<td>Independent organizations managed collaboratively by unions and employers to offer education and training, including on-the-job training, alongside other benefits and occupational services</td>
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37. This phenomenon was studied extensively by Ryan Craig in his 2018 book *A New U: Faster + Cheaper Alternatives to College*, in which he describes models that guarantee interviews or job placements for workers (e.g., paid training Techtonic) and models that generate revenue only when workers’ and/or employers’ desired outcomes are achieved (e.g., bootcamps from App Academy and Kenzie Academy, with deferred tuition and income share agreements, respectively).42

38. While the range of credentials available to workers is vast and the research on their long-term value is often contested, many dual-customer training programs, like the bootcamp Kenzie Academy, recognize that access to credentials and/or portfolios can boost working adults’ long-term employability.41

39. Increasing flexibility for working adults: This means allowing them to learn on their own time and earn while they learn, often by leveraging technology. For example, NextStep, an on-ramp that prepares workers for certified nursing assistant (CNA) jobs, delivers training through skills-based, mobile-native courses that students can complete asynchronously in 10–15 minutes per module.37

40. Increasing support for working adults: This means helping them address academic, career, or personal needs in the form of mentors, coaches, childcare, and/or transportation assistance. For instance, SV Academy, a sales bootcamp, pairs students with three types of coaches: a communications coach to help students build their brands, a mindset coach to help students identify strengths and weaknesses and develop a growth mindset, and a career coach to help students navigate the job search and first year on the job.38

41. Incorporating worker voice into program design: This means protecting the interests of working adults. For example, WRTP | Building Industry Group Skilled Trades Employment Program (WRTP | BIG STEP), a joint labor-management program that was the subject of a high-quality randomized controlled trial in 2010, has been successful in augmenting workers’ earnings. WRTP | BIG STEP has “credited labor-union involvement for its success in training and placing workers into well-paying manufacturing jobs,” according to research by the Center for American Progress.39

42. Incorporating signals that have labor-market value: This means certifications, industry certifications, Department of Labor registered apprenticeships, credit toward a college degree, or other portable forms of signaling. For example, online work portfolios allow workers to transfer their skills and experiences to other employers.40 While the range of credentials available to workers is vast and the research on their long-term value is often contested, many dual-customer training programs, like the bootcamp Kenzie Academy, recognize that access to credentials and/or portfolios can boost working adults’ long-term employability.41
In order to predict the future of dual-customer training programs, it’s important to remember their heritage. These programs sprang forth from a broader landscape of labor-market intermediaries. Within the broader landscape, predecessors of dual-customer training programs collectively represent a competitive threat to dual-customer training programs because they are potential substitute or replacement products.43

Dual-customer training programs do share some DNA with their more traditional intermediary cousins that focus on job placement or information exchange. For example, workforce boards and sector partnerships aggregate worker and employer demand and facilitate information exchange between the two sides, while traditional staffing agencies offer job placement. But neither workforce boards nor staffing agencies address quite the same set of worker and/or employer needs as dual-customer training programs, partly for obvious reasons—they don’t focus on job preparation or the provision of skills—but more deeply, they don’t offer what dual-customer training programs offer because they don’t operate as true labor platforms, defined in this research as: entities that coordinate the market of workers and requesters of work for defined tasks or projects and promote information symmetry between the buy side and sell side.

Serving both the worker and employer effectively is no small feat; programs often set up two sides internally to operationalize this, similar to B2B + B2C and B2B2C companies. One side is responsible for acquiring and retaining employer customers, and the other is responsible for acquiring and ensuring the success of worker customers. This is powered by cross-functional teams, like marketing and analytics, and the use of technology to gain operational efficiency and reduce program delivery costs.

And this is just the beginning—dual-customer training programs recognize the untapped and growing market and are continuing to optimize existing services and grow market share. For example, to expand toward working adults without college degrees, programs are improving screening processes or incorporating trusted screening tools that employers may already use, like HackerRank.44

Programs are improving coaching capabilities to help workers not only complete the training but overcome trauma, explore careers, and build confidence.

Particularly in light of COVID-19 and the related economic fallout, the need for solutions that bring together suppliers and demanders of labor so that both sides can be successful is only set to grow. In the remainder of this work, we’ll explore system-level factors and human-level needs that will determine whether that growth is moderate or exponential.●
“When the gap between ideal and real becomes too wide, the system breaks down.”

—BARBARA TUCHMAN
Systemic problems require systemic solutions. Although individual human challenges often prevent people from fulfilling their potential, they’re frequently symptoms of a deeper underlying disease. Such seemingly individual needs can usually be traced back to a deeper systems-level problem by simply asking, “Why?”

Five whys is an iterative technique used to determine the cause-and-effect relationships underlying a particular problem. The technique is simple: just ask the question, “Why?” Then ask it again. And again, and again, and again. Essentially an exercise in persistence, the goal is to push through the allure of tactical, surface-level solutions until the true source of the problem comes into clear view. Obtaining this clear picture of the root problem enables problem-solvers to respond to the right challenge at the right time.

One framing that visually describes the difference between surface-level interventions and systems-level interventions is illustrator Tony Ruth’s take on the popular children’s book The Giving Tree by Shel Silverstein. The ladders beneath the apple tree are tools—they help individuals respond to surface-level needs that they experience day to day. But it takes a more intentional system of buttresses, cables, and stakes in the ground to truly respond to the root cause of the problem. When we deal with root causes, we get closer to justice.

In the context of economic mobility, our deep research with real people surfaced countless needs that everyday working adults and hiring managers regularly experience. By iteratively asking, “Why?,” we were able to travel down a path of discovery that ultimately revealed a handful of problems worth solving, akin to the bent tree trunk. These problems are framed as system-level insights, and they fall into five main categories:

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
- A focus on discrete demographic groups contributes to a duplication of effort within workforce development.
- Unscalable “perfect” is the enemy of scalable “good.”

LABOR MARKETS
- The value of a labor-market intermediary derives from facilitating a mutually beneficial exchange.
- Both sides—workers and employers—are de-risking through self-reliance, often powered by technology.

SUPPLY CHAINS
- Hiring is part of a labor-market supply chain.
- Hiring managers, not HR professionals, are the procurement officers of this supply chain.

LABOR PLATFORMS
- Labor platforms exist in the spaces along the labor supply chain—and the shorter the chain, the better.
- Labor platforms address two problems—matching efficiency and participant volume—and the former is more urgent than the latter.

BUYERS & SELLERS
- Employer firms are not a monolith.
- For workers, time is money, and proximity to the dollar is vital.
“We are often unwilling to have one of the most important conversations of all: the role workforce development has played in maintaining the conditions underlying the current economic crisis that has displaced millions of workers.”

—CLAIR MINSON
**A FOCUS ON DISCRETE DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS CONTRIBUTES TO A DUPLICATION OF EFFORT WITHIN WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT.**

Workforce development in the U.S. is characterized by a fragmented system of state and local programs and investment boards responsible for spending federal and state dollars to help job seekers find jobs. Their primary value proposition lies in their ability to redirect people to various nonprofits and publicly funded programs, like Job Corps, HUD employment and training programs, Local Veterans’ Employment Representatives (LVERs), the Disabled Veterans’ Outreach Program (DVOP), the National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP), and the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP).

Workforce development in the U.S. is notoriously underfunded compared to other federal spending priorities. In a 2011 study, the Hamilton Project found that “other industrialized nations invest up to ten times as much as the United States in vocational training.... Since 1985 the amount budgeted for key U.S. Department of Labor training programs has declined by about 20% in real terms.”

**WHAT WE KNOW**

Public funding may be systematizing duplication of effort, thereby preventing the workforce development industry from capturing economies of scale.

“Continue to surprise those who would put you in a neat demographic.” —GORDON GEE

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Federally Funded Workforce Development Resources in the Commonwealth of Virginia

**DEPARTMENT OF LABOR**
- Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) Adults
- WIOA Displaced Workers
- WIOA Youth
- Wagner-Peyser Employment Service
- Other workforce dollars

**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**
- Adult Education and Literacy
- Vocational Rehabilitation
- Pell Grants
- Perkins Act

**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**
- Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)

**VIRGINIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM**
- Funds administered through 15 local workforce development areas

**VIRGINIA EMPLOYMENT COMMISSION**
- Services provided through American Job Centers

**VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**
- Services provided through community colleges and other local providers

**VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF AGING AND REHABILITATIVE SERVICES**
- Services provided through local aging and rehabilitative services offices

**VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES**
- Eligibility and employment services provided through local social services offices

W. Edwards Deming, the American statistician, once said: “Uncontrolled variation is the enemy of quality. That’s all window dressing. That’s not fundamental. That’s not getting at change and the transformation that must take place.” The workforce system is a victim of uncontrolled variation. Funding and oversight are spread across multiple federal agencies before trickling down to the state and local levels. Agencies each retain separate program goals, often with conflicting provisions. For example, TANF focuses on rapid employment while WIOA emphasizes job retention and wage gains. The diagram was adapted from American Enterprise Institute’s report.
A FOCUS ON DISCRETE DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS CONTRIBUTES TO A DUPLICATION OF EFFORT WITHIN WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT.

WHAT WE LEARNED

Workforce development programs’ focus on single demographic groups—such as veterans, farmworkers, older adults, or people aged 16-24—creates a certain amount of service duplication within the broader system. After all, if one 65+ disabled veteran living in a city could have her employment problems resolved by any one of five programs, then why are there five programs? American Enterprise Institute put it succinctly in January 2020: “The failure to revise and integrate federal employment and job-training programs over a five-decade history has resulted in a policy and bureaucratic maze that creates challenges for program administrators at the federal and state levels and, most importantly, confusion for employer and worker users of the system.” AEI goes on to note that “funding to serve more employers and workers does not address the issue of a duplicative, fragmented, and confusing service delivery architecture. In fact, more funding only exacerbates and incentivizes separate program delivery through separate agencies and bureaucracies.”

The overlap, it noted, is particularly profound for programs serving limited-income, disadvantaged, and dislocated populations. The solution is not less funding, but this duplication of effort, within a workforce development system that is meagerly funded to begin with, leaves little room for the R&D, innovation, and iteration necessary to bring services to scale. On top of poor funding, the resource drain caused by duplication within the sector keeps individual programs so meagerly funded that they grasp at as many potential beneficiaries as possible based on the demographic rules—even if that means an impossible range of human needs to serve—in order to keep utilization and associated funding formulas where they need to be for organizational survival.

“...I didn’t want to be at Job Corps anymore. Not to speak ill of Job Corps—it’s an amazing program—but you have the social classes within Job Corps. There were the gangbangers. It was like a mini projects. Gangbangers are showing up because they were court ordered. That’s one of the federal programs. They have a series of programs that are federal programs. At Job Corps, like 10-15% are court-ordered. Then you have that percentile that was 25% homeless. Then you have that 10% that really see bright futures. Then another 25% that is more dedicated to taking this step to move forward. Then a small percentage there because it’s around the corner—it’s close to the house, you don’t pay for anything, you know what I’m saying? Like, you literally pay for nothing. The crazy thing is, like, they were projects because of the setup—in this old military base. Everything around it is like, ‘Oh, they’re projects.’” —DALE, WORKER

This may explain, in large part, why it’s difficult for many organizations and programs, especially those that rely on government funding, to serve exponentially more people, and to serve them well. It may also explain why so many workforce innovations in recent years have eschewed traditional workforce funding streams in favor of earned-revenue business models. But government-supported-versus-not might be a false dichotomy. In 2017, the Massachusetts Pathways to Economic Advancement “Pay For Success” project became the first social impact bond exclusively focused on workforce development in the nation—to the tune of $15 million. Private capital from foundations and investors was critical in demonstrating that this model improves earnings and economic mobility for immigrants and refugees. The project is a joint venture between the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and two Boston-based not-for-profit partners, JVS Boston and Social Finance.

WHAT IT IMPLIES

Public funding may be systematizing duplication of effort, thereby preventing the workforce development industry from capturing economies of scale. To be clear, duplication of service touchpoints or locations, rather than effort and infrastructure, is not a problem per se. Starbucks or McDonalds might have 100 locations in one city, yet they’re obviously masters of scale—not that impersonal franchise models are necessarily the goal. But meeting beneficiaries where they are certainly is, and if it takes 100 storefronts around town to do that, so be it. This, in itself, doesn’t impede scale.

What does impede scale, however, is the way government funding tends to thwart coherent service alignment within the industry by discouraging consolidation of revenue under fewer roofs. When revenue can’t be effectively consolidated among fewer providers, fixed cost structures get duplicated over and over again. This dynamic seems to arise from how workforce development funding is appropriated; governments identify a specific demographic in need, then fund interventions for that demographic through legislation. Because they are run by political parties, governments often have an interest in supporting certain demographic groups (and oppressing others, for example, through gerrymandering®). Whatever the reason, when governments restrict eligibility for specific programs, the future potential “market share” (scale) of any given program is effectively constrained.

If one enterprising organization wanted to build a scalable program that could cut across demographic groups to address a commonly shared need, that program would have to jump through all the qualification and compliance hoops for each demographic-based funding stream in order to cobble together all the necessary revenue to run. And if its beneficiary population changed over time in terms of proportion or mix of certain demographics traits, the intricate funding structure could all come crashing down. Conversely, non-government-funded enterprises are free to develop revenue models that cut across demographic groups, capture commonly shared needs, and create the possibility of comparatively larger revenue streams burdened by similarly sized cost structures—in other words, scaled operations.
A FOCUS ON DISCRETE DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS CONTRIBUTES TO A DUPLICATION OF EFFORT WITHIN WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT.

ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE

SNAP to Skills

Through a project called SNAP to Skills, the U.S. Department of Agriculture offered technical assistance to states from 2015 to 2019 so they could build more effective SNAP Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) programs, which provide adult participants with the skills and education they need to find a good-paying job that leads to self-sufficiency. When SNAP to Skills funding dried up for Tulsa Community WorkAdvance, the on-ramp was forced to shelve its SNAP E&T job-readiness program. By a stroke of luck, Tulsa Community WorkAdvance discovered the Choice Neighborhoods initiative, a grant program managed by the Department of Housing and Urban Development designed to catalyze critical improvements in neighborhoods. Tulsa community WorkAdvance repurposed the program it had developed for SNAP E&T and reused it for Choice Neighborhoods—different funding, potentially different beneficiary demographics, but the same shared human need.
**UNSCALABLE “PERFECT” IS THE ENEMY OF SCALABLE “GOOD.”**

**WHAT WE KNOW**

The American public workforce system is less a system than a set of loosely linked entities, often connected only in name, under the banner of a “One-Stop Career Center” funded by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). These centers attempt to offer an integrated continuum of services related to recruiting, training, retaining, and transitioning workers. As investor-author Ryan Craig explained in *Inside Higher Ed* in 2019: “The one-stop center attempts to coordinate. But because everything is outsourced, getting lost in the shuffle is a common experience.”

The American Enterprise Institute corroborates this assessment, observing that, while WIOA in theory provides a structure for one-stop service delivery at the state level, in practice the thicket of different programs and disparate funding streams makes one-stop service incredibly challenging. Many nonprofits and other organizations have attempted to provide a more coherent experience for job-seekers (and businesses) by responding with comprehensive service models that are owned and operated all under one roof. Ownership is pared down and consolidated, but the array of services is not.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Dual-Customer Training Program</th>
<th>Essential Skills</th>
<th>Wraparound Services</th>
<th>Career Coaching</th>
<th>Job Readiness Skills</th>
<th>Technical Skills</th>
<th>Soft Skills</th>
<th>Recruitment and Outreach</th>
<th>Screening</th>
<th>Matching and Placement</th>
<th>Post-Hire Support</th>
<th>Employer Needs Assessment</th>
<th>Employer of Record</th>
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✓ Usually offered by programs

✓ Occasionally offered by programs

△ Outsourced

To constrain our study, we defined “dual-customer training program” to mean non-accredited programs that prepare workers for in-demand jobs and actively engage employers to ensure workers’ success. We did not include degree-granting programs (e.g., from universities, ASAP, Kentucky FAME), companies that sell corporate training to businesses (e.g., Pluralsight), or programs that aggregate information and/or demand (e.g., workforce boards and chambers of commerce). As shown above, on-ramps (e.g., LaunchCode, Per Scholas, STRIVE, and Project Quest) have the most comprehensive offerings.
Although pared-down ownership and control promote a more coherent user experience, workforce service providers are inhibited when they attempt to provide comprehensive services. What they gain through comprehensiveness is often lost through an inability to scale. Within the context of the current U.S. capitalistic political economy, stories of successful, sustained scale tend to be marked by radical simplicity and focus. Where there are bundles, they’re relatively small and arise from users’ usage patterns; in other words, the users decide which two or three things belong together, as shown by their actual usage behavior over time. This is markedly different from what some call the “spray-and-pray” service strategy.

“I enrolled in STRIVE, and it’s not just medical skills and terminology that you learn. STRIVE is very hands-on, and every day was different for you, too—you just didn’t sit there, so it was good. They just teach me everything from professionalism to interview skills, people skills, being more open, being more talkative, and life skills, I think. And also work skills. And they were able to help me get into healthcare. And then they set you up with a mentor which is one-on-one. Your mentor just helps you out with whatever you need.” —JOEL, WORKER

The best bundles actually don’t feel like bundles from the user perspective because it would never occur to them that those things shouldn’t be provided together. Exhaustively comprehensive programs, on the other hand—especially when they take the position that training is non-negotiable—are costly and complex, making it difficult to isolate, measure, and improve various pieces—and they may not help the end user in a way that justifies the added complexity. It’s unclear whether most people really need all the pieces all the time, and most programs have no way of clarifying this. Calbright College (the currently unaccredited, non-degree-granting, online California community college that launched in 2019), is a rare exception, reporting to the state legislature in August 2020: “Calbright has developed the capacity to evaluate the actual impact of programmatic and technological changes on key student outcomes aligned with student success by means of a capability now built into core technology—especially “training+” instantiations—might be a form of paternalism or deficit mindset regarding beneficiaries. This makes some program operators understandably nervous because they have long associated comprehensiveness with social impact, treating it simply as good as the worst-functioning part. While complexity may be possible to pull off at a smaller scale, it’s exceedingly difficult to get every single piece right at higher volumes.

WHAT IT IMPLIES

Comprehensiveness in workforce service models, especially the assumption that training must necessarily be included in any bundle, may be inhibiting scale. Most design responses to date have been predicated on an assumption that an exhaustive service model—one that must include skill—is necessary for successful workforce development offerings; the only question was whether to outsource some of it or conduct it all in-house.

However, in terms of trying to serve exponentially more people, the ROI on comprehensiveness has diminishing returns after a clear, primary need (or small, coherent bundle of needs) has been met for people through a more targeted, specific offering. Changes in technology, modes of communication, and cultural expectations among users and funders have created an opening for providers in this space to move away from “one-stop” thinking and/or “trainings+” thinking altogether—to proudly specialize in discrete services or small, coherent bundles that address particular pain points or common frictions that frequently occur together. For instance: what if childcare plus world-class resume-writing takes care of millions of people? There seems to be growing skepticism about the absolute necessity of training in all or even most workforce offerings, which is nothing short of seismic in terms of the field’s most basic intellectual underpinnings, long tied to the notion of American individualism (e.g., individual responsibility for skills deficits).

This shift away from the assumption of insufficient skills seems ever more likely as funders see more ways to fund attitudes around notions of “opportunity gaps” or “skills gaps” begin to morph to acknowledge a more straightforward class gap, often intersecting with race, gender, ability, ethnicity, and other avenues of identity-based oppression. For example, Nikole Hannah-Jones writes that Americans “tend to explain away or justify persistent racial inequality by... invoking the role of individuals’ traits and skills as explanations for these disparities. They use the exceptional examples of very successful black people to prove that systemic racism does not hold black Americans back and point to the large numbers of impoverished black people as evidence that black people are largely responsible for their own struggles.” Thus, funders are beginning to ask whether service model comprehensiveness—especially “training+”—might be a form of paternalism or deficit mindset regarding beneficiaries. This makes some program operators understandably nervous because they have long associated comprehensiveness with social impact, treating the two almost like synonyms at times. This is a false precept. Less comprehensive does not necessarily mean less impactful. It certainly doesn’t mean more transactional or impersonal per se. It simply means more focused. Focus enables scale.

It’s also worth noting that scale doesn’t necessarily preclude programs from eventually serving willing, interested beneficiaries that do have more complicated needs and thus require a more comprehensive set of services. In fact, scaled operations enable organizations to serve exponentially more higher-need beneficiaries alongside simpler-to-serve customers. Enterprises on a scaling trajectory become ever more capable of serving harder-to-reach (e.g., more expensive-to-serve) audiences because of growing financial wherewithal; one begets the other. After all, the point of scaling operations (and the reason we want it for dual-customer
The notion of gaining a foothold with simpler-to-serve segments happens in the for-profit world
chooses whom and how many to serve, even if that means a higher proportion of “lower-margin”
customers than they might have otherwise been able to serve in a less optimized, less efficient,
less financially empowered (i.e., less scaled) state.

To be clear, “lower-margin” customer does not necessarily mean “less educated” customer; these
concepts were largely uncorrelated in both landscape analysis and qualitative user research. In
landscape analysis, we found programs were adept at screening based on aptitudes and interests
rather than a static demographic trait like educational attainment. For instance, Techtonic,
which pledged in June 2020 to hire 100 people of color as apprentices,36 has long utilized an
applicant selection process that results in a strong pool of apprentices, 40% of whom do not hold
bachelor’s degrees. In qualitative research, we found that a college degree does not correlate
with being less expensive to serve. For instance, Akil (who holds a bachelor’s degree in an in-
demand field from a respected institution) has unresolved emotional trauma from a prior work
experience, extended-family members he must support, and a significant commuting distance
to the dual-customer training program that piqued his interest. To serve him well, that program
would need to offer him in-depth psychological counseling, pay him a living wage for his time,
and provide a transit solution to literally bridge him from Brooklyn to the Bronx. On the other
hand, Katherine (who does not hold a college degree) has no current mental health challenges, no
dependents, and sufficient financial and/or time resources to enroll and attend—all of which allowed
her to successfully complete a dual-customer training program with little or no ancillary support.

The notion of gaining a foothold with simpler-to-serve segments happens in the for-profit world
of platform businesses, too. Airbnb scaled its operations with globetrotting couples, then used
its hard-won scale to serve refugees and asylum seekers in need of free, temporary housing.37 Lyft
scaled its driver operations with easy-to-serve car owners who bring their own car to the gig, then
used its hard-won scale to reach drivers who don’t own cars via a rental service, free of charge for
anyone driving 65 or more rides in a week.38 In other words, scale is not just a process or activity;
once you’ve achieved it, it becomes a tool for growing market share—i.e., by tackling market
segments that are more expensive to serve. For the very most expensive-to-serve populations, this
strategy might be the only way—outside of public government or charity support.

In sum, comprehensiveness soaks up great resources, including the resource of beneficiaries’
time, and its resource-intensiveness makes it hard to scale up in operational terms. For a slice of
the population with particularly complex needs, it may look perfectly responsive; but for the vast
majority of would-be beneficiaries it simply looks complicated—because it is. Perhaps the core
problem of millions of people struggling with economic stability could be addressed more simply.
One analogous example from the adjacent field of homelessness that was recently profiled in The
New Yorker discusses a supportive-housing nonprofit in San Francisco called Abode, which radically
simplified the traditional approach to intractable homelessness: “What we found is, sure enough, if
you give people a home and basic services to go along with it, they’ll thrive, at very high rates.”39

Of course, there may be beneficiaries who need more than just a home and basic services, but a
scaling organization doesn’t start there; instead, it works its way up. It says, “If we want to serve
1,000 people with a debilitating challenge that isn’t often addressed by other service providers,
then we have to serve 9,000 people without it. And if we want to acquire and retain those 9,000
people, we have to have a simple offering that addresses their one problem. We can’t appear like
a kitchen-sink offering and say to them, ‘What you need is somewhere in here, guaranteed.’” The
concept of universal basic income is also rooted in this idea of: maybe we can get further by first
going straight to the root cause.

ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE

STRIVE3

STRIVE, a program that started in 1984 in New York City and has since grown
through an affiliate network, is centered around what it calls a “proven five-pillar
model.” It consists of attitudinal training, skills training, career coaching, job
placement assistance, and post-hire support. As STRIVE grew, it opened its doors to
younger populations and formerly incarcerated individuals. Phil Weinberg, STRIVE’s
CEO, grappled with whether to add additional services beyond the five pillars or to
re-examine its comprehensive model altogether. “In the case of a justice-involved
population, the five pillars may be a baseline but then additional services, like
cognitive-behavioral therapies or legal services, may be layered. But we are mindful
that there are instances where we need to be more disruptive. We actually invited
outside partners, MDRC, to unpack our pillars and redevelop them for the younger
populations we were looking to serve.” Weinberg stated in an interview. STRIVE
provides a powerful example of recognizing and re-examining comprehensive services.
“The most important single central fact about a free market is that no exchange takes place unless both parties benefit.”

—MILTON FRIEDMAN
**WHAT WE KNOW**

As in all market economies, the U.S. labor market is characterized by six key attributes: private ownership, freedom of choice, self-interest, competition, limited government intervention, and optimized buying-selling platforms. Not all of these attributes operate as well as they should, but this last attribute in particular constitutes a significant source of labor-market dysfunction. Buying-selling platforms in the U.S. labor market are unoptimized in part because job seekers and job fillers currently do not have equal access to information that would help facilitate an exchange.

Because many labor-market intermediaries, including labor platforms, cover too many different job functions in too many different industries and sectors, they are relatively unhelpful for either party in terms of providing information that could help facilitate an exchange. Buy-side and sell-side participants cannot discern the signal through the noise; outside of a few very narrowly focused labor platforms like Upwork or Uber, participants can’t tell what job skills are being offered or requested. This hampers their ability to match and exchange value, resulting in transaction volume that is not as high as either side would like it to be.

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A market economy is a system in which the laws of supply and demand direct the production of goods and services. Supply includes natural resources, capital, and labor; demand includes the needs of consumers, businesses, and government. In terms of labor, workers offer their services at the highest possible wages that their skills allow, while employers seek to get the best employees at the lowest possible price. This type of value exchange is the crux of any market. Adapted from economist and Nobel laureate Jean Tirole’s *Economics for the Common Good,* the image above depicts how intermediaries facilitate that exchange in a variety of industries.
Workers and employers desire the most help in facilitating that value exchange and improving transaction volume, not in more training and credentialing. This is not a desire for job placement speed to the detriment of job quality. It’s simply a desire for training to be treated as a last, not first, resort. Workers are exhausted by the incessant demand for more and more credentialing, especially when it comes to skills they already possess.

“I got offered a security job in a brand new Cartier store they were opening on 5th Avenue at 52nd Street in Manhattan. I took it. At the time, I had just grown my hair. I had dreadlocks. They wanted me to cut my hair. I refused to do it. At that point, I was just like, ‘Okay, this is ridiculous.’ So I stopped doing security. Then one day I got a letter in the mail and an email about STRIVE from a company called Families Forward, and I signed up. I mean, they had a couple of classes, but construction was the one that caught my eye. Because even in the house, I’m very handy. I just never had any certificates saying that I’m handy. Do you know what I’m saying?” —SHARIYF, WORKER

A myopic focus on preparation may be partially driven by the assumption that wage or income equate to skills—in other words, that adults with low-wage job histories must be low-skilled. This assumption is not reliably correct: for instance, in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area, customer service representatives, who earn approximately $16 an hour, require more skills training than, say, human resources specialists, who earn $28 an hour on average. However, research by Opportunity@Work and Accenture in a recent National Bureau of Economic Research working paper found that these occupations share many skill similarities, including critical thinking, persuasion, and active listening. The researchers also argue that “some of the stagnant/declining fortunes of workers without college degrees may be due to ineffective signaling of the relevant skills (which many non-college graduates acquire through work experience) rather than to [a skill] differential... between workers with and without BA degrees.”

We’d add: between workers with and without branded “pedigree” BA degrees. This is critically important in the COVID-19 context marked by more than 60 million jobless claims filed since mid-March 2020. A number of philanthropic and quasi-governmental initiatives—such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation’s Jobs Data Exchange46 and T3 Innovation Network,65 Opportunity@Work’s Opportunity Marketplace,54 and Colorado’s statewide data trust55—are working to improve labor market signaling that can aid matching and exchange.

WHAT IT IMPLIES

Prioritizing job preparation ahead of job-matching efficiency may be limiting scale. Not all market failure is attributable to a skills gap; there may be large portions of the worker population that, with a little matching help, could find good work without any additional job preparation whatsoever. Working adults certainly seem to feel this way: in our survey of 1,044 working adults, respondents consistently rated job matching or job placement as more important than job preparation. Respondents rated job placement services (e.g., refining job search strategies, job application support, and resume and interview preparation) as the single most important service—more important than skills training and other services. Moreover, higher percentages of respondents in the lowest income brackets found job placement services to be most important. This was consistent across educational backgrounds. When workers sense inefficiency in job-matching, uptake of “training+” interventions struggles to improve. Put another way: effective systems for matching job seekers and employers are more important than job preparation precisely because many people would find a good job without additional job prep. Focusing on improving the hiring transaction itself rather than altering the labor commodity being offered for sale could be an avenue for breakthrough scale. At the end of the day, what matters most to both sides is facilitation of the labor-market exchange, not the provision of skillling.
LABOR MARKETS | SYSTEM INSIGHT 4

4

BOTH SIDES—WORKERS AND EMPLOYERS—ARE DE-RISKING THROUGH SELF-RELIANCE, OFTEN POWERED BY TECHNOLOGY.

WHAT WE KNOW

Well-functioning markets require robust double-sided participation, but the labor market is plagued by halting, uneven participation and opaque navigation. Workers and employers often feel like the labor market bears too little fruit given the effort they put in; this can lead them to put in less effort around job seeking and hiring, or to disengage altogether. When that happens, they are making a choice about effort: they perceive the required effort (to succeed in the general labor market) as too high, so they choose to extricate themselves from the situation. This idea of “effort choice” is often missing from analyses of the labor market, and the oversight can lead to an overemphasis on so-called skills gaps—as the thinking goes, maybe the effort required (to succeed in the general labor market) wouldn’t be so high for people if they just had more skills.

“Disaster mitigation increases the self-reliance of people who are at risk—in other words, it is empowering.” —SIR IAN DAVIS

SPOILER ALERT

A reluctance to embrace worker and employer de-risking behaviors, especially those carried out via consumer technology, may be inhibiting scale.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paid upon successful:</th>
<th>TYPE OF DUAL-CUSTOMER TRAINING PROGRAM</th>
<th>HOW DOES IT WORK?</th>
<th>EXAMPLES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Placement</td>
<td>Bootcamps with deferred tuition</td>
<td>Students agree to pay a set tuition amount, but only once they graduate and successfully land a job</td>
<td>App Academy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bootcamps with income share agreements</td>
<td>Students agree to pay a percentage of their post-program salary to the school for a set period of time</td>
<td>PURSUIT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paid training acting as an outsourced recruitment firm</td>
<td>Employers pay a flat fee or percentage of the candidate’s first-year salary upon successful placement</td>
<td>VENDITION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service</td>
<td>Paid training acting as an outsourced professional services firm</td>
<td>Employers pay for services typically at or slightly above market rate with the understanding that workers are trained specifically for their projects</td>
<td>catalyte</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paid training acting as software-as-a-service (SaaS) marketplaces</td>
<td>Employers and/or workers pay on a recurring basis to interact and do business with one another</td>
<td>INTERAPT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>On-ramps or bootcamps with corporate training offerings</td>
<td>Employers pay for the service of training that is delivered to incumbent workers</td>
<td>Acadium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>On-ramps funded via social impact bond</td>
<td>Investors pay programs for delivery of services to beneficiaries; if outcomes are achieved, governments then repay investors</td>
<td>JVS Boston / Massachusetts Pathways to Economic Advancement Project</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Workers and employers need each other, yet they distrust each other—a feature of capitalist political economy, not a bug. Because they value the exchange so deeply, they are locked in a violent embrace, coping with distrust via self-reliance: employers exert increasing control over talent pipelines; workers enter into the gig economy or entrepreneurialism. What do these actions have in common? They reduce one’s exposure to the other side. The most scalable program business models are responsive to this tendency.

Continued on next page ➔
Both sides—workers and employers—are de-risking through self-reliance, often powered by technology.

But acquiring more skills doesn’t necessarily make labor-market participation and navigation easier; if anything it just delays it. The difficulty of navigating the general labor market also gives rise to “private” labor markets—unpublished openings, personal referrals, and other practices that perpetuate privilege. Research has long shown that 70% of all jobs are not listed publicly on jobs sites, and up to 80% of jobs are filled through personal and professional connections. These practices will persist as long as forgoing them feels risky, either to employers or job seekers.

Against this backdrop, both sides are continually looking for ways to de-risk the hiring transaction and regain control, and increasingly they are using consumer technology to do that, starting with a simple Google search. Workers may seek evidence that a program gets participants job placements, as opposed to mere job preparation. They’ll also seek out feedback and reviews about the program online. Employers may seek clearly articulated and published worker-quality guarantees from programs, as opposed to a mere good-faith dialogue about curriculum. They too will seek out feedback and reviews about the program online. And both will bring expectations regarding matching efficiency, digital responsiveness, and general ease of use that the last 10 years of consumer technology have taught them to take for granted.

New technologies are even enabling workers to amass ownership in the labor platforms they use. For example, Blockchain startup Braintrust “connects freelance software coders and other technical workers with companies that want to hire them for projects. Job marketplaces are common, but what’s different at Braintrust is that freelancers and other contributors collect ownership interests in the marketplace for doing things like referring potential freelancers and clients or helping to vet their peers.”

As shown in the table below, de-risking behavior is visible in the business model of many labor-market intermediaries, particularly those in which intermediary revenue streams are tied to successful placements, delivered services, or both. In other words, the intermediary is only paid if workers and/or employers get their desired outcomes. In this sense, the intermediary takes on risk that might have previously been borne by labor-market participants alone.

**WHAT WE LEARNED**

In order to get into the game more wholeheartedly, both workers and employers need to be convinced that it is possible to de-risk labor-market participation. Put another way, the outcome of participating needs to feel worth it more often, which for most labor-market participants means garnering more control. Firms are looking to become producers of talent rather than merely consumers of it. The development of internal institutes—like Deloitte U.K.’s five-year paid BrightStart apprenticeship program for high school graduates who wish to completely forgo university—signals that corporations are taking more control over the supply of labor.

Even if they don’t as far as operating an internal institute, many firms reclaim control in smaller ways, for instance switching from staffing agencies, outsourcing contractors, or offshoring partners to online labor platforms like Upwork or Catalant, the high-skilled knowledge-work cousins of platforms like Uber and DoorDash. Academic researcher Dr. Gretta Corporaal, in a study funded by the European Research Council, found that, “for employers, [online labor] platforms are an alternative for staffing agencies and offshoring. Via these platforms they bring the work back closer to the organization. The employer has more control in the selection of the worker as well as the execution of the work.”

This is not wholly dissimilar to workers’ attempts to gain more control by engaging in the gig, freelance, and entrepreneurial economies. Workers’ rapid adoption of gig platforms—like Qwick, the on-demand food-service staffing app—started with people’s desire to take more control over their day-to-day and was fueled by consumer technology, which offers the matching efficiency, digital responsiveness, and general ease of use that have become standard service levels in the eyes of workers and employers alike.

> “I work for a company called Qwick. It’s almost like a temp agency. They, in essence, are set up like a temp agency, but it’s not technically what it is. I do 1099 work. I go out to different restaurants. Atlanta has at least a thousand restaurants in this city alone. That’s the one thing you can do here. So when they call me, they let me know when a shift needs to be covered or they let you know when, like, certain restaurants need to add bartenders, servers, whatever. For me, it’s flexibility. Even if I find a part-time gig, there will likely be more gigs there, too. The format was a lot more straightforward [than looking for other work] because of location. It was in the WeWork building or something. I just walked by a couple times. It was lit, even the presentation.”

—DALE, WORKER

Even though gig work is often maligned—frequently by people who don’t regularly engage in it—many working adults value it because it is one of the simplest ways to meet an underlying need for self-reliance. We found that, for workers like Dale, gig work is the surest route to establishing stable, predictable pay and/or stable, predictable hours for oneself—two job features that workers consistently rate as very important. Contrary to popular belief, worker dissatisfaction with stability of hours or pay does not seem to be correlated with alternative work arrangements like gig work per se. Gallup found in a recent study that “low-income workers are not much more likely than those with higher incomes to be involved in most such alternative arrangements.”

In our qualitative research, we found a preponderance of working adults with limited incomes who don’t aspire to becoming “employees” at all, instead preferring independent gig work or entrepreneurship. Dale would much rather be taking one-off restaurant gigs on Qwick than working retail hours and interacting with lots of people at his local grocer. Myiah dreams of opening her own preschool and is earning a bachelor’s entirely online to do so, even though she’s...
got a stable classroom job with benefits now at her local school district. Brenda dreams of opening an eyelash beauty business that she can call her own, and Katherine yearns for social distancing to wind down so she can reinstate her in-home daycare. This trend of self-reliance, often enabled by technology, seems rooted in a desire to flip the risk-return ratio—to move closer to (and gain more control over) desired labor-market outcomes.

WHAT IT IMPLIES

A reluctance to embrace worker and employer de-risking behaviors, especially those carried out via consumer technology, may be inhibiting scale. Typical de-risking behaviors carried out via consumer technology include modern phenomena like changing a flight online at Southwest.com to avoid the risk of a long, frustrating voice call; choosing the “Subscribe & Save” option on Amazon.com for routine diaper delivery to avoid the risk of a midnight run to the drugstore; looking up a restaurant on Yelp.com before booking to avoid the risk of a terrible meal; or attaching a Tile® Bluetooth locator to a keyring to avoid the risk of utter panic. In the world of work, typical de-risking behaviors carried out via consumer technology include phenomena like a worker taking gigs on digital labor platform Postmates™ because the income (however meager) is speedy and assured, which helps avoid the risk of an empty fridge caused by time wasted chasing fruitless income “opportunities” that don’t pan out or a business-unit manager getting a discrete project done on Fiverr®, not necessarily to save expense (although it may have that effect), but simply to execute quickly enough to avoid the risk of missing an important internal deadline.

Workers and employers have figured out how to use consumer tech to reduce whatever risks they perceive in day-to-day life, yet the workforce development sector has been reluctant to understand or harness the behavior. This reluctance seems rooted in at least two factors: an inability or unwillingness to recognize and acknowledge workers as rational consumers capable of making rational decisions, and an assumption that embracing tech-powered solutions would mean job loss for the people currently involved in hiring. Workforce offerings that harness trends around self-reliance—and acknowledge technology’s role in intensifying those trends—are more likely to scale. All consumers, including workers—and hiring managers, for that matter—develop expectations and behaviors that are shaped by the general products and services they interact with every day. Tech-forward solutions to the problems of everyday life are widespread.

Supply Chain Management Review, an industry publication, published an article in January 2020 proclaiming that “the widening of the wealth gap will drive more workers toward using technology to gain some degree of control over their destinies. Some evidence suggests that the gig economy and freelancing may help women seeking equal salaries for the same work, and more companies are establishing in-house ‘universities’ with both in-class and online programs.”

And tech-forward doesn’t necessarily mean job loss for the people currently in roles devoted to dealing with the inefficiency. For instance, talent acquisition teams focused on finding candidates in a haystack could shift into something more germane to the business, like onboarding, retention, and proprietary in-house knowledge/skill development.

ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE

LaunchCode

Sometimes self-reliance comes down to the right legal arrangement. LaunchCode’s IT apprenticeship program allows employer partners to test out new talent through legally contracted services before candidates are hired full-time. Rather than just hoping its graduates would get hired, LaunchCode decided to establish the legally binding service agreements and help evolve those service agreements into full-time hires. The move helped LaunchCode find product-market fit and scale. Why? Because the “try-before-you-buy” legal arrangement and clarity provided by the service agreement allowed employers to de-risk. One of their employer partners said: “This agreement gives departments across campus the ability to get LaunchCode graduates in the door from a hiring perspective. With this in place, we are able to quickly engage with the talent, and everything is set as far as expectation, procedure, and protocol for full-time placement, should the apprenticeship go well.”
“Supply chains are in every organization. Even a corner store has a supply chain. They just might not know it yet.”

—NADIA KASSAM
Hiring is part of a labor-market supply chain.

WHAT WE KNOW

The idea of treating labor resource needs as a challenge that supply-chain management could help solve started gaining speed in the mid-2000s. Management scholars and industry insiders began developing methods for translating supply-chain principles to labor, so that firms could make better decisions about which labor resources to “buy, build, or borrow.”

In more recent years, the notion of labor being part of a supply chain has spread. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation noted that supply-chain thinking in labor markets “is an orientation toward education and workforce partnerships in which employers are much more than advisors or beneficiaries. Instead, they are end-customers of talent supply chains. This does not mean employers are the only customers that matter, nor does it mean schools are factories or learners are widgets.”

SPOILER ALERT

Hesitation to treat workforce development solutions as part of a standard supply chain may prevent some approaches from scaling.

“If you cannot work with love but only with distaste, it is better that you should leave your work.” —KHALIL GIBRAN

Essential Services Preparation Worker Needs

- Help me cover basic needs (e.g., childcare, housing) and ensure that I have basic skills (e.g., numeracy, literacy) needed for additional work and/or training.

Employer Needs

- Help me ensure that my new hires or existing workforce are healthy and productive.

Preparation

- Help me ensure that workers can do the job.
- Help me diversify and expand my talent pipeline.

Screening

- Help me evaluate the quality of job candidates.

Matching

- Help me match me with the right employers based on my interests, goals, and background.
- Help me ensure that workers’ interests, goals, and backgrounds are aligned with my company and the job.

Retention

- Help me keep my workforce healthy and productive.
- Help me ensure that workers can do the job.

Sourcing

- Help me get in front of employers.
- Help me demonstrate that I have the attitude, skills, and experiences for the job.

The most unique aspect of a labor-market supply chain is the fact that the journey through it looks different for every individual worker. Not all people have needs in all stages. For instance, some workers can enter at the matching stage, requiring no essential services, job preparation, or assistance getting in front of employers or demonstrating aptitude. Additionally, many workers enter and re-enter the preparation stage at multiple points, whereas others engage in that stage only once. We’ve shown preparation here twice, but it could appear anywhere, and dual-customer training programs are any that encompass the preparation phase.
Firms want to reduce “leakage” in the supply chain that leads to an insufficient or unpredictable supply of labor resources. As with other types of resources, firms often address leakage through supply-chain integration, up to and including vertical integration—producing the resource instead of procuring it—and labor resources are becoming no exception.

“In Dallas, Georgia, we opened our first healthcare center. Part of our reskilling now, and [our education benefit program], is engaging those that want to become lab techs, radio techs. We recognize that the 1.4 million workers we have are all the 1.4 million we need if we could retain them all, and then start reskilling our workforce so that we don’t lose them or we don’t have to lay anybody off as the workforce changes.” —STEPHANIE, EMPLOYER

This supply-chain dynamic is more obvious in tight labor markets, as firms have more incentive to build their own labor resources through, for example, internal institutes or academies. But COVID-19 proves the continued relevance of this dynamic even with 20-25% unemployment: tight labor markets persist in pockets like grocery, medical, and logistics. In these tight pockets, we see vertical integration as firms try to shore up labor supply.

WHAT IT IMPLIES

Hesitation to treat workforce development solutions as part of a standard supply chain may prevent some approaches from scaling. Understanding job placement and hiring as part of a supply chain is critical to understanding how to help people transition to work. Education and training providers in the workforce space must understand that their services are fundamentally a business resourcing activity.

Without the ability to fully articulate and empathize with the profit-motive perspective of employers, then closely align programmatic operating practices with employer operating practices (e.g., aligning the service offering to an employer’s existing hiring timetable), workforce development offerings face a low likelihood of widespread adoption by employers. Instead, they are more likely to get stuck in pre-scale gear, where they may be locally flourishing—or even nationally growing—but still not quite scaling, defined as adding revenue more rapidly than expenses. Often this comes as a result of being overly optimized for one region, one training provider, one firm, or sometimes all three—an idiosyncratic and mostly unrepeatable combination of players, places, and personalities that may be possible to grow but difficult to scale.
HIRING MANAGERS, NOT HR PROFESSIONALS, ARE THE PROCUREMENT OFFICERS OF THIS SUPPLY CHAIN.

WHAT WE KNOW

The ultimate responsibility for hiring lies not with the HR professionals who manage the process, but with those who actually make the hire. As AI-powered hiring software firm Workable points out, “while the recruiter manages the process, it’s the hiring manager who actually closes the deal. So, hiring managers are the decision-makers; they have the final say as to who gets hired and who gets rejected. They own the outcome of the recruiting process. And when there’s a bad hire, the hiring manager is the one who should investigate what went wrong.” Irrespective of business size or sophistication, a human being or committee of human beings ultimately makes every hiring decision. Among the different types of dual-customer training programs, paid training seems particularly adept at identifying the linchpin decision-maker.
HIRING MANAGERS, NOT HR PROFESSIONALS, ARE THE PROCUREMENT OFFICERS OF THIS SUPPLY CHAIN.

WHAT WE LEARNED

The locus of the hiring decision is the locus of labor-market power. Thus the power dynamic is tilted toward employers, specifically hiring managers, who collectively manage and maintain power on behalf of the firm. They are both the entry and exit point for every individual worker coming into or out of the firm.

“I used to work the drive-thru window at a White Castle. The manager of Toys “R” Us actually was coming to my drive-thru to buy lunch, and she liked the customer service provided to her that day. She offered me to come and apply for a position. When I went into Toys “R” Us to apply for the position, she offered me a shot at being a department lead. Every time I go back to New Jersey, if I do nothing else, I try to pick up the phone and say hello to her. It really starts to hit me that I’m where I’m at in this life because of one person.” —DELLICK, WORKER

Though it is largely implicit, the power hiring managers have been delegated, collectively, is extraordinarily significant. The very nature of labor markets, as the Economic Policy Institute explains, gives more clout to employers than workers, even in the absence of policy that is “rigged for employers.” As the Washington Center for Equitable Growth points out, employers though it is largely implicit, the power hiring managers have been delegated, collectively, is extraordinarily significant. The very nature of labor markets, as the Economic Policy Institute explains, gives more clout to employers than workers, even in the absence of policy that is “rigged for employers.” As the Washington Center for Equitable Growth points out, employers...
“Fair trade evokes a relationship between consumers and producers, based on transparency, dialogue, and respect.”
—BRYANT TERRY
Labor platforms exist in the spaces along the labor supply chain—and the shorter the chain, the better.

What we know

The sheer velocity of a digitally driven global marketplace has caused baseline conditions in many industries to be far less stable and more risky today than in prior economic eras. The more nodes a firm relies on, the greater its business risk. One of the key aims of supply-chain integration has been to reduce some of that risk by not only treating suppliers more like extensions of the firm itself, but also working to reduce the overall number of nodes in the chain. Tim Cook is widely celebrated for enacting this type of strategy as CEO of Apple, reducing the firm’s key suppliers from more than 100 to about a quarter of that.

These illustrative examples from our landscape analysis revealed that labor platforms tend to start with a narrower focus as they embark on a path to scale, often with a tightly defined user base in order to get off the ground. Although some platforms start outside of—but don’t preclude—more limited-income populations, they are incentivized to eventually capture the largest possible market share. Rather than boiling the ocean, they begin with one stage of the supply chain, resolving frictions workers and employers experience related to that particular stage. And they focus on the shortest possible version of the supply chain—sourcing, screening, and matching—and expand into adjacent nodes from there. For instance, LinkedIn tackles predominantly sourcing but expanded backward and forward to tackle preparation and screening/matching, via its 2015 Lynda.com acquisition and 2018 “How You Match” feature, respectively. The Adecco Group, the second largest staffing firm in the world, solidified its “talent pipeline as a service” offerings through the acquisition of General Assembly, a rapidly growing “preparation” provider, in 2018. KnackApp tackles screening and matching together in more than 100 countries by surfacing hidden potential through neuroscience- and AI-powered digital gameplay, then matching people with learning, education, and job opportunities.
LABOR PLATFORMS EXIST IN THE SPACES ALONG THE LABOR SUPPLY CHAIN—AND THE SHORTER THE CHAIN, THE BETTER.

WHAT WE LEARNED

As with manufacturing supply chains, the fewer nodes in the labor-market supply chain, the better. The risk to both parties of the final transaction (hiring) going wrong is lower when there are fewer points of potential breakdown lurking upstream. For a company, this looks like an endless string of suppliers supplying other suppliers before the needed resource finally arrives. For a worker, this looks like a years-long string of classes, credentialing requirements, and online applications before someone finally bites.

"Job Corps, they offer a trade and a GED at the same time. I thought I was gonna go to college, so I did the GED. I should've done the trade part. I have a brother who does plumbing. He finished school and just picked up the trade, doing different jobs. He has amazing references and stuff like that. Hindsight 20/20, a trade program is essential to have. I went to school in Alabama, and they had a technical end for school—they had crafts and trades—but I wasn't applying."

—DALE, WORKER

This implies that firms may be interested in a labor supply chain characterized by fewer nodes—maybe even just one, occurring at the final transaction point and intermediated by a reliable labor platform. In fact, if shorter is better in the world of supply chains, then one node could even become zero nodes with vertical integration, obviating the need for labor platforms altogether.

We saw this in the pre-COVID-19 economy, in which labor supply was so tight that firms began producing their own qualified labor via internal institutes, among them Walmart Academy, which has graduated more than 52,000 associates since opening in 2016.80 It turns out workers also see the value in getting straight to work and reducing the number of steps on their journey to productive employment.

WHAT IT IMPLIES

An emphasis on additional training may be forcing more supply-chain nodes than necessary, adding risk and instability for both the worker and the employer, reducing their willingness or ability to engage, and thus inhibiting scale. By defaulting workers into training programs when they might have already possessed sufficient skills or trainability required for a job, interventions are putting job seekers through unnecessary steps. The training, while “new” for the worker, does not necessarily deliver more economic value than, say, timely placement at the outset. Similarly, incremental worker training is not necessarily more economically valuable for the employer, because it likely prolongs job vacancies longer than necessary.

ILUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE

Two types of vertical integration that evolving industries typically see are: forward integration and backward integration. The former refers to control of the process after the company’s manufacturing processes, while the latter is when a company buys the part before its manufacturing’s processes. Both involve expansion to another part of the supply chain, thus shortening the chains. Similar behaviors are happening in the workforce sector today. An example of forward integration along the hiring supply chain is YearUp’s creation of a staffing agency81 or Wiley’s acquisition of mthree.82 An example of backward integration is Adecco, a global human capital firm focused on job matching and placement, acquiring General Assembly.83
LABOR PLATFORMS ADDRESS TWO PROBLEMS—MATCHING EFFICIENCY AND PARTICIPANT VOLUME—AND THE FORMER IS MORE URGENT THAN THE LATER.

WHAT WE KNOW

In 2015, Deloitte University Press published a think piece, “The Power of Platforms,” observing: “Everyone, it seems, is thinking in terms of platforms. That is, they are recognizing that, no matter the market, there is money to be made in providing layers of capabilities and standards that other players in that market can tap into and use to interact more efficiently.” After acknowledging a double-sided market dynamic, platform value becomes clear—smoothing interactions between suppliers and demanders.

Put simply, “Platforms help to make resources and participants more accessible to each other on an as-needed basis. Properly designed, they can become powerful catalysts for rich ecosystems of resources and participants.” It’s important to note here the emphasis on making participants more accessible to each other—in other words, helping them meet. Indeed, the key purpose of any platform is to help participants meet, not necessarily to generate more participants, although some labor platforms do both.

Matching efficiency is more important than participant volume, and the absence of true platform characteristics—such as job function/task specificity and financial accountability to the participants wishing to be matched—may be stymying efficiency and thereby inhibiting scale.

When it comes to labor market efficiency, clearing the pipes is the first order of business, then digging a deeper well. An over-emphasis on training in the workforce development industry has resulted in a glut of supply-side participants who are still unable to connect with viable job opportunities, a friction not limited to beneficiaries of workforce development programs. This friction also affects people coming out of more traditional pathways—people who would likely be favored because their pathways are more recognizable. Beneficiaries of less traditional pathways are in a long queue that is only getting longer.
Labor platforms, including dual-customer programs, not only aggregate compelling numbers of suppliers and demanders into one place; they also broker deals between the two. Labor platforms focused on scale typically address the efficiency of matching first, then work on growing participation. Even in situations where participant numbers are in fact low, the value of matching efficiency is still paramount.

“The university system cannot produce enough of these people, and people like us are going to continue to consume them at pretty massive scale, faster than they can be produced, which is why there’s opportunities for the amateurs of the world, and small contractors, to find and aggregate these people and sell them back and make a premium. Even if universities could produce these ready-to-go people, I think we would continue to lean on ReVature if they can still provide people at a 20% discount to the market from a salary standpoint. That’s still interesting.” —TOM, EMPLOYER

This makes sense. The U.S. job market is a classic failed market, in which individual incentives for rational behavior aren’t leading to rational outcomes for the group. Significant quantities of both supply and demand are getting backed up in the system, never meeting in the middle and clearing. Prior to COVID-19, U.S. jobless numbers roughly matched job openings for years on end, hovering in the millions on both sides but continually failing to clear.

The dearth of intermediaries to facilitate worker-employer interactions may explain this persistent market failure. Early labor platforms like LinkedIn arose to improve matching efficiency, but, as venture capital firm Andreesen Horowitz has noted, the non-specificity of job function on platforms like LinkedIn has meant that these types of intermediaries “offer a broad look at everything you might want, but don’t do any one thing particularly well. They require too much work to separate the signal from the noise, which impacts both the speed and quality of the process.”

Matching efficiency can’t exist without mutual accountability on both sides—program-to-employer and program-to-worker. Therefore “dual-customer” might be better defined as “dual financial relationship.” Once a dual financial relationship is in place, labor platforms must also cater to specific job verticals, or potential buyers and sellers will become disillusioned by the difficulty of finding the signal in the noise. Indeed, both dual financial relationships and job-function specificity improve matching efficiency, but both have been largely absent from labor platforms, including dual-customer programs.

Incredible Health, a labor platform that specializes in matching nurses with hospitals, tackled matching efficiency before participant volume. Sometimes referred to as the “Match.com for nurses” by its hospital clients, it has effectively reduced time to hire for hospitals and increased salaries for workers through technology-enabled sourcing, screening, and matching. Iman Abuzeid, MD, the CEO and co-founder of Incredible Health, made an intentional decision to tackle matching first: “We talked about the problem about the shortage and the efficiency of the market. What we have worked on so far is to solve the inefficiency problem. How do we get the right nurses at the right hospitals quickly? It’s like ships passing each other in the night, they just don’t find each other. When it comes to solving the actual underlying nursing shortage, it’s something we want to tackle because it’s part of mission and vision but I don’t know what that looks like yet.”
“The first principle of the market economy is that it is comprised of many small buyers and sellers, which implies a substantial degree of equity.”

—DAVID KORTEN
EMPLOYER FIRMS ARE NOT A MONOLITH.

SPOILER ALERT

A bias toward large employers, perhaps rooted in unease around the hiring practices of smaller businesses, may be inhibiting scale.

WHAT WE KNOW

According to data published by the U.S. Small Business Administration in September 2019, businesses with fewer than 500 employees represent nearly all of the country’s employer firms (99.7%), nearly half of private-sector employees (47.3%), and nearly two-thirds (64.9%) of net new private-sector job creation. Small businesses added 9.6 million new jobs between 2000 and 2018, compared to only 5.2 million at large employers.\(^87\)

In some ways, demand for labor is stronger in small businesses than in large, but hiring is far riskier, which leads to hiring and employment practices that the workforce development field has traditionally been skeptical of, like low or no benefits, heavy reliance on freelancers, and contracting—all business behaviors intended to mitigate the risk of a bad hire. As Pip Jamieson, founder of professional networking platform The Dots, explains: “A bad hire—one who turns out to be substandard or untrustworthy—represents a much larger proportion of a smaller company’s workforce, so it will have more difficulty dealing with that than the larger corporations.”\(^88\)

The way companies think about themselves in terms of competitiveness in attracting talent seems to correlate with facets of popular culture. Big firms with household names like Google are very competitive in the market for labor. So are startups, since popular culture has assigned a certain degree of “glamour” to startup life. Meanwhile, firms with no household name or other aspect of “glamour” tend to struggle in attracting talent, no matter how large or small. This notion of “glamoroussness” is an important dimension contributing to the sheer variety of employer firm profiles and the variety and specificity of their needs.

Continued on next page ➔
EMPLOYER FIRMS ARE NOT A MONOLITH.

WHAT WE LEARNED

Despite small businesses’ demand for labor, many workforce offerings are designed for the 0.03% of employer firms with more than 500 employees. Larger workforces result in higher risk tolerance around bad hires, presumably making large firms more amenable to new workforce offerings. This, combined with the fact that they tend to offer benefits and eschew short-term employment arrangements, makes them workforce-development darlings and the target client for most programs and presumed starting point for scale.

But small and medium-sized businesses may actually be the best candidates for scaled platforms. They are already accustomed to more liquid workforce arrangements, because their low risk tolerance around hiring often drives them to use freelancers and contractors who reduce the risks around a bad hire and let them scale head count up and down quickly.

“I found Amanda on Acadium, which was called GenM at the time. I confess, it’s terrible, but as a business person you are always watching costs. When I did this, it was around $120 for three months. You get an intern for three months. I had the view that whomever I would get would then become part-time for me. I went into it with the strategy of: ‘I just want the three months and then hopefully, the person will be good in three months.’ So the three months was almost like a test run for me. And Amanda is a really great fit. She’s super autonomous. What I wanted her to do was—whereas I do other people’s social media—I wanted her to do mine, so that I could still do my clients’ social media. I was willing to train her because—well, I think it’s a bit of an ego-legacy kind of thing. I think there is something that starts at ego, when you see people that you’ve trained succeed. You helped somebody get to a cool place that they wanted to go. I also, to a certain degree, like to train people on my processes.” —CAZ, EMPLOYER

In other words, small and medium-sized businesses are already pros at the “try-before-you-buy” model that is gaining speed in workforce innovations now. Small and medium-sized businesses also have fewer decision-makers; the owner and the hiring manager are often the same person, with no recruiters or HR in sight. The nature of small and medium-sized businesses may make them ideally suited to adopting scaled platforms.

WHAT IT IMPLIES

A bias toward large employers, perhaps rooted in unease around the hiring practices of smaller businesses, may be inhibiting scale. Selling into such a variable world is also costly and difficult. Small businesses are different from large employers and each other. But nearly half of all jobs and two-thirds of new jobs exist in this diffuse, variegated world. One needn’t buy the notion that small businesses are more ripe for platform adoption than large firms to know objectively that they’re about half the job market in any case, and thus must be addressed on any path to scale.

Furthermore, designing for small businesses would inherently mean designing for scale, since the huge variety of small and medium-sized businesses with vastly different labor needs means that products serving them are forced to be flexible and adaptable. This helps keep the offering as universally applicable as possible. This is not the case when developing for the 0.03% first; it’s much harder to adapt a large-firm product for small businesses than the other way around. Thus, starting with small businesses seems like a promising path to eventual widespread adoption among employer firms, especially if the acquisition and implementation costs of signing on a small or medium-sized business could be mitigated and managed for scale, as analogous platform companies like Shopify have done.9

ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE

OPENCLASSROOMS

OpenClassrooms, an online education company based in France, has delivered fully online courses and vocational degrees to about 3 million students in Europe and North Africa since its founding in 2013. In 2017, it started offering fully online apprenticeship programs that include on-the-job training for students and enable businesses to convert apprentices into full-time hires. OpenClassrooms reported that two-thirds of its apprenticeship clients in Europe are startups and small businesses. The founder, Pierre Dubuc, has committed to serving small businesses in its expansion to the U.S. as well: “It’s pretty cool, especially for startup companies and small businesses that want to hire one developer or two data analysts. They can have access to this program and actually be subsidized to run these apprenticeships [through DOL grants].”90
FOR WORKERS, TIME IS MONEY, AND PROXIMITY TO THE DOLLAR IS VITAL.

WHAT WE KNOW

After visiting the Blackfoot nation in Alberta, Canada, in 1938, psychologist Abraham Maslow famously proposed a hierarchy of human needs. This hierarchy is represented visually as a five-layer pyramid, with basic physiology forming the foundation, followed successively by safety, belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. Maslow used these five layers to describe the pattern through which human motivation generally moves, proposing that each need must be satisfied according to the individual in order for them to move on to focusing on the next layer. The bottom four layers stand apart from self-actualization because they arise from being deprived of something, thus creating a kind of “treeline” below which motivation for personal growth can be difficult to access, muster, or maintain.

One reason deprivations below the treeline exist in the first place has to do with the role of time as the primary ownable resource of people struggling with economic stability. For these people, the idiom “time is money” couldn’t be more true, as they toil in hourly wage jobs and spend countless unpaid transit hours going to and fro. Resolving any deprivation (e.g., “deficiency needs” on Maslow’s hierarchy) takes time—time that they don’t have. In order to resolve one deprivation, they are often asked to create another because, as British author and journalist Polly Toynbee has observed, “poor people’s time is regarded as valueless.”

In 2009, the World Bank proposed a new definition of “time poverty”: working long hours and having no choice to do otherwise. In other words, an individual is time-poor if she is working long hours and is also monetarily poor, or would fall into monetary poverty if she were to reduce her working hours below a certain level. We heard time and again during interviews with people struggling to find life-sustaining work that dual-customer programs and other labor-market platforms were interesting to them, especially if free, but having to quit or reduce hours in order to commute and attend was a non-starter.

Continued on next page →

"Intelligent people make decisions based on opportunity costs." — CHARLIE MUNGER
Economic mobility is first and foremost a deprivation problem. In the field of psychology, the items below self-actualization on Maslow’s hierarchy are collectively known as “deficiency needs”—they arise due to deprivation and thus motivate people to meet them. Once met, deficiency needs dissipate. Conversely, self-actualization needs continue to be felt and may even grow stronger over time—they are never really “met” in the same sense as deficiency needs because there is always room for growth. This makes designing for economic mobility different than designing for learning, because economic mobility often operates below the treeline on Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, deep in deprivation territory. People struggling with economic mobility may be deprived of physiological requirements like food, clothing, shelter, and healthcare; safety requirements like emergency financial cushion, transportation, childcare, and nonviolent neighborhoods; belongingness requirements like access to technology, community, and close personal relationships; or esteem requirements like self-esteem and reputation. They are also often deprived of time.

“"There was somewhat of a barrier to entry for Per Scholas. I saw the facilities—I think they had some labs, work stations, which was something that appealed to me because it’s hands-on. You can learn things and actually being able to do it is what’s going to help you learn. But they were in the Bronx. It was kind of out there, and between that and other obligations I had at the time, it was so far out, and from Brooklyn, it would’ve been a very far commute and a big time commitment. It would have been 9:00-5:00 p.m., I think, for a few months. It wasn’t paid. Afterwards, it wasn’t a guaranteed offer—it was a guaranteed interview, if you made it through the whole program. The financial entry point was free, but the fact that it was so long and that I would’ve had to commute there was a bit of a turn-off for me. And what I was working part-time was conflicting with that.” —AKIL, WORKER

Cumulatively, deprivations can make it difficult (though not impossible) for people to tap into the growth drivers that might propel them to engage with learning. They are too busy resolving deprivations by earning cash. As we heard time and again from workers in this study, for people deprived of any or all of these things, credible, near-term cash-flow strongly motivates decision-making around work opportunities, including the decision to decline and avoid opportunities that appear to damage short-term cash-flow potential. In fact, the majority of survey respondents said that they are not at all likely to relocate for a job-training program, that they had less than five hours every week to spend on job-training programs (including commute time), and that their ideal length for a job-training program is less than three months.

Ironically, workers also have an incentive not to maximize short-term cash-flow potential but to keep income steady and small, due to the “benefits cliff” that increased earnings could cause: once workers pass a certain income threshold, their eligibility for social supports suddenly disappears, thrusting them back into crisis mode. Although social enterprises like Leap Fund attempt to address this phenomenon, many workers are left wishing they had never taken a pay raise to begin with. All of these dynamics—time poverty, benefits cliff—keep workers psychologically boxed into low-wage jobs and prevent them from embracing the programmatic interventions that dual-customer training programs offer.

WHAT IT IMPLIES

A failure to appropriately value the time and opportunity cost of people struggling with economic stability may be inhibiting user adoption and thus program scale. Unpaid learning and commuting time understandably diminishes many workers’ willingness to adopt workforce interventions since, after all, such offerings effectively price their time at zero. Workers are acutely aware that unpaid time spent trying to advance in their careers is time not spent earning money. For many, that seals the decision not to participate, regardless of what impact the program may promise to have on future earnings. Interventions that are free on a cash basis but require unpaid time, including commute time, are not in fact free. Opportunity cost is something greater than zero, particularly for people struggling with economic stability. To drive widespread adoption by job seekers, interventions will need to pay them for their time—and tell them so upfront.

ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE

Cincinnati Works, a coaching and job placement program that was founded in 1996 to help populations that face barriers to work, such as individuals with criminal records, intentionally decided not to include skills training in their services. “We are a work-first model. We help our clients first figure out work and how it integrates into their life. Once that’s done, we can help them think about skills training and advancement. The problem for our clients is time and money. They don’t have time to invest in job training,” said Peggy Zink, Cincinnati Works’ President and CEO.
# 10 System Insights in Sum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workforce Development</th>
<th>Labor Markets</th>
<th>Supply Chains</th>
<th>Labor Platforms</th>
<th>Buyers &amp; Sellers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td><strong>9</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Focus on Discrete Demographic Groups Contributes to a Duplication of Services.</td>
<td>The Value of a Labor-Market Intermediary Derives From Facilitating the Exchange.</td>
<td>Hiring is Part of a Labor-Market Supply Chain.</td>
<td>Labor Platforms Exist in the Spaces Along the Labor Supply Chain—and the Shorter the Chain, the Better.</td>
<td>Employer Firms Are Not a Monolith.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public funding may be systematizing duplication, thereby preventing the workforce development industry from capturing economies of scale.</td>
<td>Prioritizing job preparation ahead of job-matching efficiency may be limiting scale.</td>
<td>Hesitation to treat workforce development solutions as part of a standard supply chain may prevent some approaches from scaling.</td>
<td>An emphasis on additional training may be forcing more supply-chain nodes than necessary, adding risk and instability for both the worker and the employer, reducing their willingness or ability to engage, and thus inhibiting scale.</td>
<td>A bias toward large employers, perhaps rooted in unease around the hiring practices of smaller businesses, may be inhibiting scale.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td><strong>10</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensiveness in workforce service models may be inhibiting scale.</td>
<td>A reluctance to embrace worker and employer de-risking behaviors, especially those carried out via consumer technology, may be inhibiting scale.</td>
<td>Overlooking the needs of hiring managers, the linchpin decision-makers in labor-market transactions, may be inhibiting scale.</td>
<td>Matching efficiency is sequentially more important than participant volume, and the absence of true platform characteristics—such as dual-sided financial accountability and job function/task specificity—may be stymieing efficiency and thereby inhibiting scale.</td>
<td>A failure to appropriately value the time and opportunity cost of people struggling with economic stability may be inhibiting user adoption, and thus program scale.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“When we bear witness, when we become the situation—homelessness, poverty, illness, violence, death—the right action arises by itself. We don’t have to worry about what to do. We don’t have to figure out solutions ahead of time.”

—BERNIE GLASSMAN
System-level problems are the invisible architecture holding bad human experiences in place. These bad experiences are incredibly visible and visceral. Bearing witness to them is important, not only to find discrete problems worth solving, but to develop the kind of empathy that can fuel problem-solving at both the system and human level, over both the short and long term. In sum, empathy builds endurance. And empathy means talking to people.

In recent years, the phrase “nothing about us without us” has come to epitomize the importance of centering and building empathy for beneficiaries. The notion is simple: endeavor to understand and elevate the lived experiences and perspectives of the people you want to help. If you want to know how people live, why not just let them tell you?

This is particularly important in the realm of economic mobility. Real working adults who are struggling with economic instability have particular patterns of living and unique everyday problems that are worth seeing, feeling, and deeply comprehending from their point of view. This is more than just listening and learning; it’s changing the national conversation about poverty and economic mobility. Ryan Rippel, director of the Economic Mobility and Opportunity program at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, said it best in June 2020 when announcing the 28 grant recipients of the Voices grand challenge funded by a group of eight philanthropies:

“Equitable access to opportunity will not be possible until we address misconceptions, racial bias, racism, and stereotypes and move to action guided by shared values, history, systemic solutions, racial equity, and human dignity. We don’t think that this work is by itself going to solve either racism or poverty in America. Far from it. But we will not change complex systems if decision makers are not following the voice and insight of those facing marginalization and victimization as a result of our economy and our institutions. One way to accomplish this is by ensuring that the actual stories of those who experience poverty are front and center with the goal of compelling new levels of action.”

Indeed, empathy work in America is long overdue. In another life, Volume III of this work might’ve been a grant recipient of the Voices grand challenge, because it too seeks to offer alternative storylines to what the Gates Foundation calls “confusing, conflicting, and just plain inaccurate accounts about what poverty is, why it happens, to whom it happens, and how to address it.” In fact, because the thrust of this research is about double-sided markets and programs, our research applied an empathy lens to the employer side of the equation as well. Working adults need proverbial ladders to function in the labor market more successfully—and hiring managers do, too. They are both participants of the same market.

Too frequently in workforce development, the needs of individual people on the employer side are overlooked, misunderstood, or ignored. Sweeping generalizations and/or faulty assumptions about how employers work cause their needs to fall off many interventionists’ radar. Their problems and day-to-day obstacles are deemed unworthy of exploration or inspection—let alone empathy. The truth is the buy-side experience of the labor market is highly nuanced. For starters, the linchpin decision-maker in any given hiring scenario is often someone only a few rungs up from the entry-level workers interventionists care most about. They have very real problems and practical concerns that require human-level tools and programs to solve. Empathizing with both sides can make a double-sided market work better for everyone. This volume focuses on human-level needs on both sides and the tangible tools and interventions that might address them.
Our journey to empathy starts with regular people—working adults who want better, more stable employment and better, more stable positioning in the economy. We wanted to meet and understand these people. Their personal stories and perspectives should deeply inform how designers, funders, operators, and other interventionists understand the frictions that everyday people face when engaging with the labor market.

So we met and got to know 32 individuals struggling with economic stability, and we developed deeper relationships with a few. Brenda is a lifelong family caregiver who, after more than 30 years, finally has the chance to pursue a livelihood of her own choosing but is thwarted by job injury and disability. Akil is a millennial college graduate struggling to get traction in the tech industry. Katherine is a late-blooming entrepreneur trying to protect her new business in the face of the pandemic. Dale is an aspiring filmmaker who found freedom and flexibility in the gig economy until economic shutdown forced him back into grocery retail.

In qualitative design research, we uncover patterns of experience and evolve them into jumping-off points for problem-solving. The stories of Brenda, Akil, Katherine, Dale, and many others collectively revealed four broad themes suggesting areas where interventions might be needed most.

1. **HERO’S JOURNEY**
   Every person is on a hero’s journey, facing their own problems and slaying their own dragons. It’s a part of the human condition; we all share common psychological and functional needs that transcend demographics. Addressing these needs is how we grow, self-actualize, and reach our full potential.

2. **PLAYING THE ODDS**
   Economically, we are all playing the odds, but the deck is stacked against some. Fortune may favor the prepared, and it also greatly favors the privileged. Odds of economic success can be improved a thousand ways, but only if those ways are known and available. Access to edge-gaining tactics and strategies is a privilege that can be busted open and shared.

3. **BELONGINGNESS**
   For some, belongingness is survival. Despite their strength, an overwhelming number of people who struggle with economic stability also struggle with physical and emotional scars of all kinds. Feeling that you belong is crucial in coping with intensely painful traumas. Because of this, communities and intimate relationships are crucial.

4. **POSITIONS OF POWER**
   Privileged people hold positions of power. There can be no honest conversation about economic opportunity for all without addressing how structural systems of oppression confer benefits and power upon privileged people. The hard work of reversing systems of oppression must not fall to those oppressed.
“The self is not something readymade, but something in continuous formation through choice of action.”

—JOHN DEWEY

1 HERO’S JOURNEY

A PERSONAL NARRATIVE

GETTING GROUNDED

OPPORTUNITY AREAS

p.60

p.62

p.63
At 59 years old, I am a child again. I was raised in an unstable household and began caring for my sick mother at 9 years old. I cared for her for the rest of her life. When my niece became pregnant at 15, I stepped up to raise her son as my own. I’ve always been needed by someone. Since I knew what it was like to grow up poor, I devoted myself to a safe job in dental assisting and stayed there for 33 years. For someone like me, having a safe job meant everything. It meant stability. After my mom passed away, I left dentistry and was seriously injured on a gig-economy job. I’m frustrated because I can’t find work now, and I’m struggling to access workers comp, but I won’t settle. I’ve always settled. Not this time. I never really had the chance to feel free or follow my passion. I’ve never had the chance to make my own choice. That’s all about to change.

In high school, I did quite well. But I ended up taking the California Equivalency exam to graduate early. Money was so tight, I needed to get working. When I turned 19, I began a nursing program and was placed with a terminal patient. The patient needed more care and equipment, which I requested. My request was denied, and the patient passed away on one of my overnight shifts. I was rattled by that experience. Around that time, I began partying a lot. I sort of fell into it. I now know that was a way to cope with my childhood memories. Things were so difficult growing up. This was my outlet. I was still quite young, but after a few years, the partying began to catch up with me. One day, I looked in the mirror and thought, “You look like crap. You’ve got to make a change here.” I’m 28 years sober as of May 25, 2020. Spirituality and singing are my coping mechanisms now.

So at 21, I got serious about my future. I went to school to become a dental assistant and worked in dentistry for 33 years. Time flies. I dedicated so much of my life to being a dental assistant and took pride in my work. I worked with a great dentist toward the
end, much kinder than some I worked with in the beginning of my career. There are more employer-employee laws now, but back then bosses could say whatever they wanted to you and slam things and make you feel very intimidated. It was pretty abusive in the beginning, I’ll be honest. But the last dentist I ever worked for, he was awesome—so caring. I would’ve loved to have him as my dad. My natural father was amazing, but his heart was just so broken. He really loved my mom. He never really found anybody else. He wasn’t even able to care for himself after the divorce. He just never got it back together. So I continued caring for my mother through my adult life, alongside my job. Then my niece got pregnant at 15. She was so young, there was no way she could care for a baby. I stepped up to raise him myself. Though sometimes I feel I bit off more than I could chew, it’s all been worth it. Sure, he would have benefited from his natural parents, but I did my best, and I know he views me as his mother.

Then, in the same year that my mother passed away from lung cancer, my dentist retired and sold his practice. His daughter got in at Google, so he felt he could retire. I was navigating life without my job, while grieving my mother’s death so deeply. I knew I had to get working again but couldn’t be in a position where I had to think too much. I was processing everything. All the memories of her; all the years spent caregiving. I’ve always been needed by someone. So I took a gig job delivering laundry. One day, while delivering laundry, I was recruited right off the street by a catering manager. Good food makes people happy, and I’m pretty social, so I went for it. I liked the work, and I felt young again. I stayed on for four years. But then I seriously injured my shoulder while lifting several heavy bags of leftover food during a three-hour shift. I have a significant tear in my right shoulder and can’t use my right arm as I used to. I’m working with a lawyer to fight for treatment, as it’s not being covered by workers’ comp as it should be. This injury has resulted in major adjustments in my life. I even had to cut my hair so that I could comb it more easily!

Throughout my life, I have believed that a person could get work if they wanted to—that someone along their way would connect them with opportunities. That was always my philosophy. But after the injury, I can’t stand by that thinking anymore. There are certain things I can no longer do on the job. Even though I’m frustrated with not being able to find another job, I will not settle. I’ve only settled in the past and didn’t always have the freedom to choose my own path. I don’t want to settle anymore. It’s my time to follow my heart. As women, we have a lot of empathic qualities and sometimes people take advantage of those qualities through life. We go through tough times and those struggles can show up on the outside. It’s clear to me now that supporting women to look and feel their best is my passion.

My dream is to become a certified aesthetician and open my own beauty business. First, I need to complete the training. California’s Vocational Rehab is helping me to pay for tuition and expenses for the aesthetician license. They helped me earlier in my career, as well, and even recommended counseling to cope with my injury. With their help, I know I can accomplish my dream to help women. I won’t settle for a paycheck anymore because that’s inauthentic. I’m now free from so much caregiving. I don’t want to be the person that retires and watches TV. I want to work. I want to have fun. I’m a young spirit. This is my time.

Brenda needs medical care to regain use of her right arm. She struggles to sign her own name. Brenda is navigating workers’ comp with a lawyer, but if she doesn’t recover, this traumatic injury could remain with her for life and force her out of the workforce entirely.
Every person is on a hero’s journey, facing their own problems and slaying their own dragons. It’s a part of the human condition; we all share common psychological and functional needs that transcend demographics. Addressing these needs is how we grow, self-actualize, and reach our full potential.

**Design Question**

What is it about demographics that doesn’t feel quite right in terms of addressing people’s needs?

Serving all people who share an externally observable trait rather than all people who share an internally felt need can obligate an intervention to address a huge array of human needs and problems, resulting in cost structures that, while impressively comprehensive, are difficult to scale. In order to establish firm foundational footholds that promote scale, product responses should target discrete human needs, which cut across many demographics. This doesn’t mean permanently eschewing solutions that address multiple needs. It just means letting a commonly held need, not a demographic trait, guide how and for whom a solution is designed. Intentional right-sizing can enable more rapid, focused scale. This means utilizing demographics to inform service experiences rather than centering demographics as the entry point, source, cause, or origin of the need itself. When we tell a person that a trait alone grants them access to a service, we are telling them (and the world) that the trait is the problem.

**Insight:**

People want the freedom to choose simple ways to give particular attention to particular needs.

Above all, people want the agency to choose what’s right for them, even if it conflicts with what social services are pushing. For example, a 50-year-old New York woman named Laura—an associate’s degree holder who had been pressured into several management positions throughout life before falling out of the workforce for seven years to deal with multiple sclerosis and lupus—said: “If I had to find a new job today, I’m not quite sure that I would want to be in a leadership position. I feel like I want to be more of a worker. I don’t want to be responsible for other people’s work going forward. I continue to fall into these management positions, and I think it’s really too stressful for me.” It’s difficult to imagine a program catering to this desire to move “backward.” Another commonly-felt desire we heard was a need for paying it forward as both survival technique and cultural value. When experiencing deficiency needs, people of all stripes tended to lean harder into doing right in order to do well—surviving by serving—but they sometimes struggled to find simple ways to do so. The offerings available to them were complex and confusing because they spoke to social identity rather than felt need, listing out service features rather than the benefits someone might realize by using the service. Indeed, many offerings have a hard time communicating their value in terms of benefits because they target an entire demographic, and thus an array of needs that is so wide that programs find it difficult to hang their hat (in terms of messaging) on resolving any one of them. All of the people that fit a certain demographic have incredibly diverse, often dissimilar needs, resulting in complicated service models and consequently confusing value propositions.

**Design Principle**

Fall in love with solving a problem, not serving a population.

What if we proposed value to people by communicating problem-solving benefits as opposed to product features, rooted in psychographic needs as opposed to demographic traits? What if we followed the need, not necessarily the numbers?

**Bottom Line**

For improved adoption and scale, working adults need interventionists to:

1. **Change the Locus of Control**
2. **Do First Things First**

We’ll unpack these opportunity areas on the following pages.

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Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, informed by Blackfoot Nation knowledge

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**Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs**

- **Physiological needs**
- **Safety**
- **Belongingness**
- **Esteem**
- **Self-actualization**

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**Psychological Needs**

- **Deficiency needs**
- **Growth needs**

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HUMAN NEED

For improved adoption and scale, working adults need interventionists to:

1. **CHANGE THE LOCUS OF CONTROL**

RESPONDING TO THE NEED

**HOW MIGHT WE HELP PEOPLE EXERT THEIR AGENCY AND TAKE CONTROL WITHOUT OVERWHELMING THEM WITH THE PARADOX OF CHOICE?**

UNPACKING THE NEED

People who seek economic mobility need agency to select particular solutions to their particular problems—the ability to say yes to what they need and no to what they don’t need.

**INSPIRED BY REAL PEOPLE**

“...I want to become an entrepreneur. I don’t want to work for a boss unless they can accommodate what I want to do. I’m finding that very difficult. At my age, at 59, I don’t want to work just for money. I would just be doing it for the paycheck. It just feels very demeaning—I’m not being myself. I don’t want to be there, and no matter what you do, you’re going to make a mistake, and someone’s going to call you on it. Well, I don’t even like what I’m doing, and the paycheck is not worth the aggravation or the frustration. It’s not worth it.”
—BRENDA, WORKER

“I want to open my own preschool because it’s the chance for me to have my own business. The chance for me to access revenue that I haven’t before. The chance for me to lead a team, which I love doing. The chance for me to build something that my daughter can benefit from, while teaching and working with kids.”
—MYIAH, WORKER

“I don’t emote properly in certain circumstances, as a person. Like, I’m very socially awkward to begin with. I need something where I can be away from people. That’s why I’m in film school. I’m learning, doing digital filmmaking. It is more behind the scenes. If you look for a job as a videographer, that’s in high demand. In the film industry, once I get out of school, my pay grade automatically jumps to between $50 to $100 an hour. And for a videographer, they’re not going to care about background. I’m doing it more because I know the monetary gain. And if need be, I could relocate to the next major place where film is. I think you get what I’m saying.”
—DALE, WORKER

**SUPPORTED BY OTHER SIGNALS**

“The long-held view was that hands-on personal attention was necessary to lift up students who have to fill gaps in their education, overcome life obstacles and then make their way in the corporate world. But Year Up and others say they have found that much more of their training can be done effectively online than they expected. While the attrition rates for students are higher, they are only slightly higher, they said.”

Gaining Skills Virtually to Close the Inequality Gap

“We envision a society where all families have the opportunity to realize their dreams, and we are dedicated to nurturing a national movement of low-income families advocating on their own behalf— one powerful enough to create solutions to poverty and injustice. No one can tell me that families who experience poverty don’t have the wisdom and the agency to solve their own problems.”

—LUZ VEGA-MARQUIS, PRESIDENT AND CEO OF THE MARGUERITE CASEY FOUNDATION

The Power of Families: From Poverty to Agency to Unity

**SOLUTION IDEA**

What if we made things like entrepreneurship and learning from home easier, opening up flexibility for those with caregiving responsibilities, which disproportionately affect members of systematically marginalized communities?

What if we invested in:

→ Low-interest small business grants and SMB advising for more limited-income aspiring entrepreneurs
→ Helping existing successful programs develop fully digital versions of their models
→ Launching a VC to correct investment trends favoring the enabled and affluent
→ Portable benefits, especially healthcare

Thought starters:

→ My Village
→ Patreon
→ Catch Portable Benefits
→ a16z Podcast: How the Passion Economy Is Redefining Work
→ Can start-up companies profit off one of the lowest paid professions: home-based child care?
→ Camelback Ventures

NEEDS OF WORKING ADULTS
For improved adoption and scale, working adults need interventionists to:

What if we viewed actively honoring a person’s past and intergenerational circumstances as a precursor for workforce innovation?

- Pro-bono legal support for those navigating worker’s compensation
- Economically diverse executive councils with broad social-identity representation to help direct workforce investments and portfolios
- Mental health support for all demographics, prioritizing group therapy
- Reducing “first-mile barriers” like food insecurity, transportation, and childcare

Thought starters:
- Foundation for Black Women’s Wellness
- GYRL WONDER
- Sunrise Movement
- Rivet School Pay It Forward ISA program
- COOP’s Pay It Forward alumni program
- Lyft’s Job Access Program

“Being poor requires so much mental energy that those with limited means—be they sugarcane farmers in India or New Jersey mall-goers—are more likely to make mistakes and bad decisions than those with bigger financial cushions. This is the psychology of scarcity. People’s minds are less efficient when they feel they lack something—whether it is money, time, calories or even companionship.”

Eldar Shafir explores how deprivation wreaks havoc on cognition and decision-making.

“Food insecurity threatens the well-being of adults and children today and undermines the stability of our economy tomorrow. Political inertia or inaction on the issue of childhood food insecurity is an expense we cannot afford. To strengthen our future workforce and foster the prosperity of the nation, policy makers must prioritize child health now by supporting federal home- and school-based nutrition and Early Childhood Development Programs.”

Feeding Human Capital Report

“At its core, the welfare queen myth shapes who we believe is deserving and fully human, and who is not. It reinforces toxic ideology that places the onus of poverty solely on an individual, rather than examining and acknowledging the societal and political decisions that force a person into poverty in the first place. It gives us permission to continue to blame Black women for their circumstances, pushing the belief that they must be controlled and taught how to act right. It absolves our collective guilt to implement changes to systems and policies.”

If Black Lives Matter, the ‘Welfare Queen’ Myth Must Go

Service to others is the rent you pay for your room here on earth.

— MUHAMMAD ALI
“Talent lies around us like kindling waiting for a match, but some people, just as gifted as others, are less lucky. Fate never drops a match on them.”

—WALLACE STEGNER
DO I START OVER? Go back to college, get another degree? Would that really make a difference? Do I really have to take on more student loans to get a job? Sometimes, I think I’d have a job already if I was in another field. But I worked so hard to get here. I went to a great school and took advantage of every opportunity at RIT. I have a degree in cyber security! Isn’t that supposed to be some sort of job guarantee? Isn’t a degree enough to get you in the door? I keep seeing these entry-level jobs requiring three to five years of experience. I don’t understand that. How are you supposed to get the first three years of on-the-job training? Working in tech is supposedly a “safe” kind of job, but I’ve been let go twice. And tech isn’t the friendliest industry to people of color, you know. Tech is really behind when it comes to diversity. Is that the reason I haven’t been offered a job, despite making it to multiple final-round interviews?

I had just finished my third internship. This one was at Tesla. My college, Rochester Institute of Technology, required three internships and, yeah, my last one was at Tesla Motors in Fremont, California. I really loved it. You know, I’d grown up always wanting to go to California. As a kid who grew up in the Bronx, that was a dream of mine. And to be there and to apply my skills, well, I felt like it was all finally coming together.

Soon after the Tesla internship, I got my first full-time job in California. I was so excited, finally getting the chance to live there. When I moved, I lived in an Airbnb in San Francisco until I could find a place. It was a lot of moving costs, but I needed to get there to find a place. Thankfully, I’ve always been frugal, so I was living off my small savings. It wasn’t much, but it was something.

After eight or so months, the company had to downsize. I was laid off. I was upset about losing that job, one that I had worked hard for. But I didn’t have time to think about it too much. I had to find another job quickly to afford to stay in California. I looked around for a few months, moved in with a friend, and went to a bunch of meet-ups, like the tech meet-ups, you know? I made it to final-round interviews a few times, but didn’t get anything. Something I don’t understand is this—if a company says they are looking for entry-level positions, why do they require three to five years of experience for those? If companies view that as entry-level, how is someone going to get in the door? I don’t know why I didn’t get a position. I don’t understand that.

Looking back, I wish that I moved back home earlier. Paying for housing...
during all of this ate up a lot of my savings and unemployment checks.

After I moved home, I got another job in information security. I was thankful to finally have a job. I didn’t like the work as much; it was for a legal group. Lots of merger-and-acquisition-type stuff. The environment was so fast-paced. I’m not the smartest person in the room—I mean RIT is full of smart people—but I did good work for them, and I was never supported. We were always under a lot of stress, and I felt watched. I was working late all the time. I started to feel really devalued, like I wasn’t good enough at my job. Nothing I did was enough. It was like an elite kind of locker room. I was just treated badly, plain and simple. It really started to get to me. And I ended up losing that job. Yeah, I actually got fired. I still feel like I’m not up to par with them.

My confidence was shaken, and still is. And I can’t get past that experience and fear. Will work always feel that way? Like you’re walking on eggshells? When I lost the job with the legal group, I honestly felt relief. No job is worth sacrificing your mental health for. Even though I have gone through so much and worked hard in school to give myself opportunities, I can’t afford not to be picky. It’s just not worth it to be treated poorly. After losing that job, I was connected to a program here in New York—Per Scholas. It was free, which made me consider it, but it’s weekdays, all day long, for something like 17 weeks. And it’s an hour away. I can’t sign up for that without quitting my only source of income, teaching capoeira. And they couldn’t guarantee me a better job afterwards, either. They could guarantee an interview but not an actual job. Are more certifications even going to help me find a job? I already have a degree!

I used to dream about going back to California. There were more tech networks there. But tech is definitely lagging in terms of diversity, even more so in the Bay Area than in New York. I wonder sometimes if that’s why it’s been so hard for me to find work—and keep work! I mean, that could be part of it, right?

I have people to take care of. My grandparents are both ill and are being evicted from the apartment they’ve been in for 30 years. We’re taking their landlord to court. Not easy.

Tech is definitely lagging in terms of diversity, even more so in the Bay Area than in New York. I wonder sometimes if that’s why it’s been so hard for me to find work—and keep work! I mean, that could be part of it, right?

why it’s been so hard for me to find work—and keep work! I mean, that could be part of it, right? But at this point, I don’t really dream of going back to California. I am stuck with big student loans from RIT. And I’m working part-time as a capoeira instructor for kids. I love that work and am passionate about martial arts, but it’s not much. I need to find a job soon.

Sometimes I think I should try a different field. Would it be easier? But then I think about how much time, effort, and money it took to get through college. I have intense feelings of frustration and uncertainty all the time. Those feelings are real. Do I try something else? Do I keep going? Do I have to start all over?

In debt, doing the “right” things, and still without meaningful work? Millennials like Akil are learning that the college wealth premium is a myth. His family prioritized college education, but for him it hasn’t led to economic security.
Economically, we are all playing the odds, but the deck is stacked against some. Fortune may favor the prepared, and it also greatly favors the privileged. Odds of economic success can be improved a thousand ways, but only if those ways are known and available. Access to edge-gaining tactics and strategies is a privilege that can be busted open and shared.

The labor market behaves like a game of musical chairs: Participants try to position themselves as best they can, but when the music stops, someone’s always left standing. The key is ostensibly simple—don’t be that person—but it’s unclear how to win and, in recent years, it seems like the chairs have been pulled even farther away from some participants, causing even more uncertainty. In other words, players are placed in zero-sum opposition to one another, competing based on relative advantages over which they have limited influence. Survival has little to do with absolute merit and much to do with relative position. This concept of relative position is central to much of the economic mobility work of Raj Chetty et al.\[94\]

The labor market is an odds game, and, in an odds game, the house always wins.

When there are no absolutes or fail-safes for achieving economic stability, people have little choice but to play the odds of the labor market. As Darius, a 46-year-old Black man living in San Francisco, said in an interview: “Everything is going to happen; I’ve just got to wait for my chances. I don’t think there’s ever really luck involved with things; I think that you just put yourself in a position, and sometimes you just increase your odds. So I’m going to just continue to try to increase my odds of good fortune, you know?” This odds game is one that not only isn’t cheap to enter, but one that systematically disadvantaged people are ill-equipped to win. Of course, every odds game does have some winners, but in a world of imperfect information and uneven advantage, there are necessarily far more losers than winners—a game mechanic that epitomizes unscalability. Indeed, interventions that look or feel like they involve “good luck” are likely fueled by this mechanic. A better intervention would treat all players as inherently valuable—that is, not riddled with deficits but inherently capable of winning, together and simultaneously.

**DESIGN PRINCIPLE**
Assume human beings are diamonds in the rough first.

**BOTTOM LINE**
For improved adoption and scale, working adults need interventionists to:

1. Help them trust the system or bust the system
2. Get people off the back foot

We’ll unpack these opportunity areas on the following pages.
HUMAN NEED
For improved adoption and scale, working adults need interventionists to:

1. HELP THEM TRUST THE SYSTEM OR BUST THE SYSTEM

RESPONDING TO THE NEED

HOW MIGHT WE ACKNOWLEDGE THE DISTRUSTR PEOPLE HAVE IN EXISTING ECONOMIC SYSTEMS, AND EITHER REPAIR THE TRUST, REPAIR THE SYSTEM, OR GIVE ALTERNATE ROUTES?

UNPACKING THE NEED
People who seek economic mobility need to climb above the Maslow treeline, toward self-actualization, and be able to trust that their efforts will prevent them from slipping back down.

INSPIRED BY REAL PEOPLE

“"I’m starting to be more open to the idea of certifications and maybe looking into getting one. Maybe it was a bit of stubbornness, and it was a bit of arrogance in terms of thinking that I had enough. What I had should be enough to fulfill role requirements for a company or at least should get me into the door somehow without necessarily having to have a certification. I figured that, you know, having that experience, learning in internships at places like Tesla Motors, and having roles in security would speak more to my skill set than certifications, which is my frustration in my job search.”
—AKIL, WORKER

“When I graduated, I could not get a job with my master’s, and I was pretty ticked off because I was like, ‘Wow, I went through all this schooling and took out thousands in loans, and now I can’t get hired anywhere.’ So I have a second useless degree. Now I have two useless degrees. I have a useless bachelor’s, and I have a useless master’s degree. So I couldn’t get a job. And I was pretty angry about that. So I left the United States for seven years, and I just worked overseas making almost no money, but the cost of living is cheaper.”
—KYLI, WORKER

“When right after high school, I took an internship at American Airlines, the corporate office in downtown Manhattan, and I did marketing with them. That’s why I got into marketing in college. I fell in love with that, I just wanted to learn more and explore. But once I graduated, and I had my associate’s in marketing, it was very different. The job that was being offered to me was different than what I thought I was going to be doing. It wasn’t the job that was being offered to me. It was different than what I thought I was going to be doing. It wasn’t advertising—it was like cold-calling jobs and door to door. I went to community college, but from there I was just bouncing around from job to job. At first, I didn’t want to do the program. My girlfriend was telling me about STRIVE for a long, long time, telling me, ‘Hey, they can help you find a career.’

“"They won’t just put you in any jobs. There’s a lot of jobs out there, but it’s not many that can lead to a career.”
—JOEL, WORKER

SUPPORTED BY OTHER SIGNALS

“The overemphasis on skills training obscures the structural character of the problem that must be addressed: equity in workforce development. This is particularly important because training is not a guarantee of a better life…. Even completing a high-quality, labor market-responsive training program that focuses on one of those occupations would not necessarily lead a worker to a job that could adequately support a family or lead to future career growth… Job training can either be a bridge to more financial stability, or it can be a funnel to concentrate certain types of job seekers into low-wage occupations.”
American Progress: A Design for Workforce Equity

“The 50-year war on poverty has made living in poverty more tolerable, but it has not made it more escapable. Census data shows that within four years, 75% of families living below the poverty line move above it, yet 50% of these families slip back into poverty in five years.”
FILO

“We propose that policymakers do all that they can to make the world a place where when I fail for a moment because of mismanaging my scarcity, there is a way to climb out, rather than sink further.”

The psychology of scarcity: Princeton psychologist Eldar Shafir explores how deprivation wreaks havoc on cognition and decision-making

What if we invested in:
- Direct cash-flow insurance (e.g., universal basic income)
- Job guarantees, income-sharing programs and tuition assistance
- Student debt forgiveness for first-generation graduates
- “Backup job” training in the trades
- Trades-first messaging
- Community-based entrepreneurship
- Civil liberties defense fund to combat bias in hiring

Thought starters:
- G. Landed
- RisingTideCapital.org
- Who Is Robert F. Smith, the Billionaire Erasing Student Debt
- High-Paying Trade Jobs Sit Empty, While High School Grads Line Up For University
- Why Amazon’s Automated Hiring Tool Discriminated Against Women

It’s hard in a monetary system to trust people.
—JACQUE FRESCO

SOLUTION IDEA

What if we gave individuals proof that they’d never again have to start from zero? Or that there was a way to hold the current system accountable? Or that, if they so chose, they could take an alternate route?

NEEDS OF WORKING ADULTS
For improved adoption and scale, working adults need interventionists to:

INSPIRED BY REAL PEOPLE

“...As a result of finishing school early, I didn’t know how to interview well, so even though I was intelligent and coachable, I couldn’t interview well to get a position... Now, in order to do what I want, I have to take a whole aesthetician course, which doesn’t cover much of what I want to learn but I need the whole license in order to do that role.”
—BRENDA, WORKER

“...I wasn’t exactly a pristine student. I’m a terrible student. I feel like I was born into the wrong era. It took for me to get to my mid 20s to become studious. I shouldn’t have jumped from school to school when I was doing my GED program. I should’ve immediately entered the workforce.”
—DALE, WORKER

“...If I were not at FIT, and if I wasn’t so interested in textiles, I feel like I wouldn’t have gone to a four-year school. I wouldn’t have wanted to take the time and spend the money to focus on something that I wasn’t really, really interested in. I have friends who go to NC State. They have no idea what they want to do; they’re in a random program. They’re in college, but for what? No reason.”
—CLYDE, WORKER

SUPPORTED BY OTHER SIGNALS

“...As argued by Race Forward, the overemphasis on skills attainment for many workers ‘fail[s] to recognize the historical and intergenerational way in which multiple systems, including not only workforce but also education, housing, criminal justice and others, have created an inherent set of disadvantages for people of color.’ The overemphasis on skills training obscures the structural character of the problem that must be addressed: equity in workforce development.”

A Design for Workforce Equity

“...Raises have been hovering around 3% on average, leading some employees to jump to a new job for a more significant pay increase. Staying at the same place over the long haul can cost workers thousands of dollars with no real reward in terms of job security.”

2019 Salary Budgets Inch Upward Ever So Slightly

SOLUTION IDEA

What if we could help people strategically deploy their skills instead of change themselves? What if we could help them find growth and new value through acknowledging and repurposing existing skills?

What if we invested in:

- Reverse-engineering career paths and life design
- Job and career explainers to deconstruct skills used in each field and to point people to fields using similar skills as their own
- Gig economy and 1099 platforms where commonly-used skills can add value to multiple industries
- Skills-based hiring and skill assessments, including prior learning assessments

Thought starters:

- Mike Rowe of 'Dirty Jobs’ says follow opportunity, not passion
- As California Trains 20,000 Contact Tracers, Librarians and Tax Assessors Step Up
- Senegal’s dancing grandmothers lead charge for health over tradition

Time isn’t the main thing. It’s the only thing.
—MILES DAVIS
“Sometimes people with the greatest depth appear to be like fish out of water.”

—CURTIS TYRONE JONES

3 BELONGINGNESS

A PERSONAL NARRATIVE p.72

GETTING GROUNDED p.74

OPPORTUNITY AREAS p.75
A STORY ABOUT PRE-RETIREMENT, AMBITION, COMMUNITY, AGING, LOSS, AND DEALING WITH COVID-19

IT’S JUST HARD TO BELIEVE. I raised my daughter on my own. I have seven grandchildren now. And I’m in my 50s, caring for my own mother. I worked so many jobs to get me through my schooling. I mean, I really hustled. I’ve got a drive, an ambition. And it led me to health care. I was blessed to work as a home health aide for 15 years, caring for people—people who sometimes had no one else but me. Even though I had to quit because of my bad back, I still visit my patients. I care about my community, and that’s most important. I like jobs that give back. I believe in that. People are there for me and I’m there for them. And, wow, to get the chance to finally have my own business? Well, I had to pursue that. I’ve been waiting for this moment since I was in my 20s, studying business. Life threw me some curveballs. I didn’t get to start my business when I wanted to. And to finally have it, and then have it all taken away? It’s just hard to believe.

I’ve been in New York City almost my whole life. We moved here from the South, when my mom got remarried; I was around 10 or 11. Now, with grandchildren of my own, it’s been around 40 years here. The community here is strong, everyone knows everyone. It’s important that we’re there for each other and that we invest in the community. I’ve always felt this way, about giving back. Maybe it’s from my Southern roots. As small children in South Carolina, if we had company over for dinner, we didn’t eat until they left. It’s about caring for other people.

In my mid-30s or so, I was out shopping and someone just handed me a flyer. It turned out they offered training to become a home health aide. I took that opportunity, and it was a two- or three-week course. And then I moved on to get my license as a certified nurse’s assistant to give myself more options. The CNA course was longer, maybe eight or ten weeks. And it was funded by the government, so I didn’t have to pay. I liked the course but was disappointed that the class size kept getting smaller. People couldn’t pass the exams. There were tutors and everything, but you could see people were disappointed that they couldn’t get through. This whole time, I was also working and a single parent. That wasn’t easy. I stayed on in a restaurant job and also cared for my daughter while making it through that course, day by day. If the course wasn’t funded by the government, I don’t think I could’ve done it all.

After the training, I worked as a health aide for 15 years. My last job was in a nursing home. I really cared for my patients and my co-workers. We were like family. But over the years, with all that heavy lifting of people, my back started to go out. But I kept going to work. I loved my work. But eventually I just couldn’t push through the pain. I ultimately had to quit. I was sad to leave that job, and I still visit my patients. Not everyone in a nursing home has a family to come see them, so I go see them.

I’d never even considered welfare or government assistance before. That money is supposed to be for people who really need it, people who don’t have anything else. And those welfare-to-work programs? I just don’t think those even work. If people are on welfare, they become comfortable not working. Anytime you make someone
comfortable, they end up not doing well with change. I didn’t want to be that person, but I needed to survive. I didn’t want welfare to be my only option. My drive is what’s carried me throughout my whole life. I’ve always taken opportunities that have come my way. The thought of being dependent on the system and losing my drive, losing my control—that scared me. What if I got stuck and just never got out of that cycle? After I worked so hard my whole life? Was I really going to end up as a ‘welfare person’?

So I started Googling my options. There are a lot of employment programs out there, but I wasn’t looking for that. Those are temporary job placements—cleaning and restaurant work—and I couldn’t go back to standing on my feet all day, not at my age. I was looking for new skills, a new trade. I wanted to advance myself. A program called STRIVE caught my eye. I just liked the name—STRIVE. We always have to be moving forward, right? I reached out and I knew this is what I was looking for.

They offered several training programs. I took up the opportunity to get licensed in childcare. I have experience in caregiving already, so it felt like a fit. But when I went to the classes, I didn’t really feel like I fit in right away. There were lots of young people there. But over time, we got close. I really liked the program. I owe a lot to it. I’m thankful for it. God is good.

And you see that more now, older people going back to school, starting new careers. The economy is a big reason for that. Sometimes we have to have more than one job or want to switch it up a bit. When I was younger, I studied business in community college. My mother felt if I took up business, I could open up my own business. Of course, I didn’t have any money then. I was young, and I had my daughter. My mom was ill. Setbacks. That opportunity passed me by. But with STRIVE, I became a licensed childcare provider, tending to four children in my home. Finally, in my 50s I got my own business.

But COVID-19 took that away from me, and I worry whether I’ll get to care for children again. Childcare isn’t only a job—it’s a chance to give back to the community I live in. Supporting parents being able to work, that’s important. The mothers of my kids all lost their jobs with the shutdown, so now they’re taking care of their own.

And you see that more now, older people going back to school, starting new careers. The economy is a big reason for that. Sometimes we have to have more than one job, or want to switch it up a bit.
For some, belongingness is survival. Despite their strength, an overwhelming number of people who struggle with economic stability also struggle with physical and emotional scars of all kinds. Feeling that you belong is crucial in coping with intensely painful traumas. Because of this, communities and intimate relationships are crucial.

**Design Question**

What is it about past interventions that reminds us of lotto winners?

When it comes to household-income curves, there are two ways to move an individual to the right—pluck them from one quintile and place them in another or shift the whole curve. In the former, sole individuals get a shot at fortune, but at the expense of leaving communities behind, which—ironically—may be why positive impact on an individual’s life either doesn’t last or doesn’t spread. This ends up looking like a statewide lottery or maybe Publishers Clearing House—individuals certainly experience mobility along that horizontal axis, but the curve itself does not.

**Insight**

Community mobility instead of individual mobility might be the secret sauce for scale.

Interventions that separate individuals from deeply personal, carefully constructed communities may be getting physiological, safety, or esteem needs met while simultaneously destroying belongingness, which all but guarantees anemic scalability. People need to move rightward on the income axis, but the idea that they can do so in isolation—detached from extended families, unmoored from long-standing communities, buoyed by individualism—is false. Bradley, a Black 27-year-old Loyola student in Chicago, had a data-analytics opportunity with the NFL but turned it down: “Their job takes them away from their family. The normalcy is no longer there. Everybody from the NFL organization, when they have those games over in London, in a foreign country, everybody must go as a requirement. You can have a career and make money, but it’s taking you away from your loved ones.” Asked about career plans now, he says: “I want to be an electrician because it’s a skill to fall back on. It’s something useful that you can utilize among your household as well as helping out loved ones or people close. You might need a plumber, and they might be a plumber.”

**Design Principle**

Let people bring their community with them.

What if we focused on investments that improve and renovate rather than remove and relocate? What if we knew when to stop treating something—such as the shape and position of an income curve—like a fixed design constraint and start treating it like a malleable object of design?

**Bottom Line**

For improved adoption and scale, working adults need interventionists to:

1. **Invest in Whole Communities**
2. **Take a Closer Look Around**

We’ll unpack these opportunity areas on the following pages.
HUMAN NEED

For improved adoption and scale, working adults need interventionists to:

1. Invest in whole communities

RESPONDING TO THE NEED

HOW MIGHT WE PRESERVE AND BOLSTER EXISTING COMMUNITIES TO ENSURE THE KIND OF BELONGING THAT LEADS TO LASTING—AND THEREFORE SCALABLE—CHANGE?

UNPACKING THE NEED

People who seek economic mobility need to feel a sense of true belonging surrounded by intimate relationships as they undertake difficult journeys that may force them to work through long-standing traumas.

INSPIRED BY REAL PEOPLE

I care about my community. I like jobs that give back. I believe in that. People are there for me, and I’m there for them. The community here is strong. Everyone knows everyone. It’s important that we’re there for each other and that we invest in the community. I’ve always felt this way. Maybe it’s my Southern roots. As a small child in South Carolina, if we had company over for dinner, we didn’t eat until they left. It’s about caring for other people. I feel like STRIVE gave me a place to assert myself in the community, to build up and help moms who are working that second shift. I wanted to continue to pay it forward. I like running my in-home daycare because it’s not only helping me, but I get a chance to give back to the community."

—KATHERINE, WORKER

Before I started Concourse, I went to Evergreen Valley College close to my home. My mom was key because she would help me with my baby. While I went to school, she would take care of him, then I would pick him up and go home. If you keep your family together when they’re young, when they grow older they’ll stay together. That’s one of the things that I’m trying with my four-year-old because I was always there for my other two older ones.”

—NOEMI, WORKER

I’m a mama’s boy, so as soon as I got the letter, I was like, ‘Ma, look at this.’ I explained it to her, she read it, and she’s like, ‘It seems nice.’ I’m like, ‘Yeah.’ She was like, ‘Are you going to do it?’ I’m like, ‘Well, I’m going to give it a try, you know—like, I emailed them. I’m going to call them on Monday morning.’ Monday morning, 9:00, where a good mother at: ‘Hey, did you call those people?’ I was at work. I’m like, ‘Yeah, yeah, I called them, I spoke to them. I got to go on this day and do this and do this.’ And I mean my mother even came for my graduation because she was very happy for me. Do you understand what I am saying? Then my brother, of course—I mean we live in the same house. Me and my brother are like best friends. So I let him know, and he’s like ‘Do it.’ And I’m like, ‘Yeah, I’m going to do it.’ And here we are.”

—SHARIYF, WORKER

SUPPORTED BY OTHER SIGNALS

“Wealth inequality is more extreme than income inequality. Excessive concentration of wealth slows economic progress, tears at our social fabric, and undermines our democracy due to how it functions differently than income. Household wealth can be passed down through generations not only through inheritance, but through wealth transfers at critical points. Such transfers mean that those children can develop more assets that outweigh their debts, which is of particular importance for Black families who disproportionately lack these opportunities.”

Baby Bonds: A Universal Path to Ensure the Next Generation Has the Capital to Thrive (Insight Center)

“Economic poverty is often accompanied by a poverty of social capital, a network of relationships based on shared values and identities. Social capital can be described as a sense of belongingness. A middle-class person is more likely to join a choral society, faith community, or civic improvement group. This fellowship is good for us. Volunteering has been linked to lower rates of depression; participation in a faith community, to longer life. Coronavirus has shut down most of these groups. Many barriers already prevented participation for lower income people: work schedules, transportation, fees, and discomfort with the dominant culture of these institutions.”

The Greatest Public Health Threat Is Poverty (Yale School of Medicine)

SOLUTION IDEA

What if we viewed individual successes as wins for entire communities? And invested in family units, extended person-to-person networks, or entire communities instead of picking a lucky, disconnected few?

What if we invested in:

Universal basic income for families
Reparrations for Black Americans
Trusts and safety nets for our most economically unstable ZIP codes

Thought starters:

“The Case for Reparations” by Ta-Nehisi Coates
Family Independence Initiative: Home | FII
The Posse Foundation
Brookings: Black reparations and the racial wealth gap

Not belonging is a terrible feeling. It feels awkward, and it hurts, as if you are wearing someone else’s shoes.

—PHOEBE STONE
HUMAN NEED

For improved adoption and scale, working adults need interventionists to:

SOLUTION IDEA

What if we supported connection, interpersonal networking, and social capital formation within neighborhoods as the first step before trying to insert social capital from outside the core community?

What if we invested in:
- Community gathering spaces
- Hyper-local volunteering/informal jobs boards
- Local-level job recruiting and ambassador programs
- Local youth programming and mentorship
- Launching a VC fund to invest in small business to create high-quality jobs in local communities
- Engaging philanthropy more meaningfully in small local business

Thought starters:
- Nextdoor137
- “Show recruiters you’re open to job opportunities” feature on LinkedIn138
- Where You Shop Matters: How Thinking Local Can Help Kickstart the COVID-19 Recovery139
- Create Good Quality Jobs | Pacific Community Ventures140
- Public Private Strategies | Small Business, Big Impact141

SUPPORTED BY OTHER SIGNALS

“Neighborhoods need to define their priorities for themselves; in so doing, they often discover that there are untapped opportunities to grow their own local economies, without needing to import talent from elsewhere. Even if your city’s brand is busted, your community is still capable of re-building itself. As Jane Jacobs once argued, ‘the best cities are actually federations of great neighborhoods.’”

Opportunity Is Local (Or: You Can’t Buy a New Economy)142

“If you're always trying to be normal, you will never know how amazing you can be.”

—MAYA ANGELOU

INSPIRED BY REAL PEOPLE

“I used to work in an insurance office. It was more like selling insurance. But we couldn’t bind because we didn’t have the licenses. So we would be filling out papers and helping the clients making payments, and it’s like a whole new language in the insurance business. How did I get that job? I think we had insurance there, and then the owner offered me, like, ‘Hey, you looking for a job?’ Because I think we went in to do a payment, and they offered me the job right there. I did that part-time for more than five years.”

—NOEMI, WORKER

“After a while, you sort of beat yourself up and you’re like, ‘Well, what’s wrong with me?’ But you know, there’s nothing wrong with you. It’s just a competitive job market. So you kind of have to kind of wing it. But I finally got a job. It was a fairly successful small agency, and he was looking for an assistant. It was just crazy timing. He just ran into my mom and was like, ‘I need an assistant.’ My mother was like, ‘Oh, well, my daughter needs a job.’”

—CAZ, WORKER

“I walked in because I was fed up with the restaurant job that I had across the street. I was like, ‘How do I become a personal trainer?’ And Isaac, the manager at the time, he was like, ‘Well, you can’t just become one; you have to go to our training school, and then you have to get certified.’ I was like, ‘Fine. How do I do that?’”

—KYLI, WORKER

Unpacking the Need

People who seek economic mobility need help elevating and fortifying the inherent value and advantages of their own communities, not interventions that alter, project unfamiliar values, or act to separate people from place.
“Being quiet is comfortable. Keeping things the way they are is comfortable. And all comfort has done is maintain the status quo.”

—LUVVIE AJAYI
AS A YOUNG BLACK MAN, I refuse to become a statistic. I’ve always looked for ways to better myself, to have more freedom. I struggled in high school and decided to quit, so my mom signed me up for Job Corps, where I saw some rough crowds. A lot of those guys were there on court order. There were some bad social dealings there. I’ll leave it at that. Looking back, I feel like some of those guys had undiagnosed learning disabilities. I myself could be on the spectrum. I never really fit in. But we didn’t learn about that stuff back then. I only knew that school was hard. Anyway, I wanted to get out of Job Corps as soon as possible, so I got my GED and moved on, but I should’ve studied a trade there instead—more job security. Those Job Corps guys reminded me of some people I know now. Have you ever tried to get a job with a criminal background? It’s pretty much impossible. I refuse to go through that.

You want to know the biggest hurdle to finding good work? Background checks. If a person has a criminal record, it’s hard to find good work because companies won’t hire them. When companies run background checks, they don’t take into consideration if the people have made conscious decisions to change their lives. You’re always branded a criminal. You’re basically committed for life if you have a record. You pretty much become a slave, because you’ll always be working under a certain class or degree of people. You’ll be judged. And that’s even if you get the job. If you’re applying to a job with 30 other people, why would they pick you?

And it’s easy to see how this system starts. People hit hard times early in life, and the consequences stay with them. Growing up, school didn’t come so easy to me. I did okay when I applied myself, but overall it was a struggle. I’ve never felt like a good student. It was always harder for me than other kids. Because of this, I ended up leaving school. I wanted to make money right away and did all types of administrative work around town. I remember I had a job at a grocery store when I was a teenager, too. I was working a lot of random jobs. So when my mom suggested Job Corps in Georgia, I signed up. Honestly, though, Job Corps was like a mini project—meaning, it was like living in the projects. I was able to make it through despite that environment. It was kind of wild. It wasn’t easy to study or learn there. The place was full of gangbangers and guys attending because they got it assigned to them through court order. As a young Black man, I wanted to get away from some of those bad social dealings I had witnessed there. I wanted to get out of there as fast as possible. I didn’t want to end up in some system. I wanted more for myself.

Fortunately, I was able to get my GED there, though I wish I had pursued learning a trade at Job Corps instead. Everyone has this dream that they’ll be a great college student, and I was no different then. We all want that, right? That’s why I went the GED route. I figured I’d complete college after. But now, I have a friend who is a trained plumber and gets paid well and has a safe job. That makes me wish I had followed the trade path instead. There’s job security in specialized trade work.
Looking back, some of those guys really struggled to learn. And maybe I did, too. Back then, we didn’t know about learning disabilities. No one ever talked about that. We didn’t know what that was. As kids and teenagers, it wasn’t clear why some people had an easier time learning and fitting in than others. And there wasn’t the kind of support that there is now, in certain communities. I felt school was harder for me but never really knew why. Then, as an adult, I myself learned about autism in a magazine. I figure I might be on the spectrum. I share some of those same qualities.

I’ve always felt like I’m not a clear fit in so many circles. I’m a young Black man, for starters. But then I’m also a skater. And I’m not someone who is comfortable around a lot of people. It bothers me. I feel different than other people, socially. I don’t emote in the same ways. I can’t work around so many people all the time; it stresses me out. I don’t fit in. I need a way to make money where I can be on my own. That’s why I’m studying film. I can be a freelance videographer.

After some moves and bouncing around between jobs, I found a gig on Craigslist with a company that places workers in restaurants that need short-term help. It’s this gig app called Qwick. So it got me doing restaurant work, working at the bar and in the kitchen, but I don’t want to work in restaurants forever. I have a personal policy never to accept full-time offers in the restaurants because I’m afraid to get stuck. I don’t like the work. I mean, restaurants are traps. The workers never make enough money to open their own restaurants. Someone else always owns them and profits off of them. My plan has always been to get out of that work. For better or worse, COVID-19 kinda forced that. All the restaurant gigs dried up overnight, so I had to go get a job at my local Sprouts. I’m glad I got it, but man, I can’t believe I’m back at a grocery store at the age of 31. I’d rather be doing the restaurant gigs.

One positive to the gig work is that it’s flexible, and that helps because I’m a student again. I’m in film school right now, online, and that’s my top priority. The restaurant work allows me to focus on this. I’m taking it one step at a time. Working as a videographer would give me more options and financial security. And

As a young Black man in Atlanta, I want better for myself and will keep working through film school, slow and steady. Sometimes it takes me longer to get where I want to go, but I refuse to become a statistic.
Privileged people hold **positions of power**. There can be no honest conversation about economic opportunity for all without addressing how structural systems of oppression confer benefits and power upon privileged people. The hard work of reversing systems of oppression must not fall to those oppressed.

**Design Question**
What is it about skills-oriented approaches that feels like it may be missing the mark?

The designers of economic mobility interventions are unlikely to be users themselves. People who struggle with economic stability are rarely in control of these design processes; after all, it’s difficult to design solutions for financial stability in the absence of one’s own financial stability. The economic mismatch between interventionist and user increases the risk of advantage blindness infiltrating the work, thereby increasing the odds of various forms of design ineffectiveness, including unscaability stemming from a failure to address underlying power and class structures. Skills-oriented approaches appear dismissive of the barriers disadvantaged people face even after acquiring skills. These barriers are reflective of a class gap not addressed by most interventions. Closing that class gap requires acknowledging that it exists.

**Insight**
We are part of the system, thus we can’t change the system without changing ourselves.

As philosopher Marshall McLuhan once observed: “One thing about which fish know exactly nothing is water, since they have no anti-environment which would enable them to perceive the element they live in.” Interventionists in the economic mobility space sometimes struggle with similar problems of perception because they lack direct knowledge of experiences counterractive to their own. The frequent economic mismatch between interventionist and beneficiary in this work makes human-centeredness and empathy even more crucial than usual. But it also gives rise to an additional obligation on the part of the interventionist: it requires more and deeper self-awareness than would be needed if the economic gap between designer and user were smaller. A lack of self-awareness, even if accidental, keeps systems of oppression in place.

While our privilege gives us the power to respond to the core problem beneficiaries face, our privilege and our power also generate it. The truth is: we can’t affect the system without affecting ourselves. That is a challenge interventionists need not just face (as a simple context of design) but embrace (as a formidable yet entirely investable and malleable object of design).

**Design Principle**
Be self-centered in order to be human-centered.

What if for research, we looked not just into windows but into mirrors? What if we started calling out euphemism when we see it masquerading as optimism? What if we traded well-intended belief in pure meritocracies for a healthy suspicion of design responses that don’t somehow downgrade or mitigate the relative power of the relatively powerful, including ourselves?

**Bottom Line**
For improved adoption and scale, working adults need interventionists to:
1. **Bravely Face the Music**
2. **Listen Intently and Often**

We’ll unpack these opportunity areas on the following pages.
For improved adoption and scale, working adults need interventionists to:

1. BRAVELY FACE THE MUSIC

**INSPIRED BY REAL PEOPLE**

“...I didn’t enjoy my last job. It was very stressful to me. It was definitely a very uptight world. I didn’t feel comfortable with all of my coworkers. I had to have emails from all over the world answered within like an hour—45 minutes to an hour or so. The bulk of what they were doing was mergers and acquisitions. I’m looking at lawsuits—like, I’m not a lawyer. I’m not really crazy about law. I’d like to do something positive. I still feel like I’m not up to par with them. That was a point of anxiety for me, actually. So when I got fired, I was actually happy. I was glad to just be done. That last experience has definitely made me a bit more picky. It caused troubles with my mental health in a negative way. That was my biggest lesson from that. It was like, ‘Don’t ever take a job like that. No job is worth sacrificing your mental health.’ My last boss was not the greatest person either. It was like an elite kind of locker room. That might have been why it was very high-stress.”

—AKIL, WORKER

**SUPPORTED BY OTHER SIGNALS**

“...There are some dentists who are barely tolerable because some people have some extremely eccentric personalities. I know there’s a lot more employer-employee laws now, but at the time there weren’t. They can talk to you in whatever way they want to, and slam things, and can be pretty abusive. Major micromanagers, and I survived.”

—BRENDA, WORKER

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—AKIL, WORKER

“What if we invested in:

- Pro-bono legal support in discrimination cases
- Abolishing criminal background checks for minor offenses in the hiring process
- Pushing the redesign of the credit rating system
- Protections for 1099 workers
- Economic and social-identity diversity requirements for boards
- Mitigating voter suppression in communities of color

**SOLUTION IDEA**

We look into mirrors, but we only see the effects of our times on us—not our effects on others.

—PEARL BAILEY
For improved adoption and scale, working adults need interventionists to:

**INSPIRED BY REAL PEOPLE**

"I enrolled in community college at 22. I only enrolled because I was pregnant with my daughter and knew that I needed to do something more. I really needed the financial aid. What gave me the initiative to go to school was the financial aid. The backup thought was: 'If I'm going to school, I would do it in something I'm interested in and build a career in.'"
—MYIAH, WORKER

"I got a job as a security guard at a Cartier store. At the time I had just grown my hair. I had dreadlocks. They wanted to cut my hair. I refused to do it, and yeah, at that point I was just like okay, this is ridiculous. So that job didn't last long."
—SHARIYF, WORKER

"My mom was just a homemaker. She did work at Burger King a long time ago. My dad worked in a warehouse. In the Hispanic families, the woman stays home and doesn't want to—I mean, not that they don't want to do anything—but it's like, you're more of a housewife. But with my husband, it's not like that. He's like, 'You gotta do something because if something happened to me, what are you going to do for yourself?'"
—NOEMI, WORKER

**SUPPORTED BY OTHER SIGNALS**

“We understand intuitively that, because others are like us, they suffer similar pains and enjoy similar pleasures. So far, so good. The problem—the disconnect if you will—is that those similarities sometimes are superficial. The working poor may look like the more advantaged—they have jobs, houses, cars, etc. But the truth is that they live on the margins of financial disaster.”

The wealthy suffer from an ‘empathy gap’ with the poor that is feeding a rise in inequality.

“To paraphrase, my agent was pushing back a meeting necessary for the completion and timely release of my book—which is about how Black people can apply the lessons we derive from traumatic experiences to our careers—so that white people could reflect on how to help Black people. I countered, insisting that our meeting take place as scheduled because Black people’s lives are in danger, and I shouldn’t have to sacrifice momentum on a book written for Black people because white people are performing empathy.”

Opinion | I Don’t Need ‘Love’ Texts From My White Friends

“Anti-racism work is not self-improvement work for white people. It doesn’t end when white people ‘feel better.’ It ends when Black people are liberated.”
—Rachel Cargle

**SOLUTION IDEA**

What if instead of asking communities of color to do more, we invested in deeper psychological and behavioral bias and empathy work for white people, to benefit equity efforts?

**What if we invested in:**

- Bias testing (rather than training)
- Compensating employees of diverse social identities directly for all culture and/or diversity awareness work within companies
- Paid reverse mentoring (conducted by employees who volunteer to mentor) to tackle bias and racial dynamics
- Leveraging the voices of real people who are closest to the issues by funding ongoing and rotating advisory panels

**Thought starters:**

- Harvard’s Project Implicit
- Black Lives Matter
- StoryCorps
- Want To Be An Office Ally
- Reverse Mentoring
- Aspen Ascend’s parent voice advisory panel

One of the most sincere forms of respect is actually listening to what another has to say.
—BRYANT MCGILL
## Needs of Working Adults in Sum

### Themes

1. **Hero’s Journey**
   Every person is on a hero’s journey, facing their own problems and slaying their own dragons. It’s a part of the human condition; we all share common psychological and functional needs that transcend demographics. Addressing these needs is how we grow, self-actualize, and reach our full potential.

2. **Playing the Odds**
   Economically, we are all playing the odds, but the deck is stacked against some. Fortune may favor the prepared, and it also greatly favors the privileged. Odds of economic success can be improved a thousand ways, but only if those ways are known and available. Access to edge-gaining tactics and strategies is a privilege that can be busted open and shared.

3. **Belongingness**
   For some, belongingness is survival. Despite their strength, an overwhelming number of people who struggle with economic stability also struggle with physical and emotional scars of all kinds. Feeling that you belong is crucial in coping with intensely painful traumas. Because of this, communities and intimate relationships are crucial.

4. **Positions of Power**
   Privileged people hold positions of power. There can be no honest conversation about economic opportunity for all without addressing how structural systems of oppression confer benefits and power upon privileged people. The hard work of reversing systems of oppression must not fall to those oppressed.

### Opportunity Areas

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<td><strong>Change the Locus of Control.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Do First Things First.</strong></td>
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<td>People who seek economic mobility need agency to select particular solutions to their particular problems—the ability to say yes to what they need and no to what they don’t need.</td>
<td>People who seek economic mobility need their resource deprivation acknowledged and addressed, in a way that pays it forward to the community, before headway can be made on their personal growth.</td>
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<td><strong>Trust the System or Bust the System.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Get People Off the Back Foot.</strong></td>
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<td>People who seek economic mobility need to climb above the Maslow treeline, toward self-actualization, and trust that their efforts will prevent them from slipping back down.</td>
<td>People who seek economic mobility need opportunities designed for their existing valuable talent, knowledge, abilities, and assets—especially assets like time—before asking them to develop additional ones or give up invaluable time.</td>
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<td><strong>Invest in Whole Communities.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Take a Closer Look Around.</strong></td>
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<td>People who seek economic mobility need to feel a sense of true belonging surrounded by intimate relationships as they undertake difficult journeys that force them to work through long-standing traumas.</td>
<td>People who seek economic mobility need help elevating and fortifying the inherent value and advantages of their own communities, not interventions that alter, project unfamiliar values, or act to separate people from place.</td>
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<td><strong>Bravely Face the Music.</strong></td>
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<td>People who seek economic mobility need partners in power, especially philanthropists, who can master the art of radical self-awareness and system-awareness with courage, even in the face of controversy.</td>
<td>People who seek economic mobility need partners in power, especially philanthropists, to continually seek out and obtain a deep and intentional education on the nuances of their experience.</td>
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NEEDS OF HIRING MANAGERS

Rank-and-file managers are multiple and diffuse, often with no formal training related to hiring. Though they are influenced by a supporting cast of HR and recruiters, they possess high degrees of autonomy. We wanted to meet and understand these people. Their personal stories and experiences shed new light on how designers, funders, operators, and other interventionists might be able to influence and reduce labor market friction.

So we met many people who are connected to hiring inside companies of all shapes and sizes, and we developed deeper relationships with a few. Brooke is a lifelong human resources professional who sees its untapped potential for human capital development. Peter is a dyed-in-the-wool people manager who takes ownership of the growth trajectory of new hires who come into his business unit. Tag is a small-business owner who takes matters of employment into her own hands with careful attention to detail. Tom is a high-ranking official in a professional services firm tasked with managing huge teams and keeping freshly sold client projects staffed.

These narratives illuminate the collective employer experience, which informs the way labor market demand shows up in America today.

In qualitative design research, we uncover patterns of experience and evolve them into jumping-off points for problem-solving. The stories of Tag, Brooke, Peter, Tom, and many others collectively revealed four broad themes—areas where interventions might be needed most.

1. HUMAN NATURE
   There is a great deal of human nature in people, as Mark Twain observed. Business managers are obliged to comply with the basic premise of the American economy: self-interest. Despite personal misgivings, managers are incentivized to make choices that maximize shorter-term business growth—not necessarily human potential.

2. GROUP DYNAMICS
   Firms are groups, subject to group dynamics like social loafing—the tendency of individuals to put in less effort when working in a group context. Members of a group often perceive that neither rewards (in case of success) nor blame (in case of failure) will be attributed properly. This attribution concern is important to address.

3. POWER MOVES
   Even small decisions can feel like unfair power moves to a job seeker. Many business managers don’t realize the power they wield because it was unintentionally acquired. This can be dangerous, like a giant who doesn’t know his own strength.

4. COST OF DOING BUSINESS
   The cost of doing business refers to all expenses incurred in producing and selling—like labor budgets, inclusive of hiring, training, and reskilling. As long as a firm is producing and selling, it’s incurring these expenses, which is to say: always. This is why employee growth should be treated as a regular expense, not a special, discretionary opportunity—a subtle but important shift in mental model.
1 HUMAN NATURE

A PERSONAL NARRATIVE  p.86

GETTING GROUNDED  p.88

OPPORTUNITY AREAS  p.89

“The virtues are lost in self-interest as rivers are lost in the sea.”
—FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT
I LOVE RUNNING MY OWN BUSINESS. It’s so different than being at a typical office job, behind a desk. Even though I did it, that was never really for me. I wanted to do more. I think some ways of working come down to personality, you know. Some people like working in an office, and some people need to run their own show and pour their heart into their own business. That’s me. It certainly isn’t easy to be a small-business owner. One of the biggest struggles is in the hiring process. Great people are hard to come by. I run a line of beauty products, so getting someone to care about our products as much as me and do a good job promoting them, that can be tough. And I put a lot of energy into my staff—training them, etc. You have to dedicate yourself to crafting your own job descriptions and putting in the time to get a good result. But there are no guarantees.

I’m an extremely spontaneous person by nature. I have moved to new places, traveled the world, and learned new skills along the way, picking up whatever I need whenever I need to. I really enjoy trying new things. It helps me keep growing, expanding. I am always in it for the experience. I grew up on the East Coast and have been in New York City for many, many years now. I would not say that I loved school, but I excelled at it. I graduated high school years early and got into two Ivy League schools, though I ultimately chose to attend somewhere else. But I have always committed myself to my own growth. I’ve worked in various sales and marketing roles most of my career and earned my MBA at Babson while I was working there in the development office, so the tuition was free. Did you know they are the number one entrepreneurial studies school in the world? I think that ties directly into my personal story and journey toward becoming an entrepreneur.

From a young age, I was always passionate about health and beauty. My father always thought I would be the doctor in my family, but honestly it was not my calling. I couldn’t picture myself working in that type of environment, dealing with illnesses, treating disease. But I was really attracted to the wellness end of it, so I became a board-certified massage therapist and aesthetician. There’s a saying: “You never regret working out.” It is the same for skills and education—investing in yourself, in your well-being, and in the experiences you have had. You never regret it.

People have always said to me, “You have way too much personality to sit behind a desk.” Honestly, I shared their sentiments. I was tired of busting my butt for someone else when I knew that whatever it was that I was doing, I could do it better and faster for myself. So eventually, I made the leap to launch my own comprehensive skincare line, which I sell directly into spas, salons, and wellness centers. I am fortunate that running my own business is something that comes naturally to me. It’s exactly what I want to be doing, so it almost doesn’t...
feel like work. Sure, I work a lot—oftentimes 70 or 80 hours a week—but that comes with the territory. That is what it takes to run a successful small business. It certainly is not easy, but it is worth it. It’s amazing to see it grow.

As my business expanded over the years, I needed to hire additional staff. It’s always tricky bringing new people onto a team. The hiring process can be challenging. Sometimes you get someone that’s a dream come true, and other times you get someone who literally does not produce. Getting the wrong person can be a punch in the gut, very costly, especially when you’ve got a young business that is on a rapid growth trajectory. You really can’t afford to get it wrong. But at the same time, it can take a lot of time and effort to get the right hire, so when I am looking for talent, I am very, very specific about which skills and certifications I require. I know the precise needs of my business and feel 100% comfortable writing those job descriptions from scratch myself. I probably would never just lift verbiage from some other job description online. If I know exactly what I want and what I’m looking for, why wouldn’t I do that? Because if a job description is too broad, I receive a downpour of applicants that are unqualified and unsuitable. I don’t have that kind of time to waste.

In my line of work, it’s crucial to have industry experience. Certifications are often required, too, but industry experience is the real linchpin. That’s not to say I don’t value education in my prospective hires—I do. Being educated shows dedication. It shows that someone has the ability to see something through. However, I will say, though valuable, hands-on experience, skill set, and good work ethic have proven to be far more important than a college degree. I’ve learned that over the years.

And I think another important factor informing my opinion there is that when I bring people on board, I really invest my own personal time in them. Training is so important to build trust and passion in a sales team. They need to know the industry inside and out, and they need the product knowledge to perform well with potential buyers. Trade shows are particularly crucial, so I take it upon myself to train them. Without depth of understanding about the market and what buyers need to see and hear, it is challenging to become a key player, so this is why.

Trade shows are particularly crucial, so I take it upon myself to train them. Without depth of understanding about the market and what buyers need to see and hear, it is challenging to become a key player, so this is why.

I really prioritize seasoned industry professionals and training them on the product line myself.

Years ago, I hired someone that seemed fantastic during the hiring process, but she turned out to be all smoke and mirrors. She added enormous stress so I had to eventually let her go. Upon her termination, I was reviewing all of her call lists and discovered the records of her sales calls were all falsified. Lesson learned—$30,000 later. Like I said, the wrong hire can be costly.

When you’re hiring someone, it’s important to balance thoroughness with time investment. The other side of the coin, though, is that you cannot spend all of your time hiring when you’re running a business. One cannot be too cautious during the hiring process in the quest to locate your ideal candidate, but there needs to be a balance between that caution and reviewing the hundreds of resumes you are inundated with—the risk versus the reward.
There is a great deal of human nature in people, as Mark Twain observed. Business managers are obliged to comply with the basic premise of the American economy: self-interest. Despite personal misgivings, managers are incentivized to make choices that maximize shorter-term business growth—not necessarily human potential.

**DESIGN QUESTION**
What is it about involvement between employers and workforce-development programs that feels a little dishonest?

Many interventions in the labor-market space that involve employers share two characteristics that don’t feel quite right. First, they often aren’t woven deeply into core business operations—they feel more like shiny charitable projects than routine operating expenses, even though routine treatment as an operating expense is precisely what an intervention would need for long-term sustainability and scale. Second, they often rely on individual employees’ prioritizing moral rectitude above business imperatives—this feels more like a boxing match between David and Goliath than a harmless tension that will never come to bear. Indeed, if succeeding means scaling, these interventions don’t seem set up for success.

**INSIGHT**
We’re only human, after all—and for-profit businesses are only for-profit businesses after all.

If we continue to discount, deny, or otherwise downplay human nature and the way that it manifests both at the individual decision-maker level and the group organizational level, we will be guilty of magical thinking. In particular, if we continue to discount the human motivations of rank-and-file hiring managers—those people in whose hands rests the surprisingly simple power of yes or no—we’ll miss the opportunity for big, sustained change. Indeed, if we want to shift from charity to change, we must start designing for the extremes of potential responses, including the heartless extreme. If something can work even according to the coldest business calculus, then it can work anywhere.

**DESIGN PRINCIPLE**
Design for it all—the good, the bad, and the ugly.

What if we designed for the full suite of human behaviors and motivations, not just an idealized subset? What if we harnessed behavioral economics to make it easy and elegant for individual hiring managers and their supporting casts to do the right thing? What if, for them, it didn’t even feel like a painful, difficult decision at all?

**BOTTOM LINE**
For improved adoption and scale, hiring managers need interventionists to:

1. **TAKE EMPLOYERS AS THEY ARE**
2. **BRING SEXY BACK TO HIRING TASKS**

We’ll unpack these opportunity areas on the following pages.

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**Freud’s Conception of the Human Psyche: The Iceberg Metaphor**

- **Conscious**
- **Preconscious**
- **Unconscious**
- **Nonconscious**

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For improved adoption and scale, hiring managers need interventionists to:

**TAKE EMPLOYERS AS THEY ARE**

**RESPONDING TO THE NEED**

**HOW MIGHT WE MAKE A HIRING MANAGER INSTINCTUALLY FEEL LIKE IT’S OBVIOUSLY “WORTH IT” FOR THEM TO GIVE A NONTRADITIONAL CANDIDATE A CHANCE?**

**UNPACKING THE NEED**

People who make hiring decisions need their humanity recognized, accepted, and addressed, not swept under the rug.

**INSPIRED BY REAL PEOPLE**

“

I love to solve problems. It’s what I’m good at. But everything we do has to work for both sides of the equation. We serve the candidates as much as we serve the clients. The majority of candidates don’t get the outcome they desire, but that doesn’t mean we don’t support them. When you think about when somebody goes looking for a job, an average job we have open, we’re going to get somewhere between 30–100 people apply for that job. Only one of them gets it. The vast majority do not get the outcome that they desire. How do we manage that with dignity and continue to support? We’re not a charity. Profit is important, but so is maintaining a process that treats everybody with dignity throughout. It’s equally important. I don’t think those are at odds.”

—JIM, EMPLOYER

“Companies call all the time and want me to pay for their workers. Yet we have the Urban League that isn’t asking me to pay for the worker but they’re saying, ‘Hey, give my people a chance.’ We’ve never paid for the worker. You’re training someone for profit and building your business, and now you’re going to charge us for them. So you’re kind of double-dipping. Whereas, I would much rather give you money holistically so that my community, because those people don’t necessarily have the funding to go to the for-profit program.”

—STEPHANIE, EMPLOYER

“Each recruiter on my team has anywhere between eight and 10 clients—business unit hiring managers—that they’re responsible for. Then I, by default, get to know the noisiest ones. Everybody on my team has an individual OKR [objectives and key results]. Every quarter, they’re responsible for hiring X number of people. My OKR is the sum of everybody on my team. My clients are hiring managers. I am measured on what percentage I get of their goal. Like, if they need 100 people hired, how did I do in 2019? Those really clear quantitative measures.”

—LINH, EMPLOYER

**SUPPORTED BY OTHER SIGNALS**

“Now that you know the truth about the civilian hiring game, it’s time to leverage your mastery of its rules in your search: [1] Instead of approaching the process as if it were a robotic talent allocation system, you’re going to empathize with the flesh-and-blood humans running the process—and especially their pain. [2] Instead of assuming that recruiters and hiring managers are all driven by the same incentives, you’re going to recognize their unique roles and modify your approach accordingly. [3] Instead of hoping that a meritocracy recognizes your talent and hard work, you’ll see the system for what it is—a relatively arbitrary process—and make that process work for you by speaking the recruiter’s language and getting referrals.”

*The Definitive Post-Military Job Search Handbook*

“While figuring out how to get Black employees in the door of your organization is important, focusing on how to keep them there and grow them into leadership roles is even more important. Organizations should be measuring the outcomes of all of their people practices—from recruiting and hiring to promotions, compensation, and attrition—to evaluate where racial disparities exist.”

*Restructure Your Organization to Actually Advance Racial Justice*

**SOLUTION IDEA**

What if we helped position human resources and hiring managers to be stewards of equity within their organizations?

What if we invested in:

- Nonprofits working with or focused on employers, like the James Irvine Foundation’s “Better Careers” initiative
- Hiring post-mortems for large companies (and corporate tax credits as incentives)
- HR-led redesigns of hiring processes, e.g., applicant and post-hire process surveys with improvement incentives for HR and hiring managers
- Standalone, industry-specific recruiting firms representing underrepresented communities, to counter the perception that there’s a lack of candidates with those backgrounds

**Thought starters:**

- These Companies Connect Employers to Diverse Pools of Talent
- Airbnb Grows Women in Data Science by 100%
- *equityXdesign: Racism and inequity can be redesigned*
- “Targeted hire” standards in Washington, Alaska, S.F., Seattle

*There is a great deal of human nature in people.*

—MARK TWAIN
For improved adoption and scale, hiring managers need interventionists to:

**INSPIRED BY REAL PEOPLE**

I was willing to train her because—well, I think it’s a bit of an ego-legacy kind of thing. I think there is something that starts at ego, when you see people that you’ve trained succeed. You helped somebody get to a cool place that they wanted to go. I also, to a certain degree, like to train people on my processes.”
—CAZ, EMPLOYER

“We’ve got a huge need for cyber talent, we have the added complexity of the fact that we need security-cleared cyber talent. The physical resources outside of our company do not exist at the level that we need them, to staff what we need to staff. And every company is competing for those very same slim amount of resources. And so we physically cannot meet the demand if we don’t do something internally.”
—DEB, EMPLOYER

“We have a library of skills we ultimately boil down to a competency library of about 30 skills that we feel like are applicable to most roles. And so through a consultative process with my team, we’ll say, this is the skill that you’re looking for. It’s not static.... We’ll revisit at the six-month mark in role. We’ll re-look at the key impact areas and click back out to see what are the skills required.”
—CAROLYN, EMPLOYER

**SUPPORTED BY OTHER SIGNALS**

“Find overlap in must-do tasks and training opportunities. Regardless of whether your new hires are recent graduates or seasoned pros, do not be afraid to give them hands-on work. They can learn a lot about a client or your processes by completing some of your more straightforward tasks, such as shadowing a meeting and taking notes or completing some portions of client onboarding. In addition to familiarizing new hires with company norms, this approach will also free up other team members to handle more complex work. It offers a way to allow new employees to gain a solid understanding of your company while also being immediately useful.”

Owning Your Onboarding Process Is the Key to Success With New Hires

“Lisa Borders, president of the Women’s National Basketball Association, said she focuses on diversity of skills in candidates. ‘I’m always looking for the opposite of what I am, for the most part,’ she said. ‘I think so many of us, because of unconscious bias, hire people who look just like us, who have the same skills that we do, to complement us. That’s not a complement at all. That’s a duplicate. So I am often looking for the person who can complement the skills I already have.”
How to Hire the Right Person

**SOLUTION IDEA**

What if we transformed the entire concept of hiring so that hiring managers were actually eager to play an expanded, high-impact role in the professional ecosystem of hiring, growing, developing, and leading?

What if we invested in:

- Cross-functional mentorship between hiring managers and their direct employees
- Incentive programming and rotations that reward hiring managers directly for every new hire trained, mentored, or developed
- Collective voice platforms for employees, run by HR

Thought starters:

- Social Talent
- Etsy School
- Pair coding
- Yammer

Nothing we do is more important than hiring people. At the end of the day, you bet on people, not strategies.

—LAWRENCE BOSSIDY
“Admiration takes on a whole new level when you appreciate just how complex it is to run a modern business.”

—URSULA BURNS

2 GROUP DYNAMICS

A PERSONAL NARRATIVE p.92

GETTING GROUNDED p.94

OPPORTUNITY AREAS p.95
THE WAR FOR TALENT IS REAL. The economy changes with each new invention and emerging technology. We see that clearly. It’s not enough to have team members who can only do one thing. They need growth through learning new skills. That adds company value so that we can move talent across more jobs. Our business includes a workforce of craftspeople, which can be hard to recruit for and retain. We go to people working in the trades, in vocational programs, with hopes of recruiting them. As an HR executive, I see the larger talent issue as two-sided. Companies need to figure out a way to build and continually evolve skilled employees in order to keep up. And employees need a way to learn and continually grow their skills to continue to be relevant.

I honestly didn’t think I would go into HR. I was always a go-getter, so to speak. I took AP courses in high school in Virginia and was interested in business even back then. Small things like learning how to balance a checkbook interested me. I knew I liked business and I went to college to study business after high school. Thankfully, my high school AP credits counted in college, so I felt I had a bit of a head start there. I was able to explore a bit more than the other students, not rush into anything, and try different classes. Some of my fellow students were under a lot of pressure, especially those who went into engineering. There’s this feeling of “Is this right for me?” on top of a large course load. That’s a lot to put on an 18-year-old. At some point, I was connected to an internship through a friend in a student organization, where I was president. The internship was in HR, and I only took it because it was different. I ended up really liking my time there, and that launched my career in this field. Now, 16 years later, I’m an executive at a large Fortune 100 company that’s involved in advanced technologies and advanced manufacturing.

At one point, there were no VPs of human resources. We were referred to as “personnel.” The name “personnel” shows you how tactical the HR role was back then, and now we’re solving large-scale business problems. The discipline has grown in scope and influence greatly. We run diversity and inclusion programs and employee-engagement strategies. We partner on reorganizations and change management. We’ve become core partners to executives over time, and now it’s quite common to have someone with HR experience in the VP circle. And one of the reasons is that the war for talent is real. It’s real. So many large companies are competing for the same people, including skilled people in the trades. The employment landscape is changing, and we have to change with it. Recruitment is just one half of it. We also must think about retention and how we keep our employees engaged and happy. COVID has changed the employment landscape recently, but when the economy picks up, employees will have more choices. How we treat our employees now defines their commitment to us when that time comes. HR is a huge player in that.
A big and important challenge for companies right now is to solve for on-the-job training and re-skilling of employees to keep their workforce strong.

I think wherever you are in your career—and whoever you are—most people don’t want to plateau. You don’t want to feel stagnant. Everyone wants growth, even though that looks differently for different people. People want options. They want to learn. They want to keep progressing, to keep moving forward. To provide that sense of growth, companies are going to have to figure out how to “re-skill” or “up-skill” their employees—train them in something new, challenge them, and ensure those skills match future business needs. That’s especially important now, in the world of technology, which changes so rapidly. We need new skills all the time. Growing employees to take on new scope and move around within business units can be a challenge. We’ve worked to develop training programs to address this challenge. Using myself as an example—my first two years here were spent in a training program, on rotation between teams as an HR representative. So, there is some on-the-job training happening out there, but it may not always be enough to keep up with emerging technology. Companies are going to have to step up and do more of this reskilling work themselves. The war for talent is just so real, we’ve got to be able to keep employees engaged and trained in the skills needed now and in the future. We can’t always lay off for old skills and then hire for new skills. It’s not only expensive; it doesn’t create the culture of commitment and engagement that’s so important.

I’d like to make a point on culture and engagement. In terms of culture and engagement, our company values inclusion, belonging, and psychological safety as being extremely important. I view my company as a leader in this space; however, we still seek to find the best ways to deliver programs to employees that are impactful and sustainable. Years ago, in the early 2000s, we had a diversity and inclusion program. It was well-designed in the sense that VPs were rewarded for growing diversity and inclusion efforts as part of a larger, more comprehensive bonus program. We had a lot of metrics related to the inclusion program, all which were good metrics. But the program struggled over time because it was very taxing for the company. Providing evidence to meet the company metrics was manual and labor-intensive, and there was considerable headcount working to sustain this one program. So, it shuttered. I was disappointed by that.

There must be a way to run these programs without so much administrative burden. Recent events following George Floyd’s death highlight the necessity for companies to step up in this space—to address true inclusion and acknowledge the fears and realities that so many people of color carry into the workplace every day. And while doing so, identify programs and policies that are sustainable.

Back to the topic of skills, recruiting externally can also be a moving target, so the company needs to be ready to move with it to stay competitive in business and in the labor market. When we do need to hire externally for a skill, we value candidates who will think innovatively and differently from each other, so that collectively we create the best solution for our customers, with quality and affordably. One way we’re connecting with diverse talent is through partnerships with vocational programs that are training people in hard skills. Upon hire, they can immediately apply their knowledge and skills. That, combined with high school and university recruiting, helps us meet our needs in this area. As employees, they can continue to grow and learn more soft skills in-house, and we’re fine with that responsibility. I feel HR is critical in solving talent issues. We see across the entire ecosystem and partner in solving large, strategic business challenges. A big and important challenge for companies right now is to solve for on-the-job training and re-skilling of employees to keep their workforce strong. More than strong—relevant.
Firms are groups, subject to \textit{group dynamics} like social loafing—the tendency of individuals to put in less effort when working in a group context. Members of a group often perceive that neither rewards (in case of success) nor blame (in case of failure) will be attributed properly. This attribution concern is important to address.

\textbf{DESIGN QUESTION}

What is it about incentive structures inside organizations that feels so tough to crack?

When humans operate as individuals in a business context, the costs and benefits of any given choice or decision tend to accrue somewhat evenly to the same person. Take the owner of a very small business—outcomes, whether good or bad, of any particular decision accrue to that same singular person. This means that the owner can consider vying business alternatives on their merits without unrelated incentives tipping the scale in one direction or the other. In larger organizations, however, there’s no such cost-benefit symmetry—hiring downside risk accrues almost exclusively to the decision maker, whereas upside is enjoyed broadly. When there is hiring success with broadly enjoyed upside, credit is rarely given to the decision maker. Thus, because hiring managers personally bear all the downside but none of the upside, they are reluctant to take even small risks in hiring. Why should they? There is nothing in it for them personally, no potential upside. This dynamic can start to take root even in surprisingly small companies that, nevertheless, have outgrown the owner’s ability to do everything—any business where the chief executive has delegated some or all hiring tasks.

\textbf{INSIGHT}

As long as costs and benefits of hiring accrue asymmetrically, offers and rejections will too.

The risk of making a bad hire—lost productivity, wasted time, payroll burden, legal exposure, and good old-fashioned embarrassment—accrue to the individual who chose to make the hire. Downsides are attributed implicitly or explicitly to the hiring manager, directly threatening their future viability in the group. The benefits of making a perfect hire, on the other hand—great ideas, skilled know-how, speed, effectiveness, and good old-fashioned teamwork—accrue to the group or organization generally. Unsurprisingly, this leads to inertia and apathy around hiring—less talent planning occurs, if any; fewer interviews are conducted; and even fewer offers are extended. When there is initiative, it is not surprising that hiring managers do what has worked before or hire the least risky candidate, often a version of themselves. Hiring managers are loath to take risk, which is a significant source of labor-market transaction friction. Micro-dynamics like these, hinging on the incentives of a singular, relatively low-ranking person, are an opportunity area ripe for deeper interventionist fluency.

\textbf{DESIGN PRINCIPLE}

Know the organism you’re designing treatments for.

What if we committed to learning the language of American businesses, including management science? What if we invested in things that helped employers see the workforce development field, including funders, as dispassionate scholars of business rather than combative critics or naïve supplicants? What if we treated mastery of management science and organizational psychology as our own self-imposed upskilling mandate, compulsory for investing in this space?

\textbf{BOTTOM LINE}

For improved adoption and scale, hiring managers need interventionists to:

1. Make them believe they can take calculated risks
2. Show the risk of doing nothing

We’ll unpack these opportunity areas on the following pages.
**HUMAN NEED**

For improved adoption and scale, hiring managers need interventionists to:

1. **MAKE THEM BELIEVE THEY CAN TAKE CALCULATED RISKS**

**INSPIRED BY REAL PEOPLE**

"We can’t make compromises in quality. What we have to do is shift our mindset around what our pipeline of people is, and can be, and be creative about how we get them ready. So we’ve got to make a fundamental shift in the system and the culture and the belief that this person can’t do it or this person doesn’t have the experience. I do believe that that’s an opportunity for us—to get over some of the historical mindset and say we can’t do the same thing over and over again and expect different results, right? We’ve got to pick where we’re going to open the aperture."

—DEB, EMPLOYER

"I totally agree that wages need to be higher. The challenge or the opportunity for us is, how can we get creative around the wage and still build a great business, because we’ve pushed as far as we can to still have a minimum margin lucrative business in the Bay Area. But is there something creative around stock options or benefits or all-in that other companies are not offering that we can compete on?"

—CAROLYN, EMPLOYER

"How do you obtain the skills that you need for the job that you’re in, despite your formal education really not having much to do with that? God, I have no idea. I definitely think there’s room to learn, try, and mess up at a place like [large tech firm]—more here than in a nonprofit. In nonprofits, you’re so resource-constrained. You have a pretty big piece that you’re covering, because it’s so resource-constrained, so there’s not as much room for error."

—LINH, EMPLOYER

**SUPPORTED BY OTHER SIGNALS**

“Running a company on a concentrated model requires a cadre of managers who possess the capacity and taste to work with the intensity demanded of top executives today. At the same time, corporate reorganizations have deprived companies of an internal supply of managerial workers. When restructurings eradicated workplace training and purged the middle rungs of the corporate ladder, they also forced companies to look beyond their walls for managerial talent—to elite colleges, business schools, and (of course) to management-consulting firms. That is to say: The administrative techniques that management consultants invented created a huge demand for precisely the services that the consultants supply.”

How McKinsey Destroyed the Middle Class

“Organizations spend a lot of time and resources developing knowledge and capability. While some of it gets translated into procedures and policies, most of it resides in the heads, hands, and hearts of individual managers and functional experts. Over time, much of this institutional knowledge moves away as people take on new jobs, relocate, or retire. Knowledge also degrades when a new senior executive or CEO introduces a different agenda that doesn’t build on earlier knowledge, or contradicts what was done previously. And knowledge disappears even more rapidly when a firm reorganizes or merges with another and there is a subsequent reshuffling of the cast of characters.... As part of your strategy, identify the few key things that you want every member of your team to know or be able to do—and figure out how to turn this from an implicit assumption to an explicit expectation.”

Three Ways to Preserve Institutional Knowledge

**UNPACKING THE NEED**

People who make hiring decisions need to see their home organizations develop and espouse a collective “growth mindset” with respect to people operations, including a culture of acceptable risk-taking in hiring.

**RESPONDING TO THE NEED**

**HOW MIGHT WE ESTABLISH DEFAULT, BASELINE HIRING CULTURES AND PRACTICES THAT ARE EQUITABLE AND COMMON ACROSS FIRMS, EVEN THOSE LACKING LUXURIES LIKE HR?**

**SOLUTION IDEA**

What if we held all employers of all shapes and sizes to a higher standard—an expectation that they not only should but can do the ongoing work of fostering and developing a healthy workforce?

What if we invested in:

- Policy requirements for companies to release high-level employee DEI data
- Third-party equity reporting and company census and equity certifications
- Platforms elevating employee demands
- Worker-owned and -operated models, such as cooperatives, joint labor-management programs, and union pathways

Thought starters:

- Frank
- Core Staffing Cooperative
- CultureAmp and BLIND
- Facebook employees revolt over Zuckerberg’s stance on Trump
- Wall Street says it cares about diversity. Only TD Bank and BNY Mellon sent us their official report.

Success is a team sport.

—SIMON SINEK
HUMAN NEED

For improved adoption and scale, hiring managers need interventionists to:

SHOW THE RISK OF DOING NOTHING

RESPONDING TO THE NEED

HOW MIGHT WE COMBAT THE TRAGEDY OF THE COMMONS WHEN IT COMES TO ANY GIVEN ORGANIZATION’S LACKLUSTRE FIRMWIDE HIRING PRACTICES?

UNPACKING THE NEED

People who make hiring decisions need to viscerally understand what the business and human consequences are of maintaining the status quo.

INSPIRED BY REAL PEOPLE

"I don’t work regularly with HR business partners unless there’s an issue that comes up that I need guidance on, but it’s not something where I’m meeting with them on a regular daily basis. I would imagine [for] the too large if somebody was overseeing hiring and admin, like HRBP [human resources business partner] issues. They’re dealing with all that sticky compliance and lawsuit stuff, all the terrible stuff, which I never have to deal with. I imagine doing that on top of hiring would be a little large—too large, in my opinion. Also, they’re two different expertises, right? It’s like somebody who knows the ins and outs of millions of employment laws isn’t going to necessarily be the best recruiter and vice versa.”

—LINH, EMPLOYER

"Everyone always wants to hire someone. I think the number one reason is everyone thinks they work harder than the next person and they need help. It seems harder to have discipline around building scalable processes. Why do we need to hire someone? Because you’ve created an eight-hour process around, like, communicating open enrollment emails, but honestly, you could do a mail merge and it would be easier. It wouldn’t be quite as personalized, but it would be scalable. I think in general at organizations, it is an organizational tendency to build a lot of process without really questioning if it’s a value-add.”

—CAROLYN, EMPLOYER

"Our HRBPs are very strategic. Depends on where you go and what level, but our HRBP directors are stuck at the hip with our line of business and functional VPs and leaders. Looking at people strategy, how we deliver on this business from all aspects. They’re pulling in the full integrated talent management strategy and the people strategy for their business that they support. It is definitely not a compliance role for us.”

—DEB, EMPLOYER

SUPPORTED BY OTHER SIGNALS

"The U.S. Department of Labor says the cost of a bad hire can reach up to 30% of the employee’s first-year earnings. The Undercover Recruiter reports bad hires can cost $240,000 in expenses. Those are broken down into costs related to hiring, pay and retention. CareerBuilder says 74% of companies that made a poor hire lost an average of $14,900 per poor hire.”

Bad hiring costs – By the numbers

"‘You either care about [culture] or you don’t,’ says Elzinga. ‘It’s just that the ones that do believe culture eats strategy for breakfast and are doing something about it are actually carefully trying to make that an intentional thing. Often people say, ‘Why should I invest in my culture?’ Or ‘Why should I invest in my people?’ And I would say that if you’re in business for long enough, there’ll come a time when your people have to invest in you. And that’s where you see culture really play out.”

Why Neglecting Company Culture Could Lose You Everything

"And that stark blend of hypocrisy and social commentary—do as I tweet, not as I actually do—is everywhere in marketing. It’s not fair picking on just Nike and Adidas when a huge number of companies pay social media lip service to Black lives, while simultaneously ensuring that none of those lives are lived out at the executive level at the very top of these companies.”

SOLUTION IDEA

What if companies understood the true cost of shabby hiring and talent development practices, both to their balance sheets and to society at large?

What if we invested in:

➔ Tax credits for companies that train employees in a formal capacity
➔ SEC.gov to require reporting for publicly traded companies to report how much money they spend on bad hires, as per DOL guidelines (cost of churn)
➔ Third-party certifications to mitigate discrimination in company offerings and products on the market

Thought starters:

Glassdoor
Best Places to Work: Employees’ Choice
Show Me Your Board!”
The Status Quo is Costing You
World Economic Forum | The business case for diversity in the workplace is now overwhelming

—ELBERT HUBBARD

Do nothing, say nothing, and be nothing, and you’ll never be criticized.
“Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man’s character, give him power.”
—ABRAHAM LINCOLN

### 3 POWER MOVES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A PERSONAL NARRATIVE</td>
<td>p.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GETTING GROUNDED</td>
<td>p.100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPPORTUNITY AREAS</td>
<td>p.101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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I don’t believe there are bad employees, only bad managers. And it starts from the beginning. Do you know how much time the average hiring manager puts into a job description? Let’s just say it’s not much. If a company pumps out boilerplate job descriptions, it can’t expect a great result.

Hiring managers really need to partner with HR to craft specific job reqs. Otherwise, you won’t get the right candidate in the door and there are impacts down the line. It’s like a game of dominos. The market has changed a lot over the last decade. Exceptional candidates have a lot of options these days. They don’t need to work for you. You need them more than they need you. And they’re not going to wait several months for you to figure your process out. They’ll go somewhere else.

I started out in medicine, actually. I was pre-med, and once I started getting hands-on experience, I knew it wasn’t for me. I didn’t have the best “bedside manner,” I was told! I love science, though. So I ended up in clinical regulatory work because I didn’t want to end up as a “lifer” in the labs. That switch to regulatory work came through a friend. It all comes down to your network, doesn’t it?

In regulatory, I was on a few projects with a former supervisor who was pretty disorganized. I took on some of their work and grew to lead operations in biomedical and pharmaceutical. I work with researchers, clinicians, scientists, and “boots-on-the-ground” types. It took me a while to understand that I like working with people after all; I just prefer working with specialists instead of patients.

Now I run large teams and large-scale operations. It’s enjoyable for me. I’m able to utilize my education and experience in the field of science while also managing people. It’s not an either-or.

I’ve developed some strong opinions about hiring people based on my experience and seniority in my company. We hire a lot of people. In the corporate world; there are fundamental misunderstandings when it comes to an employee’s performance. I’ve always said this as I moved up the chain: ‘There are no bad employees. There are only bad managers.’ I believe that. An employee must have at least some skill and value if they succeeded in the hiring process. Now, if you have issues once they’re in the door, that’s on you as the manager. Either they aren’t getting the guidance they need, aren’t being developed, or the manager isn’t managing them out. Companies can be quick to judge employee performance, but I don’t think that’s right.

Another big issue we see in the world of hiring is getting candidates who are the right fit. All too often companies post boilerplate job descriptions, without much detail or specificity, and expect a rockstar hire from that process. That’s not going to happen. You can really only get away with basic JDs for entry-level staff, who you know don’t have all the skills yet but are eager to learn, and you’re ready to train them up. Outside of that level, you need to take job descriptions super seriously. Business unit managers don’t always see themselves as responsible for recruiting, but if...
I’ve developed some strong opinions about hiring people based on my experience and seniority in my company.

The workforce is really changing, especially in the world of biomedical, science, technology. It’s skilled work. People have a lot of options if they’re skilled. They can have offers from multiple companies. And the younger prospects expect more from companies. They expect every company to be like Silicon Valley big tech, offering free meals and dry cleaning, etc. That’s not uncommon now. It can be hard to compete with. And people have options now. I had a colleague, a really talented woman, who wanted to start a family. She went on maternity leave and decided she wanted more flexibility. She didn’t want to come back to full-time office work. So she launched her consultancy and now works with multiple companies in the industry. She’s doing well for herself. People can do that kind of thing now. “Career” and “company” used to be kind of like synonyms, or like two sides of a coin, but they just aren’t anymore. So where does that leave a company like mine? We have to try even harder. You know that quote from the Red Queen in Alice in Wonderland? “It takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place.”
Even small decisions can feel like unfair **power moves** to a job seeker. Many business managers don’t realize the power they wield because it was unintentionally acquired. This can be dangerous, like a giant who doesn’t know his own strength.

**DESIGN QUESTION**

What is it about the power balance between job candidates and hiring managers that feels problematic?

In economic terms, a functioning market is simply a system where two parties—buyers and sellers—engage in fair exchange, through transactions in which forms of equal value pass between parties. While parties may exchange by barter, most markets involve sellers offering their goods or services in exchange for money from buyers. The labor market is no different. It hosts the interaction of supply-side sellers of labor (workers) with demand-side buyers of labor (employers), and the commodity is indeed purchased with money (wages). However, labor itself is unique as a trading commodity. It is a special type of good that cannot be separated from the owner. This makes those on the sell side of the equation inherently more vulnerable and therefore less powerful in the transaction than those on the buy side, because their whole lives are wrapped up in the exchange. It’s also worth noting that in the U.S., where hiring decisions are largely delegated to the individual who will directly supervise the new hire, there is a perverse disincentive to hire because staffing up inherently dilutes the supervisor’s power. It’s not necessarily in an individual supervisor’s personal best interest to diffuse institutional knowledge and work responsibility across more people. This can be mitigated through the use of production quotas or sales quotas that supervisors must meet (forcing them to staff up), but in any type of non-direct labor, non-direct-sales scenario, the disincentive to hire is harder to root out. This only strengthens the power position most hiring managers have over job candidates.

**INSIGHT**

Personal vulnerability on the sell side means unintentional god complex on the buy side.

In an ideal situation, hirers and hirerees are evenly matched—friendly rivals sitting on either side of a marketplace, ready to find a fair transaction if there is one to be had. In reality, **far more is on the line for the worker at every single one of those negotiating tables, no matter the level of their income or the color of their collar. The sell-side suppliers of labor are inherently vulnerable and less powerful because of the inseparability of their bodies from their trading commodity.** We can sense this imbalance in casual workplace phrases like “We need an extra set of hands,” “We need a warm body,” or “We need a fresh crop of kids.” This lingual reduction of working adults to body parts or children reflects their vulnerability. This relative weakness winds up getting leveraged by hiring managers who understandably want to have their cake and eat it, too. It shows up when hiring managers say things like, “I look for people like me.” These earnest but unhelpful behaviors get amplified when the market is flush with supply, a scenario that makes hiring managers feel even more justified in their seemingly clever but in fact deeply biased sorting mechanisms.

**DESIGN PRINCIPLE**

Name the bad practices, then make them hard to do.

What if we uprooted assumptions baked deep into the jobs-market mental model that may seem harmless but have in fact perpetuated bias? What if we developed a keen eye for insidious behaviors camouflaged as innocuous routines and became ruthless about ripping them out like weeds? What if we cleaned up the model with clear eyes and a fresh set of assumptions rooted in what we know to be true about the role of power in the labor market instead of what we wish to be true?

**BOTTOM LINE**

For improved adoption and scale, hiring managers need interventionists to:

1. **PUT UP FRIENDLY GUARDRAILS**

2. **HELP THEM STOP MOVING (OR HIDING) THE GOAL POSTS**

We’ll unpack these opportunity areas on the following pages.
HUMAN NEED

For improved adoption and scale, hiring managers need interventionists to:

1. Put up friendly guardrails

RESPONDING TO THE NEED

HOW MIGHT WE PREVENT SUBTLE, SOMETIMES UNINTENTIONAL, BUT COMMON ABUSES OF POWER IN HIRING PROCESSES?

UNPACKING THE NEED

People who make hiring decisions need gentle but effective checks on their power whenever they’re on the hiring side of the interview table.

INSPIRED BY REAL PEOPLE

“The best people are the ones that are happy in their jobs, right? Because they’re excelling at their job. They’re not out there looking. They’re getting promotions, they’re getting paid well. It’s hard for me to make a generalization about online candidates that I don’t know, but maybe most individuals who are looking are, I don’t know, maybe not as qualified. Most of the online applications are individuals who have zero relevant experience—like, zero. People just kind of throw their name into anything because ‘you never know what will happen’ kind of thing. There’s a stigma, and if they’re not currently employed, it’s even worse. Even if they do have a relevant degree or relevant experience, if they aren’t currently employed and they apply online, that’s like immediately into the trash bin. It’s not fun—you get an enormous amount of applications with individuals who don’t have the minimum qualifications.” —LINH, EMPLOYER

Here’s an interesting gender difference that’s happened. Men will apply for anything. We don’t care what the requirements are. We will apply for anything as a general rule. Women only apply for a job if they feel they have all the requirements. So we’re losing out on a huge segment of the candidate marketplace because we’re making them self-select out. Then we’ll hire the man that doesn’t have all the requirements because we know we’ll never get all requirements, but we’re not seeing the women who are more qualified because we’re driving them away.” —JIM, EMPLOYER

Our CEO is non-college-educated and has been working for the company since he was 11. His father founded the business. So I think just culturally, unless there’s a specific certification required for an accounting or legal role, we do not put educational requirements to any of our jobs. Even a VP role. We talk about this a lot, and our board talks about this a lot, about business athletes. You have discipline, you have rigor, you’re well-versed in building teams, setting goals, listening, taking action, being objective in root-cause solving. We definitely like athletic-type profiles where we can basically say, ‘I don’t know what’s going on over here, but here’s a huge, hairy problem. Go over there and figure that out.’” —CAROLYN, EMPLOYER

SOLUTION IDEA

What if we facilitated integrity through increasing the visibility of critical processes and power dynamics?

What if we invested in:

→ Applicant quality surveys and panel interviews as best practices
→ Incentives for managers to diversify their teams
→ Hiring coalitions comprised of top-performing managers within companies
→ “Non-union” unions and worker protections

Thought starters:

TIME’S UP Now. Join Us.
LinkedIn recommendations
NPR’s Bill of the Month

“Although not yet mainstream, blind hiring is one concept being tested by some companies to remove unconscious bias from their hiring process and ensure they are not hiring carbon copies of their existing employees. Applications are stripped of identifying factors (age, race, ethnicity, gender) and assessed based on the applicant’s skills, knowledge and potential for success in the role.”

“Fortunately, we already have one promising example beyond the building trades. SEIU–United Healthcare Workers West (SEIU-UHW) has partnered with Kaiser Permanente and jointly committed $130 million to launch Futuro Health. With a goal of placing 10,000 new allied healthcare workers by 2024, Futuro Health is providing career discovery, advising, coaching, and financing support for candidates interested in launching health care careers.”

Appropriate action means to advance your own goals, without unintentional harm to anyone else.

—STEVEN BRUST
For improved adoption and scale, hiring managers need interventionists to:

HELP THEM STOP MOVING (OR HIDING) THE GOAL POSTS

NEEDS OF HIRING MANAGERS WIDELY EXCEEDS IT?

The hiring manager creates the posting, but we’re still reaching out to candidates, and they’re more senior, like 10 to 15 years of experience, they look at that general job description, and they’re like, ‘Oh, this is way too entry-level for me. I’ve been working in the field for 10 to 15 years.’ We have to explain to them that that’s a general job description with minimum qualifications, but then they’ll get a level based on their interview performance. We have no college degree requirements. I think it’s listed as a preferred qualification, but it’s definitely not a required qualification. I can easily think off the top of my head five or six candidates that we hired recently that didn’t have a college degree for product manager roles. It’s mostly individuals who started college, got bored, and quit.”

—LINH, EMPLOYER

SUPPORTED BY OTHER SIGNALS

“Hiring’s transformation to a hunt for purple squirrels is partly a result of digitization and the shift to posting jobs online. But it’s also an outcome of corporate America’s decades-long struggle for cost reductions to drive shareholder value. Downsizing or eliminating training programs and streamlining middle management have cratered career paths employees used to follow from the mailroom to the corner office. Last week in The Atlantic, Yale Law School’s Daniel Markovits mourned the loss of systematic training programs (‘at IBM… a 40-year worker might spend more than four years, or 10%, of his work life in fully paid, IBM-provided training’) and laid blame on shortsighted management consultants praying at the altar of efficiency.”

Employers Are Seeking ‘Purple Squirrels.’ Here’s What We Can Do About It

“‘The topic of gender bias in job ads has been having a media moment recently... and we, like many others, have been frustrated by the topic. Unlike most others though, ZipRecruiter has millions of job ads, and we know exactly how they perform... Here’s what we learned: When companies remove gender-biased keywords, the payoff can be huge.”

—AMY EDMONDSON

SOLUTION IDEA

What if we redesigned job descriptions to focus on what a hiring manager needs rather than what they think they want?

What if we invested in:

→ Redesigning job descriptions to include maximum (not minimum) years of experience
→ Helping new graduates get their first jobs
→ Third-party skills training for graduates to learn hard skills
→ Personality tests to match with job descriptions
→ Eliminating gender-based language in job descriptions

Thought starters:

→ Textio
→ Idealist: Jobs, Volunteering, Grad Schools, and More
→ Removing These Gendered Keywords Gets You More Applicants
→ How New Grads Can Develop the Skills They Didn’t Learn in College

Psychological safety is a shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking. Psychological safety at work takes effort. It’s not the norm. But it’s worth the effort.

—AMY EDMONDSON
“Build into each budget the cost of hiring, and don’t lump yourself with capital investment.”

—ANN MACBETH

4 COST OF DOING BUSINESS

A PERSONAL NARRATIVE p.104

GETTING GROUNDED p.106

OPPORTUNITY AREAS p.107
My story boils down to a combination of right place, right time, and curiosity. I had the fortune of going to a small private high school that emphasized, above all, learning how to write well and how to study. That foundation was key. I went to a top-20 college, but it turned out to be easier for me than high school. And doing well there earned me notice from an alum from my firm, which started my professional journey. Thirty years later, I’m still at that same company, one of the largest consulting firms in the world. I lead a 7,000-person team of consultants and technologists across the country. Things really come down to big breaks in life, and I’ve had my fair share. So many people don’t get those, though. People who are just as talented. They just never get their shot. I’m just glad I found staffing partners that can bring on kids who need their big break. My firm gives them that big break. Truthfully, our clients are the biggest winners.

But first, let me back up. The industry has changed drastically since I joined. Technology came to the forefront. Businesses of all sizes and shapes need to be able to make data-informed decisions, have access to analytics, and be guided through all that. This means for consultants, it’s not enough to be client-facing and share a deck; we have to be partners in implementation. We have to continue offering top talent from best-in-class universities, but now we have to offer hard skills, as well. We need consultants who can build things in the cloud, refine data sets, run models. All of this has become critical to our business model.

At one point, we were caught in a pretty dangerous catch-22. Even though things had gotten more technical, we still had to hire top-tier talent. Pedigree really matters in this business. Companies expect that. We’re talking about kids in the top 10% of their class from the top 20 universities. We’d train them on hard skills over the course of several weeks—learning on the job, project by project, until they had built good mastery.

We like to think that it’s a college degree that determines which fields and occupations are available to which people, but truthfully, it’s social class. A society that lacks a formal caste system simply uses college brand to create a de facto one.
We also schooled them in our methods that we had harvested from internal experts and refined over the years. That was the way our business worked. But as the industry changed to emphasize smaller, more agile teams, co-creating with clients more directly, we saw the need to find or create more job-ready junior staff. This wouldn't be as much of an issue if universities were actually training enough kids with these hard skills, but that's a broader issue.

Understandably, I became concerned with the future of our entry-level talent model. Just as our need for junior technology skills became more pronounced, these same highly skilled kids started having other options; they don't have to go into consulting anymore. You have huge tech firms competing for them—the Facebooks, Googles, Microsofts, Apples of the world. We needed to find a broader talent pool and different onboarding models.

One day, the COO from a company called Revature—a person I knew—he called me and said, “Hey, Tom, you have an issue on your hands around recruitment and training costs, right? I can help you with that. What if I could give you a candidate that is certified in your target skill area, who will move anywhere in the country you need them, and who you will borrow from us for six months, for a fee, before deciding if you’d like them as an employee? Oh, and all that at below-market cost. Would that be interesting to you?” It most certainly was. His firm would find the “hidden” talent from U.S. colleges, he would put them through tech bootcamps, they’d get industry-recognized certifications, and I could try them out before committing. So these kids come with hard skills! They add value from the start and agree to move anywhere. And if it isn’t a fit, they go back to Revature. That mitigates a lot of risk for us. We get a lot of great technologists through this model, and most of them eventually transition into our firm full-time. Picture that! My teams love the Revature people; they’re talented and skilled. And clients love them as well. They blend into our broader employee pool at this point.

I’m talking a lot about the model here, but it’s not just about a win for the firm or the clients. I feel it’s a good deal for these kids, too. Many of them graduate either from top-tier schools with off-target majors or from more mid-tier schools with closer-aligned majors—either way, not our typical target hire. Oftentimes, they may not have been born with a silver spoon in their mouth, but they are intelligent. They just didn’t get the same breaks in life as the other kids, the same breaks that I myself got. It gets back to that point I made earlier—getting breaks and letting their talent burst through. Revature helps to open those doors. A person from the mid-tier state colleges of the world does not have “career line of sight” into working at a firm like this, where only grads from the best schools typically get in. Revature changes that.

These kids go from being out of the game, with no window in, to being in the game. They have the opportunity to break into a new pay grade, a whole new market for their skills. They get to work with Fortune 100 and top government clients, working on some of the most interesting business issues of our time. They’re now on a whole new trajectory. Revature is taking people out of one labor market and putting them into another. That’s huge. And for someone like me, raised by blue-collar parents and afforded a lot in life, I know this opportunity is meaningful for these kids. It’s not lost on me that I’ve had a few breaks in life, and I appreciate what the Revature model is doing. I could see it working for manufacturing, too, or even medical. It really feels win-win.

As the industry changed to emphasize smaller, more agile teams, co-creating with clients more directly, we saw the need to find or create more job-ready junior staff.
The cost of doing business refers to all expenses incurred in producing and selling—like labor budgets, including hiring, training, and reskilling. As long as a firm is producing and selling, it’s incurring these expenses, which is to say: always. This is why employee growth should be treated as a regular expense, not a special, discretionary opportunity—a subtle but important shift in mental model.

DESIGN QUESTION
What is it about framing talent development as a corporate investment that feels dangerous?

Investments (e.g., capital expenditure or “capex”) are point-in-time financial opportunities characterized by a big upfront capital sink of some kind, generating a tangible asset that the firm owns and can sell, that is listed on the balance sheet as property or equipment, and that depreciates over time. Investments can improve or enable core operations but aren’t themselves core; they are non-routine, occasional, and optional. The concept of an investment is clearly problematic when we apply it to workers. Human beings are not property. We do not “invest” in them or “maintain” them like we do machines, factories, or other capital expenditures, and human value does not depreciate over time. When talent development is collectively understood as an “investment,” it is understood as discretionary—an optional thing that is dispensable in good economies and verboten in bad ones. Moreover, investment rhetoric is dehumanizing because it creates an expectation that individual human beings can somehow “financially perform” like hard assets on a balance sheet. It only takes one trainee’s early departure or lateral promotion out of a business unit for a rank-and-file hiring manager to view an “investment in training” as “negative return,” thus tainting that hiring manager’s opinion of this “investment asset class” forever.

It may be tempting for firms to treat employee growth like capex rather than an operating expense, perhaps because some of the value of training workers may be realized long after the expense of training them was incurred. In business, whenever the expense and associated benefit don’t line up in the same time period, the accounting standard known as the “matching principle” sometimes tempts business professionals to cast operating activity as capital expenditure. This, too, is problematic because it implies that employees are incapable of learning and adding value intra-period. It also bolsters the false precept that all learning and development must take longer than a month, and that all applications of such learning must likewise take longer than a month. This certainly isn’t true today in an age of explosive, tech-enabled employee productivity, but it probably wasn’t entirely true 50 years ago either.

INSIGHT
Investment rhetoric is dehumanizing and makes training feel precious, which dampens interest in scaling it.

Ironically, skillling that is characterized as an investment in employees not only likens humans to balance-sheet property; it makes training feel more precious and more high-stakes. This prevents it from happening more often, as managers try to ascertain which workers are “worth the investment” and which are not. Simply treating it as an across-the-board operating expense would take all of these hand-wringing, bias-riddled judgement calls out of the equation. After all, making things less “special” i.e., more repeatable goes hand-in-hand with scale.

DESIGN PRINCIPLE
Move managers away from treating time spent on people like something luxuriant or dear.

What if we ignored the siren call to make workforce development non-operating sidecar opportunities? What if we resisted pigeon-holing big workforce ideas into ancillary units that are easily amputated in a downturn? What if we designed doggedly, directly, and deeply into core operations and understood each business well enough to spot the difference?

The FREE UP TIME SPENT ON LOWER-VALUE HIRING TASKS
We’ll unpack these opportunity areas on the following pages.
HUMAN NEED

For improved adoption and scale, hiring managers need interventionists to:

INSPIRED BY REAL PEOPLE

“...We slightly prefer candidates that don’t have coffee-chain experience so that we can teach them our way because we want the human experience, coffee as a means to deliver that human experience. I think we could get a lot more intentional about using a hospitality program or a rotation. I don’t know. We could just get a lot more innovative at it. [What’s preventing you from being more intentional about it?] Resources. What has to happen now is something that will not pay off for some time.”
—CAROLYN, EMPLOYER

“As with most scale-up organizations, the process is always changing. When I started, there was lots of last-minute scrambling and copy-pasting. We’re a bit more organized now. We have a people department, and there’s a couple of key folks. But yeah, in the early days, it was literally just whatever department needed someone, they did their own process. They did the interviewing. The CEO was very involved in almost all the interviews in the early days. Then we’d gather up feedback and put it all together. Usually, for like your typical engineering hire, whoever is the direct hiring manager has the final call after factoring input and feedback.”
—ROGER, EMPLOYER

“Companies write these job descriptions that have every bell and whistle and have every requirement, because that’s ultimately what they would like. But that’s not really what they need. And it’s not necessarily the smartest thing to go after, because now you might miss a great person and take to times as long to fill your position. You have a mentality in recruiting, whether it’s RPO or internal talent acquisition or even third-party agency. We’ve created this whole concept where we review candidates with an eye toward exclusion.”
—JIM, EMPLOYER

SUPPORTED BY OTHER SIGNALS

“Workstream operates like a silent machine turning the gears of a company’s recruiting process from start to finish. The software integrates with online job boards. Applicants receive a string of automated, tailored screening questions via text messages that make it feel like they’re chatting with a company recruiter. Those the company deems a good fit pick an interview time slot by text. In the COVID-19 era, most conversations are conducted by phone or video chat. Jobseekers complete paperwork on their mobile devices. The whole process can be done within a few hours.”

In the pandemic era, the new hiring manager is now a chatbot.

“As with most scale-up organizations, the process is always changing. When I started, there was lots of last-minute scrambling and copy-pasting. We’re a bit more organized now. We have a people department, and there’s a couple of key folks. But yeah, in the early days, it was literally just whatever department needed someone, they did their own process. They did the interviewing. The CEO was very involved in almost all the interviews in the early days. Then we’d gather up feedback and put it all together. Usually, for like your typical engineering hire, whoever is the direct hiring manager has the final call after factoring input and feedback.”
—ROGER, EMPLOYER

SOLUTION IDEA

What if we redesigned employee onboarding and talent development practices such that hiring managers and HR professionals had more time and were incentivized to prioritize training?

What if we invested in:
→ Mandatory vacation time for employees, so they train their staff to appropriately cover for them when they’re gone
→ Mental health services/therapy as part of company benefit packages
→ Incorporating formal training of employees in leaders’ performance reviews

Thought starters:
7 Ways to Improve Employee Development Programs
Your Staff Can Help You Hire—If You Train Them for the Job
What One Company Learned from Forcing Employees to Use Their Vacation Time

Time is what we want most, but what we use worst.
—WILLIAM PENN
HUMAN NEED

For improved adoption and scale, hiring managers need interventionists to:

REFRAME L&D AS A REGULAR EXPENSE, NOT A RARE “INVESTMENT”

RESPONDING TO THE NEED

HOW MIGHT WE HELP EMPLOYERS SEE THEMSELVES AS CAPABLE PRODUCERS OF QUALIFIED LABOR, NOT JUST RAVENOUS CONSUMERS OF IT?

UNPACKING THE NEED

People who make hiring decisions need assurances that training someone once they arrive in their business unit isn’t a waste, even if the person leaves their immediate team or group.

INSPIRED BY REAL PEOPLE

“A lot of people don’t want to invest, honestly, in training people from scratch. I call it that mentality of, ‘We opened up a job posting, and it was because we really needed help.’ You know what I mean? You need somebody to hit the ground running, not somebody where you’re gonna have to spend a lot of time mentoring because it’s their first job out of college.”
—LINH, EMPLOYER

“I think building something in-house is not within our core competency. We have a smooth and strong onboarding program. We can make them competent really quickly. But it would be a distraction to build our own program from scratch. It can be a lot to ask, to take someone who’s not yet had a professional software job and has to learn something completely different than what they learned. Entry-level hires require more training, more communication. So we keep the influx of that kind of candidate modest so we can give them a good experience.”
—ROGER, EMPLOYER

Nobody is beholden anymore. There’s no pension plan anymore. People can go where they want to go when they want to go. They’ll jump for the highest paycheck. We’ve got opportunities for boomerangs. Even when we develop people, the scale is different. We’re saying, could we keep people for six months or 12 months more, because the financial impact of that is still significant enough that it’s probably worth the trade-off? But we’re no longer talking about keeping them for another five or 10 years because it’s not realistic in those spaces. And there is this shortage of talent that we require to deliver our business strategy. In our industry in particular, we keep saying we’re going to hit the retirement cliff. So the ability for us to get the people who want to be in a company like this one, which is never going to be a Google, and to get the people who want to be here and then accelerate their development to be able to deliver at the level that we need and in the time frame that we need—it is a little bit scary. It’s a gap. We’re building bridges, but we’re right now in midair.”
—DEB, EMPLOYER

SUPPORTED BY OTHER SIGNALS

“When Verizon closed its physical stores in response to COVID-19, it leveraged L&D to reskill retail workers for new roles in call centers, customer service and telesales. It also created courses to upskill newly remote managers on topics like engaging teams and hosting virtual meetings. ‘Having a culture of continuous learning is highly important to our employees and to our leaders,’ says Lou Tedrick, VP of L&D at Verizon. ‘The pace with which things change in our environment, the technology, the day-to-day operations, requires people who can learn constantly. We devote a lot of time to learning.’”

56% of Employers Have Stronger Cultures of Learning Than Before COVID-19: How PayPal, Kellogg and Verizon Are Embracing L&D

“Those findings dovetail with research—by Amy Edmondson, of HBS, and Anita Woolley, of Carnegie Mellon—showing that organizations need ‘fertile soil’ in place before the ‘seeds’ of training interventions can grow. When the researchers looked at a corporate training program aimed at improving problem solving and communication between managers and subordinates, they discovered that success varied across the company. Improvements were greater in units that had already developed a ‘psychologically safe’ climate in which subordinates felt free to speak up.”

Why Leadership Training Fails—and What to Do About It

What if we convinced hiring managers that an untrained team member is always worse than one who receives training yet walks away?

What if we invested in:

→ Repurposing some HR budget into employee engagement and development
→ Rebranding employee training as core operations so training is not an afterthought or, worse, unevenly or unfairly doled out
→ Formalized ‘buddy systems’ within companies with clear metrics of success
→ Evidence-based practices for developing and promoting frontline employees

Thought starters:

Warren Buffett takes on bloat inside corporate America: ‘A lot of stuff that’s done at big companies is unnecessary’

Top 10 Employee Onboarding Programs

Where Companies Go Wrong with Learning and Development

FSG | Advancing Frontline Employees of Color

The goal of education is understanding; the goal of training is performance.

—FRANK BELL
## Needs of Hiring Managers in Sum

### Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Opportunity Areas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Human Nature</strong></td>
<td><strong>1. Take Employers as They Are.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>People who make hiring decisions need their humanity recognized, accepted, and addressed, not swept under the rug.</td>
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<td><strong>2. Group Dynamics</strong></td>
<td><strong>1. Make Them Believe They Can Take Calculated Risks.</strong></td>
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### Opportunity Areas

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Take Employers as They Are.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Bring Sexy Back to Talent-Related Tasks.</strong></td>
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<td>People who make hiring decisions need their humanity recognized, accepted, and addressed, not swept under the rug.</td>
<td>People who make hiring decisions need the potential personal upside of hiring and talent development to meet or beat the potential personal downside.</td>
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<td><strong>Make Them Believe They Can Take Calculated Risks.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Show the Risk of Doing Nothing.</strong></td>
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<td>People who make hiring decisions need to viscerally understand what the business and human consequences are of maintaining the status quo.</td>
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<td><strong>Put Up Friendly Guardrails.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Help Them Stop Moving (or Hiding) Goal Posts.</strong></td>
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<td>People who make hiring decisions need gentle but effective checks on their own power whenever they’re on the hiring side of the interview table.</td>
<td>People who make hiring decisions need the psychological safety to make hiring decisions based on absolute suitability instead of relative impressiveness.</td>
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<td><strong>Free Up Time Spent on Lower-Value Hiring Tasks.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Reframe L&amp;D as a Regular Expense, Not a Rare “Investment.”</strong></td>
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<td>People who make hiring decisions need the total time they spend on dealing with their talent needs to remain fixed.</td>
<td>People who make hiring decisions need assurances that training someone isn’t a waste, even if the person leaves their immediate team or group.</td>
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IN MANY WAYS, LABOR MARKET FAILURE IS A BUSINESS PROBLEM.

It has to do with income—workers need it, and employers do, too. It has to do with cost—workers avoid it, and employers do, too. It has to do with very real cash-flow concerns on all sides—the kind that keeps you up at night no matter who you are. It has to do with fulfilling a need, often a desperate one, quickly and sure-footedly. It has to do with stabilizing, sustaining, and securing. It has to do with surviving—for participants on both sides.

But labor-market failure is also a cultural problem. As poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow once wrote in a letter to a friend: “I do not believe anyone can be perfectly well, who has a brain and a heart.” Something is not right in our culture when working adults and hiring managers can miss each other in darkness like this, as two ships passing in the night. And when one side bears the brunt of this malfunction much more severely than the other, with immeasurable human cost, something has gone horribly wrong.

“Ships that pass in the night, and speak each other in passing,
Only a signal shown and a distant voice in the darkness;
So on the ocean of life, we pass and speak one another,
Only a look and a voice, then darkness again and a silence.”
— HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW, “TALES OF A WAYSIDE INN”

Jobs are livelihoods. Livelihoods determine the survival of entire communities. Companies and people need each other. Governments and people need each other. Businesses and people need each other. And yet they struggle to meet, to survive.

We know the experiences of these people on both sides of the equation are authentic, and we appreciate them for their truth. But each brings up real problems. Some of these stories make us weep. Some make us shift uncomfortably in our chairs. They tell us something that is hard to see, hard to hear: People on both sides are utterly unempowered to do what it takes. The dragon they need to slay together is too big. They need help. It’s not only a human-level challenge but also a systems-level challenge, and we can no longer pretend that the capitalist political economy we all live in isn’t somewhere near the root of the problem. We know these stories need to change, must change. We know these systems need to change, must change. Not for the sake of the systems, but for the benefit of the human lives within them.

Economic mobility and workforce development aren’t just about getting people into jobs or shepherding individuals up the rungs of a company ladder. It is also about whole families, whole communities. It is about the frail, septuagenarian mother; the developmentally disabled grandchild; the sick and bedridden husband; the 15-year-old niece’s newborn son; the family back home waiting for remittances—all hanging on to one income, often in the face of systemic oppression. It is about invisible familial networks, grabbing each other tightly so nobody blows away—gossamer social fabric, frayed but still holding on somehow. We won’t solve anything unless we have an answer for each and every one of those people hanging on.

That means we must ask these questions:

How do we nurture and value our own communities and the real, live people and families inside of them, just as we value ourselves?

How do we nurture and value the human beings all around us—running our cities, our institutions, our schools, our shops, our households, our meetings, our very lives?

How do we nurture and value our own people? They are our people—aren’t they?

Yes.
They are us. We are them.
We have to have answers for them all. ●
“Design is intelligence made visible.”
—ALINA WHEELER
SO WHAT NOW? WE’VE MAPPED OUT THE TERRITORY EXHAUSTIVELY IN WORDS.

We’ve used them to fall in love with the problem, but, as Michelle Weise of Strada Education Network is known to say, it’s not enough for us to admire the problem—how do we translate knowledge into action? To shift this desire for change from words into action—the right kind of action—we hope to convince you that, we, as a sector and as individuals, must get comfortable with three things:

- EMBRACING COMPLEXITY
- EMBRACING SELF-EXAMINATION
- EMBRACING MORE NUANCED ROLES

Designing for the future is not a choice between human-level problem-solving and system-level problem-solving; program work and policy work; models and movements; new tools and new tenets. It’s not either-or. It’s both-and. As an industry, we must learn to walk and chew gum at the same time. We must build ladders that enable people—even hiring managers!—to engage in the labor market successfully; meanwhile, we must put in place corrective systems that straighten out the underlying architecture.
EMBRACING COMPLEXITY

This research uncovered key areas of opportunity, giving those of us who care about the role of workforce development in economic mobility a place to start afresh. But this work also highlighted the enormity of the systemic challenges and the diversity of the human lives buffeted by them. The problems are simultaneously specific and on-the-ground as well as nebulous and systemic. It can feel overwhelming. The first step is understanding the complete picture and how any one of us can (and should) work on both equity and justice.

A major source of complexity in this work derives from witnessing things that were once design constraints rapidly metamorphose into malleable objects of design. Things we used to take for granted as fixed parameters are suddenly fair game—policy, regulation, even the capitalistic political economy itself. Everything is now on the table. It’s a big opportunity, but seizing it requires a belief that the root causes of economic immobility, inequity, and injustice not only can but should be designed. That includes policy.

The Harvard Kennedy School proved just that. In June 2019, the school partnered with IDEO’s CoLab and the Stanford Cyber Initiative to host a make-a-thon that brought together more than 40 policymakers and cross-sector experts to implement a novel, design-driven approach to developing policy solutions for the future of work. The approach was anchored in three shared beliefs: (1) the future of work is a ripe area for creative, design-driven policy solutions; (2) design-driven approaches should be applied to developing policy solutions; and (3) policy solutions can come in all shapes and sizes—they’re not limited to new legislative action or written policy documents. The collaboration resulted in eight distinct policy prototypes and a process for policymakers to replicate.

In a recent paper called “Roadmap for Equity,” the National Skills Coalition makes the case for policy work clear. The report’s push for policy advisement against the sector’s intense programmatic focus, warning that workforce training and education are crucial components but not the sole answer to addressing employment, income, or wealth disparities.

> “Why focus on policy? An extensive array of historical and current policies and practices have systemically limited educational and economic opportunities for people of color. Public policy decisions play a key role in forming the racial inequities in educational attainment, employment, and wages, as well as in systems that impact people of color’s access and outcomes in postsecondary education and training. Therefore, public policies must be an integral part of the solution. We need policies that counter structural racism by proactively advancing racial equity in postsecondary education, training, and employment.” —NATIONAL SKILLS COALITION

The authors cite such systemic disadvantages as hiring bias, chronic unemployment, racial wealth gaps, geographic segregation, varying access to broadband internet, wage stagnation, and lack of access to health care—all systemic challenges that prevent programmatic efforts like dual-customer training programs from meaningfully moving the needle. We’ve got to do the necessary policy work if we want to give our programmatic responses half a chance—or make them unnecessary in the first place.

Indeed, another source of complexity in this work is the push-pull relationship between policy and program. Any advocate or interventionist, regardless of where they work, ought to have a point of view on both policy and program at any given time. Program people ought to know exactly which policy interventions could put them out of business—and actually hope for that to happen in some cases (and be ready to pivot when it does). Similarly, policy people ought to know exactly which programmatic interventions they could potentially be obviating—and do so in partnership with those programs, with a plan for partners and staff whose livelihoods could be threatened by policy-change success. For example, if policy changes were to smooth out the “benefits cliff,” what happens to the Leap Fund? If policy changes were to deregulate hair braiding (as happened in Florida effective July 1, 2020), what happens to the training programs devoted to that occupational licensing?

The truth is all of it is incredibly important intervention work because all of it intervenes. The pieces are interconnected, requiring us to keep our eye on all of it, all the time. The good news is
that human-level problem-solving and system-level problem-solving, done for both sides of a double-sided labor market in equal measure, will in fact interrupt economic inequity. We just have to do it all in tandem—empathize with workers and employers, commit to flying two altitudes for two user groups at once, acknowledge the push-pull effects inherent to the system, and embrace the complexity of it all. Part of this is simply promising to fend off reversion to reductive reflexes that characterize problems as simpler than they are. As Albert Einstein is sometimes quoted as saying, “Everything should be made as simple as possible, but no simpler.”

**EMBRACING SELF-EXAMINATION**

We acknowledge this research has been mostly about outward observation. We’ve observed the nature of big, abstract systems. We’ve observed the nature of individual human lives. We’ve contemplated workforce development, labor markets, supply chains, labor platforms, and buyers and sellers wrt large, and we’ve peered into the personal histories of people trying to make it work on either side of an exchange. As we learn and observe, we must constantly remind ourselves to look not just into these windows but into mirrors as well. To master scale, we must start with a simple idea, and sometimes that means looking within.

As social-justice scholar Tania D. Mitchell wrote in 2015, during an earlier period of national Black Lives Matter conversation: “In order for individuals to act in ways that might change systems and structures and result in equity and opportunity for marginalized peoples, an understanding of the place of identity in persistent structural inequality is necessary.” Dr. Mitchell goes on to explain why social identity has such an important role to play in social action:

“Identity is complex and multi-layered. It comes into focus through a process of understanding who you are, how you are seen by others, and the consequences of being seen in this way. Identity is not simply something that we claim; it is something that is also shaped through our interactions and experiences. Because social identity exists on multiple planes (e.g., race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability, religion, citizenship status, language), each of our experiences reflects a unique combination of affiliations with and memberships in different communities.... A focus on identity allows us to acknowledge the sources of our own knowledge, fears, and realms of ignorance. It provides space for us to understand how and why certain communities are disenfranchised, under-resourced, and historically and structurally marginalized. It creates opportunities to name the roles of identity and power in policies and systems that have oppressed and continue to oppress specific groups.”

—TANIA D. MITCHELL

In many ways, self-examination is the most difficult research of all. It’s not work that any thought leader or think tank can do for us. Self-examination is extremely personal work, and its rewards and risks are, too. Dr. Mitchell again:

“An intentional focus on identity can result in deeply personal experiences that require acknowledgment of one’s connection to, investment in, and collusion with practices, policies, and communities that stigmatize, impoverish, and disadvantage. These experiences can be painful whether one is accepting one’s privilege as a beneficiary or one’s trauma as a target of structural injustice.”

—TANIA D. MITCHELL

As if two problem-solving altitudes for two user groups weren’t enough, we’re also asking you to keep an eye on you. Interrogate your own social identity so that you might come into this work anew, with more clarity, creativity, and credibility than you otherwise might have in previous eras not marked by multiple pandemics. Be prepared to show receipts so that you might also inspire others to do this work. In the words of activist Rachel Cargle, “You will feel like your foundation is crumbling, you will want to grasp onto what you’ve always known, you will crave to run back to the comfort of your privilege, you will feel hurt, you will feel confused, you will feel attacked and in the midst of it all you’ll survive. Keep going. There is work to do.”

**EMBRACING MORE NUANCED ROLES**

More than 60 million Americans have filed for unemployment insurance since mid-March 2020. Millions of women and Black and Hispanic workers are losing hard-won gains in economic opportunity. This section offers recommendations and inspiration for workforce operators, entrepreneurs, philanthropists, investors, thought leaders, and policymakers, but
not according to those designations per se. Instead of letting differences in our functional positions, organizational types, or enterprise tax statuses divide us into typically isolated lanes of work, we can use the power of a collective, systemic point of view to give each other permission to care about all of it.

When millions of Americans took to the streets for Black Lives Matter in June 2020, racial justice advocate Deepa Iyer, of SolidarityIs and Building Movement Project, published a framework to help people move forward together called “Mapping Our Roles in Social Change Ecosystems.” The framework created a shared starting point—one that recognizes each person’s unique role in social change, whether that is protesting on the streets or organizing a dialogue in our own homes. The framework is aimed at fighting paralysis during crisis and moving people to action, “even if we get lost and confused, or we are newcomers to ongoing social change efforts and don’t know where to start.”

As a sector and as individuals, we have the intellectual and emotional range to design more robust social responses that fly at multiple altitudes—social responses that have the depth and nuance necessary to move toward something even more transformative than economic mobility. By claiming ownership and responsibility over new and different program and policy pairings, we can move toward economic justice. On the following pages, we offer our own adaptation of the framework as a way to start together. Although we are all many things to many people, we focused on five roles:

WEAVERS | HEALERS | BUILDERS | EXPERIMENTERS | STORYTELLERS
### How to contribute?

**WEAVERS** are people who “see the through-lines of connectivity between people, places, organizations, ideas, and movements.”

**HEALERS** are people who “recognize and tend to the generational and current traumas caused by oppressive systems, institutions, policies, and practices.”

**BUILDERS** are people who “develop, organize, and implement ideas, practices, people, and resources in service of a collective vision.”

**EXPERIMENTERS** are people who “innovate, pioneer, and invent. They take risks and course-correct as needed.”

**STORYTELLERS** are people who “craft and share our community stories, cultures, experiences, histories, and possibilities through art, music, media, and movement.”

### Focus on what?

- **WEAVERS**: How might we retain this ability to perceive multiple altitudes and aspects at once?
- **HEALERS**: How might we recognize and respond to the exploitative policies and practices we have in place to correct underlying systems?
- **BUILDERS**: How might we iterate and evolve existing interventions to give every person support suited to their needs?
- **EXPERIMENTERS**: How might we innovate and take risks to prototype new tools that provide better supports for workers?
- **STORYTELLERS**: How might we continue shining a light on real human stories to keep the aperture of possibility open?

### Mostly about?

- **WEAVERS**: Mostly about the lines between and among policies, programs, and people
- **HEALERS**: Mostly about **policies** with an eye on known and new programs
- **BUILDERS**: Mostly about improving known **programs** with an eye on policies
- **EXPERIMENTERS**: Mostly about inventing new **programs** with an eye on policies
- **STORYTELLERS**: Mostly about **people** with an eye on both policies and programs

### Natural leaders?

- **WEAVERS**: Policymakers (regulators, activists, elected officials, public servants)
- **HEALERS**: Policymakers (regulators, activists, elected officials, public servants)
- **BUILDERS**: Policymakers (regulators, activists, elected officials, public servants)
- **EXPERIMENTERS**: Policymakers (regulators, activists, elected officials, public servants)
- **STORYTELLERS**: Policymakers (regulators, activists, elected officials, public servants)

- **Operators (executive directors, workforce-development professionals)**
- **Entrepreneurs (startup leadership teams, social-enterprise founders)**
- **Writers (journalists, researchers, thought leaders, advocates)**
- **Funders (philanthropists, venture capitalists, investors, backers)**

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- **STORYTELLERS**: Funders (philanthropists, venture capitalists, investors, backers)
### System-Level Insight: A Focus on Discrete Demographic Groups

A focus on discrete demographic groups contributes to a duplication of effort within workforce development. Public funding may be systematizing duplication of effort, thereby preventing the workforce development industry from capturing economies of scale.

**Human-Level Need:**
For some, belongingness is survival. Despite their strength, an overwhelming number of people who struggle with economic stability also struggle with physical and emotional scars of all kinds. Feeling that you belong is crucial in coping with intensely painful traumas. Because of this, communities and intimate relationships are crucial.

**AMEND POLICIES:**
Like the Work Opportunity Tax Credit, that incentivize employers to share information and invest in better job matching and preparation.

### System-Level Insight: The Value of a Labor-Market Intermediary Derives from Facilitating a Mutually Beneficial Exchange

The value of a labor-market intermediary derives from facilitating a mutually beneficial exchange. Prioritizing job preparation ahead of job-matching efficiency may be limiting scale.

**Human-Level Need:**
There is a great deal of human nature in people, as Mark Twain observed. Business managers are obliged to comply with the basic premise of the American economy: self-interest. Despite personal misgivings, managers are incentivized to make choices that maximize shorter-term business growth, not necessarily human potential.

**AMEND POLICIES:**
Like the Work Opportunity Tax Credit, that incentivize employers to share information and invest in better job matching and preparation.

### System-Level Insight: Unscalable “Perfect” Is the Enemy of Scalable “Good.”

Unscalable “perfect” is the enemy of scalable “good.” Comprehensiveness in workforce service models, especially the assumption that training must necessarily be included in any bundle, may be inhibiting scale.

**Human-Level Need:**
Every person is on a hero’s journey, facing their own problems and slaying their own dragons. It’s a part of the human condition; we all share common psychological and functional needs that transcend demographics. Addressing these needs is how we grow, self-actualize, and reach our full potential.

**UNBUNDLED INTERVENTIONS:**
Focused on addressing specific barriers to employment—such as literacy, financial stability, and job search—that transcend demographics and can be integrated within any labor intermediary.

### System-Level Insight: Both Sides—Workers and Employers—are De-Risking through Self-Reliance, Often Powered by Technology.

Both sides—workers and employers—are de-risking behaviors, especially those carried out via consumer technology, may be inhibiting scale.

**Human-Level Need:**
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### System-Level Insight: Labor Platforms Address Two Problems—Matching Efficiency and Participant Volume—and the Former Is More Urgent than the Latter.

Matching efficiency is sequentially more important than participant volume, and the absence of true platform characteristics—such as job function/task specificity and financial accountability to the participants wishing to be matched—may be stymying efficiency and thereby inhibiting scale.

**Human-Level Need:**
Firms are groups, subject to group dynamics like social loafing—the tendency of individuals to put in less effort when working in a group context. Members of a group often perceive that neither rewards (in case of success) nor blame (in case of failure) will be attributed properly. This attribution concern is important to address.

**SHINE THE SPOTLIGHT:**
Firms are groups, subject to group dynamics like social loafing—the tendency of individuals to put in less effort when working in a group context. Members of a group often perceive that neither rewards (in case of success) nor blame (in case of failure) will be attributed properly. This attribution concern is important to address.
Powerful pairings of system- + human- level problem-solving?
(cont’d.)

**SYSTEM-LEVEL INSIGHT:**
Hiring is part of a labor-market supply chain. Hesitation to treat workforce development solutions as part of a standard supply chain may prevent some approaches from scaling.

**HUMAN-LEVEL NEED:**
Economically, we are all **playing the odds**, but the deck is stacked against some. Fortune may favor the prepared, and it also greatly favors the privileged. Odds of economic success can be improved a thousand ways, but only if those ways are known and available. Access to edge-gaining tactics and strategies is a privilege that can be busted open and shared.

**OUTCOMES-BASED FINANCING MECHANISMS** that allow the public and private sectors to share the risk of experimentation

**SYSTEM-LEVEL INSIGHT:**
Hiring managers, not HR professionals, are the procurement officers of this supply chain. Overlooking the needs of the linchpin decision maker in labor-market transactions may be inhibiting scale.

**HUMAN-LEVEL NEED:**
Even small decisions can feel like unfair **power moves** to a job seeker. Many business managers don’t realize the power they wield because it was unintentionally acquired. This can be dangerous, like a giant who doesn’t know his own strength.

**EQUITY BY (RE)DESIGN HIRING PROCESSES,** led by hiring managers; as equity designer Christine Ortiz puts it “Racism and inequity are products of design. They can be redesigned.”

**SYSTEM-LEVEL INSIGHT:**
Employer firms are not a monolith. A bias toward large employers, perhaps rooted in unease around the hiring practices of smaller businesses, may be inhibiting scale.

**HUMAN-LEVEL NEED:**
There is a great deal of **human nature** in people, as Mark Twain observed. Business managers are obliged to comply with the basic premise of the American economy: self-interest. Despite personal misgivings, managers are incentivized to make choices that maximize shorter-term business growth, not necessarily human potential.

**EASY BUTTON FOR HIRING MANAGERS** at large employers and smaller businesses to hire and train diverse, traditionally overlooked workers

**SYSTEM-LEVEL INSIGHT:**
Labor platforms exist in the spaces along the labor supply chain—and the shorter the chain, the better. An emphasis on additional training may be forcing more supply-chain nodes than necessary, adding risk and instability for both the worker and the employer, reducing their willingness or ability to engage, and thus inhibiting scale.

**HUMAN-LEVEL NEED:**
The **cost of doing business** refers to all expenses incurred in producing and selling. As long as a firm is producing and selling, it’s incurring these expenses—which is to say, always. This is exactly why employee growth should be treated as a regular expense, not a special opportunity—a subtle but important shift in mental model.

**TOTAL EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE PLATFORMS** that are part of every employee’s journeys, from before entry to after exit

**SYSTEM-LEVEL INSIGHT:**
For workers, time is money, and proximity to the dollar is vital. A failure to appropriately value the time and opportunity cost of people struggling with economic stability may be inhibiting user adoption and thus program scale.

**HUMAN-LEVEL NEED:**
Privileged people hold **positions of power**. There can be no honest conversation about economic opportunity for all without addressing how structural systems of oppression confer benefits and power upon privileged people. The hard work of reversing systems of oppression must not fall to those oppressed.

**WORKERS HAVE A SEAT AT THE TABLE,** not a place at the podium, and are appropriately compensated to design and make decisions on programs and policies
As we become newly energized by our confident embrace of complexity, self-examination, and more nuanced roles, it will be very tempting to start saying yes. But we must also practice saying no—a firm, emphatic no—to thoughts, words, ideas, flurries of activity that appear on the surface like progress—and may even be rooted in good intentions, good faith, and goodwill—but are fundamentally mere novel formulations of the same old easy ways out. There is a difference between reaction and response, and we can’t afford to fall for the former this time. This moment is too unique; we must not squander it. Karan Chopra, co-founder of Opportunity@Work, offered a gentle, cogent warning in *Fortune* on July 9, just days before California and several other states reinstated shelter-in-place orders in light of spiking COVID-19 numbers:

“Our goal should not be a strong recovery. It should be a redesign, so we can have an economy that works for the millions of workers who had been left behind even before the pandemic. To start, we need to correct two fallacies in our labor market that are hidden by jobs and unemployment numbers: that wage equals value and that more jobs equal more opportunity. The first fallacy is founded on the philosophy that wages are set by supply and demand. The assumption is that low-wage jobs are the ones that the widest pool of people can do, thus they must be low-skilled. But the formula is backward: Workers are often labeled ‘low-skill’ because they are compensated with a low wage....

Caught up in this idea that low-wage workers earn the salary they deserve is the view that people would find jobs that pay more if they were capable. This brings up the second fallacy: that more jobs equal more opportunity. Pre-COVID, we had the longest economic expansion in U.S. history. Yet, in that period, we saw real wages decline for millions of workers. The Black unemployment rate was the lowest ever, but median wealth for Black families has remained largely the same for two decades. Police violence is only one face of systemic racism, and there is no video to expose the injustice of lost opportunity.”

In closing, we want to thank you, the reader, for embarking upon this journey of complex understanding. We want to thank you for being not just ready, willing, and able but *enthusiastic* about holding the enormity of it all in your mind, your heart, and your hands. It takes a special kind of partner to do this work and to get this far. We’re glad to be in it with you.
1 Definitions
DEFINITIONS

GROWTH: Adding revenue and expenses at the same rate

SCALE: Adding revenue at a much greater rate than adding expenses

BUY SIDE / DEMAND SIDE: Employer firms, the buyers (demanders) of the labor commodity in a labor market

SELL SIDE / SUPPLY SIDE: Individual workers, the sellers (suppliers) of the labor commodity in a labor market

LABOR-MARKET INTERMEDIARY: This refers to a public or private entity that interposes itself between workers and employers to facilitate how workers are matched to employers. They often inform or regulate how work is accomplished and how conflicts are resolved. They sometimes involve themselves in the provision of training. Examples include staffing agencies, outsourcing/offshoring contractors, executive-search firms, and trade unions that operate hiring halls. For purposes of this research, labor-market intermediaries also include educational programs or institutions that provide job placement or career services. In addition to these examples, labor-market intermediaries now also include labor platforms.

LABOR PLATFORM: This type of labor-market intermediary coordinates the market of workers and requesters of work for defined tasks or projects that may last anywhere from a few minutes to several weeks, months, or years. Labor platforms, like all platforms, create value by facilitating exchanges between two or more interdependent groups, usually a buy side and a sell side. The commodity being bought and sold via the platform is labor. Labor platforms are characterized by greater information symmetry between the buy side and the sell side than is provided by other types of labor intermediaries. Labor may be low-skilled or high-skilled. Coordination may be online or offline. Availability may be on-demand or not on-demand. Fulfillment may be in-person or remote. Job preparation/training may be excluded or included. In order to make value exchanges happen, platforms harness and create large, scalable networks of users and resources that can be accessed on an as-needed basis. Examples of labor platforms that are coordinated online with no significant job preparation/training component include: Catalant, DoorDash, NexRep, Qwick, Uber, and Upwork. Examples that are coordinated offline with a significant job preparation/training component include: Per Scholas, Revature, Kenzie Academy, and WRTP | BIG STEP. For the purposes of this research, accredited, degree-granting higher-education institutions (e.g., community colleges) are not labor platforms.

DUAL-CUSTOMER TRAINING PROGRAM: This type of labor platform focuses on job preparation, including the provision of job-readiness skills, technical skills, and/or soft skills. Aside from the provision of training, dual-customer training programs are characterized by two key features of labor platforms: (1) they coordinate the market of workers and requesters of work for defined tasks or projects and (2) they promote information symmetry between the buy side and sell side of the labor market. For the purposes of this research, dual-customer training programs exclude accredited, degree-granting higher-education institutions (e.g., community colleges). Examples of dual-customer training programs include: on-ramps like Per Scholas and Strive; paid training programs like Revature and Techtonic; bootcamps like App Academy and Kenzie Academy; and joint labor-management programs like the Loyd E. Williams Pipe Trades Training Center and WRTP | BIG STEP.

ON-RAMP: This type of dual-customer training program combines intensive assessment and screening, pre-employment and career-readiness skills, technical and soft-skills training, and job-placement and advancement services. Examples include Merit America, NextStep, Per Scholas, Strive, and Tulsa Community WorkAdvance.
PAID TRAINING: In this type of dual-customer training program, sometimes referred to as an “earn-and-learn” program, workers, interns, and/or apprentices earn wages while performing productive work and undergoing supervised, work-based training with related academic instruction. Examples include Acadium, Apprenti, Talent Path, Techtonic, and Revature.

BOOTCAMPS: This type of dual-customer training program is characterized by short, intense, and workforce-aligned training that focuses on the specific technical skills employers need (as indicated in job descriptions) while helping workers with the job-search process. Examples include App Academy, Kenzie Academy, Springboard, SV Academy, and Vendition.

JOINT LABOR-MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS: This type of dual-customer training program is structured as an independent organization—with governance representation from both union leadership and employer management—to offer education and training to workers, including on-the-job training, alongside other benefits and occupational services. Examples include Building Skills Partnership, the Loyd E. Williams Pipe Trades Training Center, and WRTP | BIG STEP.

EDUCATION-AS-A-BENEFIT PROGRAM MANAGERS: These service organizations are hired by an employer to manage and coordinate the relationship between the employer and an array of accredited, degree-granting higher-education institutions and other education providers. Often brought in as part of an employee retention strategy, these organizations typically help enroll employees in accredited online degree programs that may or may not relate to the employees’ job function, industry, or sector. Education-as-a-benefit program managers facilitate the market for educational services between buy-side employers and sell-side education providers; they do not facilitate the market for labor between buy-side employers and sell-side workers. Examples include EdAssist by Bright Horizons, Edcor, and Guild Education.

TALENT MANAGEMENT: This function involves both the anticipation of an organization’s human-capital needs and the planning to meet those needs.

LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT (L&D): This aspect of talent management is focused on the development of skills within an organization in order to drive business performance. L&D includes training, performance support, and other learning experiences. Historically, it has been considered a subset of HR and carried out by a specialized HR function, but L&D can also be decentralized in large organizations, separate from talent development strategy and HR functions.

TALENT ACQUISITION: This aspect of talent management generally includes the process of identifying, assessing, acquiring, and onboarding skilled workers to meet organizational needs. Talent acquisition is typically carried out by a dedicated team. In some cases, that team is part of an organization’s HR department; in other cases, the team is its own department that works in coordination with HR. More recently, talent acquisition has come to include identifying and acquiring candidates for roles from within the organization.

HIRING: This aspect of talent acquisition refers to final decision-making, e.g., which requirements will (or will not) be included on job descriptions; which applicants will (or will not) be advanced in the process; which candidates will (or will not) be offered employment, etc.

HIRING MANAGER: This rank-and-file business unit manager makes most or all final decisions related to hiring a new employee; not an HR professional.

SECTOR STRATEGY: This is one of two “demand-driven” workforce-development approaches to incorporating employers into program design and delivery. Sectoral training involves working directly with employers (i.e., not through an intermediary) to identify and train workers in targeted in-demand occupations. Longitudinal studies conducted by MDRC have shown that one sectoral-training model in particular, WorkAdvance, has shown long-term positive impact on job stability and earnings.

DEFINITIONS

SECTORAL TRAINING: This is one of two “demand-driven” workforce-development approaches to incorporating employers into program design and delivery. Sectoral training involves working directly with employers (i.e., not through an intermediary) to identify and train workers in targeted in-demand occupations. Longitudinal studies conducted by MDRC have shown that one sectoral-training model in particular, WorkAdvance, has shown long-term positive impact on job stability and earnings.
2 CAN WE TALK ABOUT SCALE? | AN IMAGINARY DIALOGUE
CAN WE TALK ABOUT SCALE? | AN IMAGINARY DIALOG

sure, but first, it's important to understand profit a.k.a. margin a.k.a. profit margin

hint: there's really no such thing as "nonprofit"... only "undistributed profit," which means the excess of revenue over expenses is plowed back into the organization (retained as net assets) rather than paid out to shareholders as a cash dividend.

oh yes, indeed

all organizations want revenues to be bigger than expenses, hence, we are all "for" profit, in a sense, no? i mean, i'm all for revenues that exceed expenses, aren't you?!

oh yes

cool cool good. so, if we can get comfortable with being "for" profit (bc if we aren't for it, then we're against it, which means we'll lose the lease, which would be bad bc we want to keep serving people, no?)...

obvi

...then we can think about our profit margin as a financial cushion. like literally a cushion

yah. pr'much

then the question becomes: how do we want to manage our cushion? as time goes on, do we want it to be razor-thin like a sleeping pad on hard stone ground at a campsite?

sounds bad

OR... do we want it to be less painful?

less painful seems better?

do we want it to be static in terms of proportionality to our size? OR... do we want to do more with less over time, meaning: grow the pad's thickness?

well, what are the pros of having a thicker profit margin?
oh i dunno like:

✅ plows back into the organization to improve things

➡️ helps weather storms

👉 better sleep, fewer ulcers for staff

and what are the cons?

 emojis 😞 😟 😢

 😞 coulda spent it on services yesterday and today for the neediest ppl

 ⬅️ thin margin helps me feel like a martyr

 🔄 avoid having to explain our financial intentions or thicker margin to anybody

ok, but how do i decide?

 between a thicker margin or a thinner one?

 a thicker, growing margin lets you serve exponentially more ppl without the wheels coming off the bus

👍

 a thin, non-growing margin lets you serve a proportional # of ppl under constant threat of wheels coming clean off the bus

👎

 ok, obviously we want to serve exponentially more people, BUT WHICH PEOPLE?

 like, do i really have to serve those ppl who are "not" The Most Vulnerable? those with only 1 or 2 small hurdles to clear?

 the short answer is:

 ✅ YES
you do

if you don’t, you’ll never scale

and besides, what’s so bad about serving ppl in need?

ok, but i can do that later, right?

wrong

if your goal is to SCALE

( It is) 😵😵😵

then you have to serve the highest-margin customers first

NOOOOOOO!

WHY????

was your first jog 26.2 miles? of course not

if you want to get good at something, you train. higher-margin customers are your way of getting in shape and building up endurance, operationally. if you go for the marathon right out of the gate (or the 225-lb bench press or the channel swim or whatever your preferred metaphor), you will most certainly get injured, and you might even die…

AND THAT’S NOT SERVING ANYONE, is it?

so...

DON’T DIE

please

the world needs your org to not just survive but thrive. that means saying goodbye to anemic profit margins and embracing true org health… the kind of robust, thriving health that supports serving exponentially more ppl than you do now, and exponentially more ppl than you could by expanding service coverage linearly
omg. ur a tough coach

you “do” realize that you are asking me to do way more than just replicate services

RITE?

ummmm yeah

so, now might be a good time to mention that when i say “scale,” i mean it in the bona fide b-school, mgmt-science sense, not the nonprofit replication sense

ouï

we’re talking about MONEY

are we talking about money?

there was a 2018 wallace foundation report that defined scale as: “a process for significantly increasing the number of sustained implementations of a successful program, thereby serving more people with comparable benefits”

it talked about distribution models: branching, franchising, or partnering with a bigger org to speed program diffusion

totes. is that not scale?
FYI, for purposes of this convo, that is *ahem* NOT SCALE

then what is it?

it's just replication + distribution

organizations of all kinds have to replicate offerings and make distribution decisions, whether they're scaling or not. so let's agree on the definition of scale... here's a quick sketch that pretty much says it all:

kk, so scale = adding revenue at a much greater rate than expenses

“seems” plain and simple

here's another way investopedia describes scale:

“Scalability is a characteristic of an organization, system, model, or function that describes its capability to cope and perform well under an increased or expanding workload or scope. A system that scales well will be able to maintain or even increase its level of performance or efficiency even as it is tested by larger and larger operational demands...... This concept is closely related to the term economies of scale, wherein certain companies are able to reduce their production costs and increase profitability as they grow larger and produce more. For situations when increasing production increases costs and lowers profits, it is called diseconomies of scale.”

tell me again... why is scale so important? (more important than mere growth?)

scaling is critical bc it tends to be the cure for everything that does go wrong and/or "can" go wrong (i mean tbh: "does" go wrong)

kk, so scale means not just growth, but rapid growth... like, more rapid than expenses
an erudite VC (it was Paul Graham) once said: “To grow rapidly, you need to make something you can sell to a big market. That’s the difference between Google and a barbershop. A barbershop doesn’t scale.”

I feel like I’ve been a barbershop all this time… I mean, we’ve grown….

A LOT!

but not in the way this Paul guy means, I don’t think

Scaling = hypergrowth

exactly… it hasn’t been in that hypergrowth way

k, so how does one grow rapidly?

Here’s a checklist of 6 things to do:

#1 - Identify milestones
#2 - Focus on risk reducers
#3 - Increase “sales” / adoption
#4 - Find your ideal customer
#5 - Optimize for the buyer
#6 - Don’t hire “salespeople” too early

At least that’s what HubSpot says (they’d know)

Scale is fundamentally about operational effectiveness: improving things, efficiency… and you can’t improve what you can’t or don’t measure

In the wise words of Investopedia: “At its core, a scalable business is one that focuses on the implementation of processes that lead to an efficient operation. The workflow and structure of the business allow for scalability… A scalable company has effective tools for measurement, so the entire business can be assessed and managed at each level.”
so wise

so anyway, back to the checklist of 6 things…. #4 seems hard

“identify your ideal customer”

what’s in there?

does this mean….

yes, this means that some people are non-ideal

at least rn

yes, market segment

market segment? use case?

glad we already talked about profit

(a) pick one target market segment

(b) find a single use case

(c) message your offering well

there’s a paper that explained this back in the ’70s
"...the concept of market segmentation has since been elaborated in many different ways. It has recently been defined by Kotler as ‘...the subdividing of a market into homogeneous subsets of customers, where any subset may conceivably be selected as a market target to be reached with a distinct marketing mix.’"

"The underlying logic is based on the assumption that ‘...the market for a product is made up of customers who differ either in their own characteristics or in the nature of their environment in such a way that some aspect of their demand for the product in question also differs.”

"The strategy of market segmentation involves the tailoring of the firm’s product and/or marketing program to these differences. By modifying either of these, the firm is attempting to increase profits by converting a market with heterogeneous demand characteristics into a set of markets that although they differ from one another, are internally more homogeneous than before.”

"The concept of market segmentation may be used for strategic alignment of the firm’s productive capacities with its existing and potential markets. By analyzing market needs and the firm’s ability to meet those needs, the basic long-run policies of the firm can be developed.”

(or maybe not a typo actually!!?)

profitability #marketsegments #long-run

kk, target market segment, can probably do that

what’s a use case?

It’s a specific situation in which a product or service could potentially be used, like “deposit funds” or “withdraw cash” if you’re talking about a bank customer trying to use an ATM

ok so yeah.... market segment, use case, got it
with that whole “identify your ideal customer,” HubSpot’s just saying build a buyer-centric sales funnel and shorten it!

well yeah, that too

hey we’re kind of good at the sales funnel thing

totally

you are

it’s about picking one buyer persona, figuring out how they buy, what they care about, what processes they use, what substitute or replacement products are available to them, etc.

it tees you up perfectly for HubSpot’s #5 step, which is: once you’ve identified your ideal buyer and their needs, optimize how you market and sell to them

a.k.a. stay obsessed with your ideal buyer persona. at this stage it’s more about narratives, not numbers

what does it mean to stay obsessed with your ideal buyer persona?

(1) find a single use case, and (2) solve one critical problem really well

btw... on the former: “If you sell to a variety of use cases, you haven’t proven your process is repeatable. You’ve introduced too many variables that will make it more difficult to optimize for your target buyer.” —HubSpot

 kinda debunks the nonprofit replication theory eh?

i mean, yeah, basically

btw.... on the latter: “By doing too much for too many people, you become too general with mediocre skills rather than an expert on one thing and servicing a specific niche. In order to scale, you need to refine your service offering as well as your target customer. In order to figure out which of your services you should zero in on, step back and look at the problems you are solving. Look for the most difficult problem that, when solved, generates the most value for your customer. Often times, many of the problems you solve for a customer can be solved in other ways by other people as well. And sometimes other people solve the same problems for less money, time, or complexity. Weed those out until you’re left with the problems that only you can solve well and ones where you can create significant value for your customer.”
which, my friend, brings us to:

one really tight core service that has the “right” features and benefits

for the “right” buyer persona

in the “right” target market segment

for the “right” use case

et voilà!

then repeat

scale.
QUALITATIVE RESEARCH APPROACH
QUALITATIVE RESEARCH APPROACH

“Design is the intentional and unintentional impact behind an outcome. Every design has an impact on equity.” —ANTIONETTE CARROLL

MODIFIED DESIGN THINKING

This research aims to provide a human-centered foundation for understanding the needs of working adults and hiring managers who need better ways to trade value in the labor market. It is intended to cultivate empathy that can inform solutions, ensuring that they are grounded in real human needs. Thus, the study takes an overarching design-thinking approach to evidence-gathering, data synthesis, and insight development.

But we modified the design-thinking process for equity. As researchers, innovators, and designers, we know our work impacts others. To acknowledge and avoid the inequities we could inadvertently perpetuate in our work, we referenced two frameworks. Equity-Centered Community Design, pioneered by Antionette Carroll at Creative Reaction Lab, builds on design thinking by addressing the role of power and history on systems. Liberatory Design, the practice of design for liberation, adapts the Stanford d.school design-thinking process to intentionally create space for designers and researchers to notice and reflect on what they are bringing into a design-thinking challenge. These frameworks examine how systemic outcomes can often be predicted by aspects of a person’s identity, such as their ethnicity, income level, or geographic location. We enlisted liberatory equity designer David Clifford of the Stanford d.school to first educate, then advise us over the course of several months.

EQUITY RESEARCH ADVISORS

The success of equity design frameworks hinges upon working alongside beneficiaries and obtaining feedback from group members without the interference of researchers who are not members of the intended beneficiary group. We laid the foundation of this equity-centered approach by creating an Advisory Board made up of working adults struggling with economic stability. After first working together closely for many weeks, advisors introduced us to their personal networks—family, friends, neighbors, colleagues. The advisors led community-based feedback sessions with individuals from their networks. These sessions were integral in bringing an equity and participatory lens to the research process.

In these sessions, individuals from the advisors’ personal networks provided feedback from their own perspectives, which the advisors then shared back with the research team in the form of audio recordings and also helped to analyze. No formal researchers from our team were present for these sessions. In total, five advisors conducted four community-based feedback sessions each, generating 20 exceptionally rich one-on-one interviews with a level of authenticity and data quality unmatched by traditional methods. All participants, both advisors and their extended networks, were compensated for every hour of their valuable time.

DESIGN PROCESS PHASES

The design-thinking process is human-centered. It starts with the people whose problems we want to resolve, and it ends with new responses to those problems, launched and scaled in market, that are tailored to suit their needs. The process is about summoning humility, developing empathy, generating ideas, building prototypes, co-creating, asking for feedback, and eventually taking innovative new concepts out into the world. This iterative cycle is described visually by British Design Council’s Double-Diamond, a framework used by millions of designers and non-designers around the world. Its four simplified stages are: discover, define, develop, deliver. →
The Double-Diamond framework is characterized by an initial problem-finding phase, followed by a problem-solving phase. These are the two “diamonds.” Each diamond contains two sub-stages for a total of four stages across the framework. Our research leaned deeply into the first two stages (Discover and Define), and it tiptoed into the third (Develop):

- We undertook a **Discover** stage to learn about the existing work and workforce-development landscape, human behavior and motivations, and new questions and opportunities for consideration. We spoke to more than 50 workforce operators, executive directors, and entrepreneurs working in the field. We were then guided by an intimate group of five working-adult advisors from three U.S. geographic regions who worked closely with us over a period of months. The advisors underwent training in design research methods so that they could effectively conduct community-based feedback sessions. In total, 32 one-on-one interviews with working adults were conducted, 20 of which came via community-based feedback sessions conducted by advisors. We interviewed 21 hiring managers, representing a mix of business unit managers, human resources professionals, talent acquisition leads, and recruiters. We validated the primary research with a quantitative survey of 1,044 workers nationwide. You will find a deep landscape analysis in Volume I and eight rich personal narratives—four from working adults, four from hiring managers—interspersed throughout Volume III.

- We undertook a **Define** stage to synthesize this rich qualitative data and evidence into new knowledge and insights, converging on a set of challenges worthy of pursuit. You will find 10 system-level insights in Volume II. You will also find eight human-level themes and their 16 associated opportunity areas in Volume III.

- We undertook the first few steps of a **Develop** stage to generate potential concepts and ideas. The details and requirements of these ideas are not delineated. We intentionally leave the deep problem-solving design work up to you. You will find thought-starters, ideas, and seeds for future solutions interspersed throughout Volumes II, III, and IV. Our aim is to inspire you in small, malleable ways throughout, not instruct you in grand, concrete ways at the end.

**DESIGN RESEARCH COMPENSATION**

Throughout every stage, research participants have been the inspiration and lifeblood of the study. They were generous with their emotional capacity, their intellectual horsepower, and their creative contributions. We endeavored to compensate participants for every hour of their valuable time. In some cases, compensation was declined.
QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
The overarching research plan for the qualitative aspect of this work is laid out below. The research plan required extensive subject sourcing and sample development, which was led by Michelle Nie. Because the ultimate samples of both workers and employers were quite large, and the connection with these individuals was maintained over the course of several weeks (in some cases months), relationship management on the worker side and employer side was handled and maintained by Michelle Nie with support from Allie Polk.

BACKGROUND

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation seeks to assist the field of economic-mobility advocates in developing a point of view around the present and future landscape of job-training organizations that enable the free and fair exchange of value between labor-market participants (workers and employers). As described by Brian Holland in The Journal of the Local Economic Policy Unit (Lepu) in 2016, the field generally refers to these organizations as “dual-customer” training programs.226

DRIVING RESEARCH QUESTION

Why haven’t dual-customer training programs scaled in the U.S. labor market? How might we use the fundamentals of market-based analysis + human-centered design to develop, articulate, and ultimately communicate a hypothesis that could potentially inform the investment thesis of various philanthropists, venture capitalists, and governments that invest in economic mobility, opportunity, and justice?

OBJECTIVE

Uncover needs and aspirations for both groups of labor market participants: workers and employers. Deeply understand the context of working adults with limited time and incomes as well as rank-and-file hiring managers inside business units. Determine the extent to which “skills” are actually the friction point for these two groups to meet and exchange value versus other unarticulated frictions.

RESEARCH SUBJECTS

► Workers:
  • Asset-limited and income-constrained
  • Employed, under-employed, or unemployed
  • Struggling with economic stability, experiencing scarcity of some kind
  • Variety of ages, gender identities, educational attainment levels, racial/ethnic identities, and geographic regions
► Employers:
  • Especially: Rank-and-file hiring managers
    ◐ Final decision-maker in hiring decision
    ◐ Located inside an operational business unit
    ◐ Supervisor of new hires
QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- Potentially only a few levels up from new hires
  - But also: HR business partners (HRBPs)
    - May exist in some workplaces
    - May run some interference for the rank-and-file hiring managers in some circumstances
    - Not the final decision-maker in hiring decision
- Stakeholders:
  - High-level HR, DEI, and/or CSR executives
  - Investors in dual-customer training programs, chiefly philanthropists
  - Operators of dual-customer training programs, e.g. entrepreneurs, founders, executive directors

METHODS AND TOOLS

- Discovery-based interviews (approximately one hour) focused on uncovering both emotional and functional needs, and both stated and latent needs
- Potential for follow-up, in-field observational interviews (approximately three hours)
- All interviews (initial and follow-up) aided by discussion guides
- Planned asset capture (DSLR, audio recording, transcription)
- Design research compensation: Amazon and/or Visa gift cards

RECRUITMENT OF SAMPLE

RECRUITING CHANNELS

- Digital posting (Craigslist, Reddit, etc.)
- Existing network accessed via Entangled Solutions, Guild Education, SkillUp Coalition (Pathstream leads, etc.)
- Guerrilla recruitment (personal networks of the research team, secret shopper, etc.)

SELECTION METHODOLOGY

- Screen potential interviewees:
  - Basic information (first name, email, phone, best way to contact)
  - Demographic information (age, last level of education, current employment/student status)
  - Experience with job-training programs, ascertained via multiple-choice question:
    - I have completed a job training program.
    - I have started and decided not to complete a job training program.
    - I have heard about but not applied to a job training program.
    - I have never heard of any of these job training programs or similar.
  - Dates and times available for one-hour phone call
QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- Narrow to 4–7 interviewees from each of the following categories:
  - Working adults
  - Hiring managers
  - HRBPs

- For the working-adult category, select based on broad diversity in the following areas: awareness of dual-customer training programs, educational attainment level, age, geographic location
  - First, we filtered the 313 people who responded to our recruitment efforts into four categories in the classic program user-acquisition funnel:
    a. unaware of any dual-customer training programs
    b. aware of but didn’t adopt dual-customer training programs
    c. adopted a dual-customer training program
    d. adopted and “fired” a dual-customer training program

  - Then, for categories (b), (c), and (d), we selected only those programs that were funded by the Gates Foundation, that we had conducted conversations with during landscape analysis, and/or that we had discovered through desk research (e.g., California Vocational Rehab, Concourse [now Rivet School], Job Corps, Per Scholas, STRIVE, and Year Up).

  - Lastly, we aimed to put together a diverse pool of interviewees based on the following demographics: last level of education, age group, and geographic location. We ensured that our interviewee population would be representative of our target population of working adults (members of the workforce, even if temporarily unemployed) with limited time and/or income.
    - For level of education and age group, we segmented according to the Brookings Institution’s methodology used in the “Meet the Low-Wage Workforce” report. Brookings segmented the low-wage workforce into three age groups (18–24, 25–50, 51–64), and three education levels (associate's degree or more; in school but no college degree; not in school and no college degree).
    - We used the same methodology to segment the hiring manager respondents, ensuring that there was representation from each age group and educational attainment cluster.
    - Lastly, we ensured that there was roughly equal representation from each of the major U.S. regions: West Coast, East Coast, Midwest, and South.
### FINAL SAMPLE, WORKING ADULTS

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<thead>
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<th>NAME</th>
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<th>EDUCATIONAL LEVEL</th>
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## FINAL SAMPLE, HIRING MANAGERS & HRBPs

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DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR INTERVIEWS WITH WORKING ADULTS

INTERVIEW SETTING

Zoom/phone call, approximately 60 minutes per conversation

INTERVIEW OBJECTIVES

- Conduct design research to understand the needs that opportunity-seekers have around talent platforms and the education-to-work experience.
  - Understand background knowledge about each opportunity-seeker, including (but not limited to) his or her identity, socioeconomic status, family background, prior experiences with education, and work/career journey.
  - Understand prior experiences with dual-customer training programs (if any) and why certain experience elements are more or less likely to resonate with each worker-learner. Dual-customer training programs include any kind of unaccredited school, training program, skills bootcamp, etc.
  - Utilize equity-design principles to:
    - create an experience where opportunity-seekers feel psychological safety and security,
    - understand new aspects of the problem we are trying to solve from the perspective of a diverse range of people and life experiences, and
    - invite opportunity-seekers to co-create and work towards more equitable approaches, not exactly solutions per se.

INTRODUCTION SCRIPT

“Thank you for taking the time to speak with me on behalf of Entangled Solutions and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. I am thrilled to gather your insights, which are the core and purpose of this project. This interview is entirely about your personal experience with education and employment, and your own views on different job-training programs. You are the expert of your own experience, so please tell me anything that comes to mind. I have a discussion guide prepared, but feel free to take the conversation in a different direction if that feels right.”

(If we have received the consent form:) “Before I begin, do you mind if we record this interview for our research purposes? Everything you say will remain anonymous if you so wish, and we will combine information from all of these interviews to share with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.”

QUESTIONS/SCRIPT FOR WARMING UP

(Directions for Interviewer: The questions listed under “Basic Information” are questions you must ask during the course of the interview. All other questions are optional—you are free to use or modify them however you see fit.)
QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Basic Information (Required):
- Where and with whom do you live?
- How old are you?
- What do you currently do for work? Is it part-time or full-time?
- What is the last level of formal education you completed? (high school/GED, some college, associate’s degree, bachelor’s degree, master’s/doctorate degree)
- What is the last training course or program you participated in, if any? (e.g. Job Corps, Per Scholas, STRIVE, online training course)

Initial Context:
- Tell me about your life story, starting with early adulthood (high school, college, etc.)
- Where did you grow up?
- How many people were in your household?
- What does a day in your life look like?
- What has been your experience with education? (high school, college, etc.)

QUESTIONS/SCRIPT GUIDED BY MASLOW’S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

(Directions for Interviewer: Start at the bottom of the pyramid with physiological needs. If you feel that they have met most or all of this layer, move on to the next layer. Try not move onto higher needs unless/until you feel the lower needs have been discussed/covered.)

Physiological Needs (Food, Shelter):
- Where did you grow up?
- How would you describe your upbringing?
- Tell me about your living situation.
- Is rent affordable for you?
- Are you personally on the lease, or do you stay with someone who is the official renter or owner?
- Are you satisfied with your current living situation? Why or why not?
- What’s on your mind when you think about a more ideal living situation, if any?
- Do you like living with others, or would you rather live alone?
- Do you ever worry about bills or groceries? Why, what is going on there?
- Do you feel that you have enough food, both in terms of quantity and quality?
- How are you impacted by the coronavirus pandemic?

Safety Needs (Physical and Psychological Safety, Job Security):
- Do you feel safe walking around your neighborhood?
- Do you ever fear for your physical safety or that of your loved ones?
- Is your home a place you like to be?
- What types of jobs did you have in your life, and how did you get them?
- How did you first hear about your current job?
- How did you decide to take your current job?
Imagine you had to look for a new job today. What would your process look like?

What works and doesn’t work about your current work situation? Your current living situation?

How are you currently feeling about the coronavirus pandemic?

Belongingness Needs (Relationships, Community):
- Tell me about what you would consider to be your communities. (e.g. home, church, school, work, neighborhood, hobbies)
- Which community or communities do you most feel like you belong to?
- How would you describe your identity? Where does that come from? (e.g. friends and family, media, how outsiders view you, etc.)
- Do you feel like you can be your true self throughout your life, such as at work, school, and in your neighborhood? Have you ever had to check parts of yourself or your personality at the door? (e.g. code-switching, etc.)
- Describe an important relationship in your life.
- Tell me about your relationship with your co-workers and/or classmates.

Esteem Needs (Accomplishments, Reputation):
- What would other people say about the things you’ve done in your life so far?
- What would your 10-year-old self say about the things you’ve done in your life so far?
- Think of someone you respect (mom, sibling, other relative, other). What do you want them to think about you?
- What do you enjoy about your job?
- What have you achieved that you are proud of? (It can be small, e.g., “I’m proud of my garden.”)
- What counts as a personal “win” for you? (Day-to-day? Week-to-week? Month-to-month, year-to-year?)
- What are your career goals?
- What are your educational goals?
- How did you decide on your major in college? (if applicable)
- Tell me about the last time you had to learn a new skill for work.
- What is something you would like to be valued for?

Self-Actualization Needs (Personal Growth):
- What do you think is your highest potential?
- What must you achieve in your life to feel that you have lived your life well?

QUESTIONS/SCRIPT RELATED TO DUAL-CUSTOMER TRAINING PROGRAMS

(Directions for Interviewer: First ascertain whether they are aware of training programs and whether they have participated in one. If yes, move on to the second set of questions regarding participation. If they left or quit a program, move on to the third set of questions regarding leaving or quitting a program.)

Training Programs:
- Have you ever participated in a training program, such as Year Up, Per Scholas, or STRIVE, or training of any sort at work?
- Tell me about the last time you had to learn a new skill for work. It could be formal, like a training, or informal, like a colleague showing you the ropes.
- Tell me about the last time you helped someone else learn a new skill. (e.g. coworker, child, relative, friend, etc.)
If they participated in a training program:
- Tell me how you learned about the program(s).
- Would you describe it as a “program”? What words would you use to describe it to a friend?
- Walk me through your journey from learning about this experience to deciding to participate.
- Tell me how you found out about it.
- Did you consider any alternatives?
- What were your goals going into the experience?
- How did you feel about the onboarding process?
- What did you think about the staff who worked there?
- Did you feel that it was a valuable use of your time? Why or why not?
- How did it make you feel?
- Did the experience overall have an impact on your credibility at work or in your career? Did it have any unexpected impacts inside or outside of work?
- Did you feel that it helped you fulfill your goals? Why or why not?
- What did this experience help you achieve? Conversely, did this experience hinder any of your goals in any way? If so, why?
- How were you able to find the time for this experience?
- Did you have to pay anything for the program? Did you get paid during the program?
- Did you have to commute far or find childcare?
- Did it have structure in terms of daily schedule, or was it more of a self-paced kind of thing? What’s better and why?

If they participated and left a training program:
- Tell me why you decided to leave the program.
- What were your goals going into the program?
- How did you feel about the onboarding process?
- What did you think about the staff at the program?
- Did you feel that the program was a valuable use of your time? Why or why not?
- How did the program make you feel?
- Did you expect the program to have an impact on your credibility at work or in your career?
- What did this program help you achieve? Conversely, did this program cause any problems for you? If so, why?

QUESTIONS/SCRIPT FOR WRAPPING UP
- Would you be willing to participate in a follow-up conversation with me?
- “Thank you so much for sharing your story and your experiences with me today. A member of my team will be in touch regarding your compensation.”
5 COMMUNITY-BASED FEEDBACK SESSIONS
In accordance with the equity-centered research approach of this work, the majority of the working-adult qualitative sample was derived via an initial group of working-adult Advisors. Five of those Advisors each brought an additional four individuals into the study from their own personal networks. After two small-group paid “mini-training” sessions on the foundational tenets of design research, the five Advisors interviewed their contacts directly, without other members of the research team present. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, then analyzed and coded by the interviewer-Advisor as well as members of the broader research team including Kenneth Fang, Michelle Nie, and Allie Polk. All interviewer-Advisor time as well as interviewee time was compensated.
**Interviewer-Advisor:**
**BRENDA MITCHELL**

| Interviewee: | Employment Status: Unemployed due to current medical condition  
|-------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Robert | Interview Date: 2020-04-06  
| Age: 48 | Relationship to Advisor: Brenda’s brother, participant in a transitional program  
| Race or Ethnicity: White |  
| Location: San Francisco, CA | Education: GED  

“‘The homelessness navigation system in S.F. is problematic at best. It’s more of a harm-reduction program than safe, clean, and sanitary housing. It’s just like living on the street, except you have plumbing. It’s not a great situation. But it’s better than living on the street. I’m a simple person, it doesn’t take much. I just need my own space where I’m not cramped in with lots of other people. It doesn’t have to be that big. I’m happy and safe with a one-bedroom or even an efficiency studio. For me, finding work can be hard. The more that people know about your work, and have knowledge of where I’ve worked and the stuff I’ve done, I usually get pretty positive reports. It just depends on what they actually know.

When I was working on the friendship line at the Institute of Aging through UCSF, I would have psychology students come in for clinical hours. I would instruct people. They would sign up for an internship and work on a crisis line that I was running or helping run. People would shadow me to see how it’s done. We would take calls from seniors and do medical reminders. I would teach students how to do client-centered care and how to hold a conversation with people—how not to exacerbate the issue or problem that people on the calls were having. I found that rewarding in the three years that I was there because I’ve only gotten professional certifications. To be able to sit and teach people that have degrees or are on their way to degrees—it made me feel good. That I was able to do it, and do it well, and help others learn—it did a lot for my self-confidence and self-assuredness. The relationship with myself is a very important relationship. If I don’t like me, nobody is going to like me. How you move through the world and what you do is going to directly affect you and your day-to-day life. So if I’m not feeling good about myself, it’s going to rub off on those around me.’’

| Interviewee: | Employment Status: Unemployed, interviewing in media/advertising  
|-------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Darius | Interview Date: 2020-04-07  
| Age: 46 | Relationship to Advisor: In same transitional program as Brenda’s brother  
| Race or Ethnicity: Black |  
| Location: San Francisco, CA | Education: Bachelor’s degree  

“I have a case manager, and my Veterans Association here in San Francisco is trying to help me get some job training potentially. Then through the unemployment office—if I continue to pursue being unemployed, which I’m not, but right now I am, just for a fallback—there are resources that are available that I’m going to need to do on the sideline. But I mean, I don’t want to change careers because I don’t need to be trained in that, you know? I just don’t want to change my job—I just want to get a job. But I’m always open for new skills, anything that will make my resume shine that is related to my job, which could be, for instance, public speaking. I’ve taken public speaking courses before so I can become a better speaker—like not stutter, not fill up blank times with words, learn how to space my words properly, these types of things. Or any other tools that would aid in better communications on my job—I would look into that. But not training for a new career. I want to become a Chief Marketing Officer for a company, and to do that, I have to stick with media and advertising. I’m not going to give up. My kid’s going to have everything he needs. I’m going to be able to afford to take him to college. Everything is going to happen; I’ve just got to wait for my chances. I don’t think there’s ever really luck involved with things; I think that you just put yourself in a position, and sometimes you just increase your odds.

So I’m going to just continue to try to increase my odds of good fortune, you know? But not college. I couldn’t—I mean, aside from GoFundMe, but I don’t have a compelling story for anybody except that I’m quarantined in a hotel because of COVID, but that’s not gonna last long. To go back to school right now, I would have to… well, I get stuck at the money part, to be honest with you. I have the drive. I would like to do it, but I can’t. I can’t afford it. I could take some precursor classes at a JC that could go towards something, but in terms of the crux, the meat of a curriculum, I can’t. I can’t do it. I can’t. I can’t. I can’t. There are some deferments that I’ve seen—deferred tuition at some schools—but I don’t know. I’m still looking for an answer. I’m already down right now—I’ve got a young baby, and quite frankly advertising can only make maximum $200,000, and in San Francisco low-income is considered $89,000 or below. So I can’t really make much here. Even as a CMO, I could barely afford to live here. I don’t know. I’m still trying to figure it out.”
COMMUNITY-BASED FEEDBACK SESSIONS

Interviewer-Advisor:
BRENDA MITCHELL

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<th>Interviewee:</th>
<th>Employment Status: Full-time medical home health aide</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Education: Some college</td>
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“It was a bad time in my life, back when I was young. I was pregnant. I had to get out and get a job. Things weren’t great back then. Well, once I had a kid, you know, I had to drop out. Then I went back and got my GED. I like my job because I’m able to take care of someone; I can help them. So I feel good about that as well. But ever since COVID-19, I have been scared to go to work. Dealing with being a person that’s on the front line—that’s personally affecting me because I don’t know who has it, and I have to take public transportation to get to work. When I get off work, everybody’s in the bed. I get off of work at eleven o’clock at night. Everybody’s asleep. I get off of work from 2:30 to eleven o’clock at night when I come home. My son is already in bed. It’s important for me that my son sees me do my job as a parent. And he’s doing it. So yeah, that’s my biggest accomplishment. That’s my goal for my son—not to be on drugs, selling drugs, on subsidized housing—no doubt. That’s my goal for my son—you know, just a young Black man that’s working and being successful at doing what he’s doing.

My highest potential? I haven’t even thought about that, honestly. I really haven’t even worried about none of that kind of stuff. I don’t even know what to say. No, no, seriously, like, real life—even asking that question—I have never even put no thought into nothing like that, really. I have so many other things going on, to be thinking about that kind of stuff. Seriously. I got a job; I got food in the refrigerator. There’s nothing for me to complain about.”

“Education is a terrible thing to waste—if you can get out there and do it, even at my age. There’s so much online learning now; there’s really no excuse. You can educate yourself if you want to do it. I haven’t been in school in 10 years, I have to admit. Finding another job for me—I’m going to be honest—at my age, it’s probably going to be difficult. Because they want the younger people; they don’t want the baby boomers much these days. I’m glad to have the job I have, helping homeless people. I’ve been enjoying it, meeting people from the street, listening to their stories, and just knowing that their lives have been disrupted, as well. For me, it’s giving back to the community, because I’m not in that situation, but that could be me. My son has a critical illness, so I feel like COVID-19 has kind of impacted us, but at the same time we’re still going out there to help the underprivileged. So I’m taking a risk pretty much every day because of health reasons. It hasn’t really impacted us financially—it’s more mentally. My supervisor was doing an interview for our agency and she said, ‘I want to stop for a minute. I just want to introduce you to the best partner in crime. She’s gonna drop everything to make it happen.’ So that’s how people view me. They always say that I’m kind, I’m loving, I’m nurturing. I definitely have a lot of hope. My highest potential is gonna always be to help others before myself. Not that I don’t take care of myself, but I just want to continue doing what I’m doing, and that’s helping others. So that’s kind of my highest potential honestly—just helping others, giving back. Because I know what it’s like to be poor. And I would never want to be in that situation again.”
**Interviewer-Advisor:**
AKIL GEORGE

**Interviewee:**
Aaron

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<th>Age: 32</th>
<th>Race or Ethnicity: Black</th>
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<td>Education: Associate’s degree</td>
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<td>Interview Date: 2020-04-07</td>
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<td>Relationship to Advisor: Akil’s coworker and friend from capoeira group</td>
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</table>

“I feel like, to a certain extent, that stereotypical working class type of mentality had a hold of me when I was younger, like: ‘I have to make sure I have job security with a pension plan and sick leave and health benefits.’ That was what was in my head. So when I went to Hunter College, I was gonna go do some psychology, then go to the NYPD and do profiling, do my 20-and-out kinda deal. But I started teaching when I started training in capoeira. I started working with my teacher within the first three months. He was doing school residency because he has his own nonprofit; it’s a capoeira group. I got into teaching through him. He picked me up as an assistant for his programs right away, immediately. I started working for him and dropped all the rest of my jobs. So the teaching artist thing happened when I started training, I realized this is what I wanted to do with my life. This is how I wanted to reach people. I wanted to help people. I wanted to make a difference. So that’s how you just get into teaching. And then from there, it was teaching for different companies and figuring out how things work within the field of teaching artists.

I’ve been pretty lucky to be able to work with some great companies, companies that have been built by close friends, to help them and support them in their own endeavors. But I reached a point in my teaching artist career where I was like, ‘Listen, I gotta find something else, because this is just not going to cut it by itself.’ It could, but the amount of work, the amount of hustle that I would have to put in, it just wasn’t working. One of the issues with teaching artist positions, I guess. The truth is that massage is my main breadwinner. When I went to Spain, I went to visit the Sagrada Familia in Barcelona and had a huge smack in the face. It was an emotional and spiritual experience for me, listening to how the architect designed the space according to what he believed, his faith, and so on. It helped me realize that I’m not living in the manner that I want to—by the principles that I want to. So for me, self-actualization would be that no matter what I decided to do, the manner in which I do it needs to match my belief system.”

**Interviewee:**
Asher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age: 30</th>
<th>Race or Ethnicity: Hispanic</th>
<th>Location: Brooklyn, NY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education: Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>Employment Status: Part-time work in the construction field</td>
<td>Interview Date: 2020-04-08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship to Advisor: Akil’s friend from capoeira group</td>
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“My father was a therapist, so I wanted to go into counseling. But in high school, I started just working, either through word-of-mouth or someone would offer me a job that needed me. I was an exterminator for a couple of years. I got into construction and steamfitting and pipefitting because my brother is in this field, and he wanted me to get into this field as well. It’s very limited—a lot of people want this job—and since he had the in, he wanted me to get it as well, so I did. With this new job that I got, I have to start at square one; like, I learned to cut some pipe, on-the-job training. COVID-19 is making me not work right now, which means I’m not making income, which is difficult. But before, I’m learning new things every day. It’s a little nerve wracking, but it’s also good in a good way. Because you’re learning something new. You know, when I had never done it before, it was very intimidating. I just use my natural ability, and I try to fake it ‘til I make it—fake competence or something like that. I don’t want fear to decide how I am, so it was either do it and be nervous and feel like you’re not doing good enough, or you got to learn somehow. So I really try, even every time I teach adults or children. It’s a humbling experience because I don’t think I’m good enough, but I’m still going to try my very best.

If I had to look for a new job today, the first thing I would do is I would contact my wife—that’s what she does for a living—and I would take any job I could get, just to hold the finances down. I would take any job at first, and then I would try to look for something that I’d be more passionate about. Self-actualization is a steady process—there’s always room to grow. But you feel accomplished, you feel secure, you feel inspiring—you inspire others, and you get inspired by others. For me, I have church and capoeira. Not everyone in the church community knows about capoeira. My capoeira community doesn’t know much about my spiritual church life. Not that I’m a different person, but everyone has likes and interests, and so it brings out a different part of me when I’m in one group or another. I think one of the main things for me is humility. You’re never going to do it by yourself. It’s always better to have a supportive community.”
**Interviewer-Advisor:**

AKIL GEORGE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Interviewee:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Employment Status:</strong> Part-time/gig work in acting, theater, and film</th>
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<tr>
<td>Perez</td>
<td>Age: 30 Race or Ethnicity: Black Location: Cincinnati, OH Education: Bachelor's degree Relationship to Advisor: Akil’s college classmate and friend from capoeira group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anwar</td>
<td>Age: 28 Race or Ethnicity: Black Location: Pine Bush, NY Education: Associate's degree Relationship to Advisor: Akil’s younger brother</td>
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“When I was about 14, I first started working. Just a regular grocery store job. It was mostly because my mom was a stay at home mom with four kids. Those kids needed to eat. So did I. I thought I needed to start working in order to bring in an additional income in order for us to have money so that we’re getting food. And that was just like grocery store, fast food restaurant jobs that I used to get and work part time on weekends or sometimes after school after high school. When I was in college, I didn’t work as much but I still had access to fast food jobs that I would work. And I also worked as a secretary for the liberal arts dean for the dean’s office in the Liberal Arts Building at RIT.

After I graduated, I had to move back home. My mom needed surgery. So I had to try to find a job quickly in order to make sure that we had everything that we needed while she couldn’t do anything and while she was recovering. So my very first job out of college was actually at a warehouse through a temporary agency. I worked that for about six months. That was the first one that I worked. It was between six months to two years where I would hold on to those jobs until either I was laid off or work stopped so they had to get rid of me.”

“I feel like that’s a general experience of people of color in America—you’re not going to belong. You’re gonna have that—because there’s an inability to connect with the mainstream culture because you’re not x, y. You kind of have to listen as an actor, so one of the skills I’ve developed is reading the room and knowing what one room wants you to be and what one room doesn’t want you to be. I’ll lead with, ‘Hey, I know this person.’ I guess that’s my technique. I’ll say, ‘I know this person.’ Then if we talk longer, ‘Oh, because their brother is a part of my improv group,’ or ‘I’ve done lighting for their sons,’ whatever. It’s a skill that’s not as artfully developed, but checking yourself at the door and knowing what kind of room you’re walking into because of the variance. I don’t want to use the word ‘urban’—I hate that word—but there’s more-Black spaces. And then there’s white redneck spaces, there’s white shady spaces, there’s white hipster spaces, there’s white college spaces, there’s white suburb leave-us-alone places. People of color, we were tied to NYC. Hudson Valley is so big that you need something from each room, and you can’t go into that room who you are.

Let’s say, in NYC, Chicago in some places, Atlanta, or California you can walk in the room like, ‘Hey, I am this non-binary, Afro-twisted-out, blue-haired bombshell.’ People will talk to you, listen to you, and find out who you are. In this area, not so much. There’s a lot of stake held in how you present yourself—how much you deviate from the norm—you kind of have to enter neutrally and then go from there. Some people kind of watch if you walk around in this area because it’s mostly a car-driving area. If you’re a walker, people might drive around and stalk you in a certain way. I’ve had people throw things at me like water bottles. Even just like, I’ll get to school and hear random errant gunshots, because this is a very big area for hunting, and that by itself feels like just a lack of safety. I guess one of the benefits of this virus is that less people are outside, so I can go be outside more often, to work out or do walks. To me, a self-actualized person is someone free enough to be able to find out what that means. There’s a Japanese structure called the way of ikigai where your way of living is made to be structured in a very simple way. Ikigai could be, ‘I want to eat food,’ or ‘I want to dance real good.’ It doesn’t need to be your defining purpose. It can kind of just be what you want to do consistently for a day or five. I’m someone who is struggling up the ladder so I’m not really focused on the top. I’m more focused on how to progress further up. I find it very interesting that you guys are using the Maslow hierarchy of needs to structure these interviews. As someone who’s super into and interested in psychology structures or ideas like this, it intrigued me that this is used as a way to explore people’s lives.”
### Interviewer-Advisor:
**KATHERINE BARNES**

**Interviewee:**
**Tyrone**
- **Age:** 62
- **Race or Ethnicity:** Black
- **Location:** New Rochelle, NY
- **Education:** Associate’s degree
- **Employment Status:** Not employed or seeking work due to disability
- **Interview Date:** 2020-04-02
- **Relationship to Advisor:** Katherine’s friend who lives in the same city

“My upbringing—I would describe it as harsh, strict. My father is much older than my mother. He was born on the tail end of slavery in Gainesville, Florida. My brothers and sisters, we bear the brunt of his ill deeds. I got whipped a lot. I didn’t like the way I was born. I couldn’t understand how a person that seemed to love me could beat the hell out of me so much. I got into substance-abuse counseling after getting clean. I was invited to a meeting type thing; they were talking about substance-abuse counseling, and schools I could go to. So I went to a school, and I got hired as a substance-abuse counselor here in Yonkers, New York.”

In my career in social work, we have to take various courses that come up during work, such as learning how to deal with HIV and AIDS, substance abuse, homelessness, and so forth. At this point in time, rent is affordable; they only charge me 30% of my income at my building, and they have plenty of food banks in New Rochelle. When I first came here, I worried about it. I was introduced to some of the pantries, and for the first six months, that’s what I lived on. But saving and being able to pay only 30% of my income leaves me with money—enough money for myself to be able to shop for adequate food. So I’m fine right now.

Overall, my experience as far as education has been very good. I mean, in the beginning, I wanted to go to one of these big colleges, and then I found out they were so expensive. I ended up going to Westchester Community College, and it was great. It was great. The instructors were great, the campus was good, and it wasn’t hard to get to. I remember I spoke to a career counselor there. He said, ‘You’re going to be a good social worker; you care about people. That’s what you should go for.’ You know, and that’s what I did.”

**Interviewee:**
**Baryse**
- **Age:** 36
- **Race or Ethnicity:** Black
- **Location:** Bronx, NY
- **Education:** Bachelor’s degree
- **Employment Status:** Full-time case manager at homeless family shelter
- **Interview Date:** 2020-04-03
- **Relationship to Advisor:** Katherine’s niece who lives nearby

“I grew up in a house with my two brothers and my mother. My mother passed away in 2009. I had my daughter in 2013. I want to go back and get my master’s in social work, but with everything that is going on now with COVID-19, I’m going to wait until I get my childcare situation sorted out because homeschooling is nonstop. I don’t love my neighborhood—the parties, the loud music all night, it’s really disturbing. A more ideal living situation would be peace and quiet. But I have a roof over my head, and that’s the most important thing. Of course I worry about bills and groceries— all the time. I’m an African American single mother of a six-year-old daughter with no help; living in New York is very expensive. I worry about if we’re gonna make it, or how we’re going to put food on the table. Even with working it’s still a lot. You got other expenses, you got to buy clothes, got to buy personal products—it’s a lot.

The pandemic has got me on edge. I’m not sleeping at night. I worry about my friends and my family, or if things are going to run out too fast at work, and we won’t be able to have any items we need, so it’s kind of nerve-wracking for me. I fear for everybody that’s around me with this virus that’s going on. My relationship with my daughter is extremely important because she needs to be raised the right way. She needs to know what love is. She needs to know what that is. She needs to know respect, boundaries, priorities. She needs to have a positive mother figure in her life so that when she’s an adult, she knows how to hold her own, and she don’t have to rely on nobody for nothing.”
### Interviewer-Advisor:
**KATHERINE BARNES**

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<tr>
<th><strong>Interviewee:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Age:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Race or Ethnicity:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Location:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Education:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Employment Status:</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Kenshen</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>New Rochelle, NY</td>
<td>High school diploma</td>
<td>Full-time medical home health aide</td>
<td>Part-time back-up home aide for Katherine’s mother</td>
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<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>New Rochelle, NY</td>
<td>Associate’s degree</td>
<td>Full-time administrator at New Rochelle Radiology</td>
<td>Previously Katherine’s colleague at a prior job</td>
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“I get up, get dressed, take a shower, eat my breakfast, get to work. I work at my job, then come home, relax, have dinner, and go to bed, and start over the whole thing again. Most of my jobs I got either through online advertising or word of mouth from a friend. Those are the two main ways I get work. I got my current job through word-of-mouth. My friend, he was telling about getting into this field, and I just checked it out and was hoping it was something that I would enjoy doing, and here I am, five years later. I’m always myself at work, around my friends, the same person. You only get one me. At the beginning of my current job is when I pretty much had to learn everything about this job. I knew nothing. I was able to do on-the-job training. It was the repetitiveness of it, doing it over and over and over. And that was what helped me get better at it. You know, where you can actually perform the tasks, just repeat certain things over and over again.

What’s my potential? I’ve no idea. I don’t live my life like that. I don’t measure things in that nature of potential. I want to be caring to other people. That’s pretty much it. Learn to forgive. Getting better at that—kindness and forgiveness. Those are my two life goals—and when I pass, die with a good conscience.”

“I was taken from my mother in Manhattan. CPS found me in an abandoned building. I was 12 months. My mother was a drug addict for, you know, a few years when she went to the hospital to have my sister, who was born with drugs in her system, and then they came and found me. So I was in foster care from age one to age six. During that time, we were living in the Bronx—I imagine, rather. Then from age six to about ten I was living with my biological mother in the Bronx. Then, from age 11 to about age 14, I was in and out of foster care. So I was back and forth from Westchester to Manhattan, and then from age 14 on, I’ve stayed in New Rochelle. I became sick in 2009 with multiple sclerosis. I didn’t know I had multiple sclerosis. At that time I just knew that I couldn’t keep up with the work anymore. Things became extremely difficult for me. I couldn’t remember words. I couldn’t remember my own mathematical formats and formulas that I had created in my own spreadsheets. Part of my job was to report to the CEO of the company how many calls were coming in, how quickly, how we were dealing with patient complaints. I was having a really tough time keeping up with that when I discovered I was sick. I was out on disability and found out I also had lupus. So I left my job. I was out of work for about five years. It was a crazy time because I’m a serious go-getter. I like to continue to learn. It’s what makes me strong. It was a piece of my identity. I always tell people one of my greatest gifts is that I do learn quickly; I’m very adaptable. And all of a sudden, that’s taken from me. So it was a very devastating time in my life. I was very depressed for about five good years. I think in the sixth or seventh year, I started to get a little stronger and decided that MS and lupus didn’t have me, and I wasn’t going to let it conquer me anymore. On Indeed, I had gotten a job coach from Social Security. I was in the ‘Tickets’ work program. They had advised me to log into the feed and look for jobs on that website. The job I have now was really one of the first jobs that I clicked on and sent my resume to. The pay was excellent, and the location was excellent.

I was really surprised and blessed to find a job across the street from my house. My whole life I had been working in Connecticut, so I’d been driving 25 to 30 miles there and back at least three to four times a week. This is my first full time job since I’ve been back to work, and I’m saving money on tolls, so it is a true blessing. I think my 10-year-old-self would say, ‘Wow, I can’t believe you’re still here. I can’t believe you’re still here. And I’m proud of you.’ Because I really fought hard to still be here. I think when I first hit New Rochelle, people thought, ‘Hey, she’s a foster case, she’ll never get far.’ My mom that raised me—my last foster mom.—she just passed away. We just buried her on February 14th. She was the most important person, and I just want her to know that, ‘You did it, Ma. You took a confused little girl, and you made her believe in herself. You made her strong, and I continue to stand because of you. Thank you.’”
“I’m a post-civil rights baby. I was born and raised in Detroit, Michigan—grew up in a middle class neighborhood in northeast Detroit. When we originally moved there, it was very much a mixed neighborhood in terms of Blacks and whites living together. My father raised us. My mother died when I was seven years old. I had a typical childhood growing up in Michigan, the Winter Wonderland. We ice-skated, tobogganed, sledded. The school was literally a block and a half down the street, literally at the end of the street. In the early ‘70s, they had busing and my dad didn’t want us to be bused, so I went to Catholic school for two years, seventh and eighth grade, which was a different experience. Then I went back to public school for high school, on the northeast side of Detroit. I was a very good student. I’ve always been the oldest, very responsible. I remember my dad saying: ‘Who’s gonna help me with the kids? And I said: ‘I will.’ So I attended Wayne State University, was fortunate enough to get an internship at then what was called the Motor Vehicle Manufacturers Association. I was 19. I took a position as a full-time secretary, and they paid all of my tuition and books. Daddy didn’t want me to do it, but I did it anyway because I loved being a secretary, and they were paying for my school. So I went to school at night, starting when I was 20 years old.

I’m older now. I feel very comfortable in my skin. I’ve always tended to have a professional demeanor and been able to code switch, in the sense of being more relaxed with true friends and family versus having a more professional demeanor when I’m working. That’s across the board. I’m leaning heavily toward going back into my own businesses again. I’m an entrepreneur at heart. My current position allows me to operate in that way because no one defines how I have to work in my market; I define it for myself for the most part. I have goals and objectives, but no one tells me: ‘Today you have to do this.’ I would like people to know that I cared about our community, especially young people. I think life is very difficult, and oftentimes, our young people don’t have the support they need. I think parents have a tendency not to look at their own children differently and often don’t see the potential—that their capacity is.”

“I grew up in southwest Atlanta. I’m the youngest of five. My mom and my dad raised me. My mom was an excellent, excellent mother. My dad was a good father. He was not around as much as my mom was, but he provided well for us, and when he was around, we always had fun with our dad. My dad was the fun person. I am a high school graduate. I went to college for three years; business management was my major, but I did not complete it. I have four more classes. I have one son that’s 27, and two grandkids, ages three and nine months. I’ve worked for the airline for 33 years. Until the virus came along, I was full-time; now I’m 30 hours a week. I work in the cargo control center where I do station support—any station that needs help with accepting cargo—we have a system for that. We’re also the department that keeps it running with the kidneys, the eyeballs from donors. But that department does not do just one thing. If the person don’t know how to accept the freight, if the pieces are incorrect, I help them to correct that. Certain things we cannot accept because it’s dangerous. When it comes to the organs, we send them from state to state and city to city to whoever needs that, whatever hospital needs it. We track it from beginning to end. Say for example it’s going from L.A. to Atlanta to Memphis—we send out an email to all those stations and check the moves. We also do pets and human remains. The same kind of situation.

I wake up in the morning to get showered, get dressed, and go to work. It looks real good when I wake up and it’s a roof and not dirt. I have to be at work by 6:00 and I currently get off at 12:30. I work in Excel sheets, answer the phone, and make phone calls, but we don’t talk to customers—only in house customers. Even though I did not finish college, none of it really is a waste of time because anytime you have to concentrate on something or get something done, it teaches you in life. Doing Excel at work makes some of that stuff come back to me from when I was in college doing business management. So all of it really applies to life because living a life is like a small business—you have to pay your bills, make sure everything’s paid on time. You have to earn your money, make your budget, and stick by that budget. Increasing knowledge is good for me, even at my age. If I had to look for a new job today, first of all, I’d look at all the people that I have to pay every month. Those are good people to work for because I know they’re getting good money.”
**COMMUNITY-BASED FEEDBACK SESSIONS**

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<tr>
<th>Interviewer-Advisor:</th>
<th>DALE HARRISON</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Interviewee:</strong></td>
<td>Marquise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age: 27</td>
<td>Race or Ethnicity: Black</td>
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<td>Education: Bachelor's degree</td>
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<td>Employment Status: Full-time logistics planner at a large food distributor</td>
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<td>Interview Date: 2020-04-27</td>
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“Really wanted to be a physical therapist, but I ended up making my way over to logistics. I figured I could make a pretty good living off of it, and it requires critical thinking. That’s why I went with it—I like critical thinking. I’ve been working with this company for five years. My typical day looks like coming in, and looking at whatever customers emailed me last night, figuring out whatever happened last night, where all our drivers are—trying to get caught up on where everything is. You have to predict what the customers are going to want. I try to get a leg up on that and just communicate with them all day, and take care of operational things around the terminal, and plan for the next day. I’ve seen other people get bonuses, but I haven’t gotten this. I don’t really mess with that part. I haven’t gotten promoted. I just keep on kind of adding responsibility.

When this pandemic came through and jobs were a little bit uncertain, it was a level of concern there. But my wife and I are fortunate to have jobs that let us work from home. I believe my family caught the virus, or had it for a long period of time, about a month or two ago. My daughter started catching a fever, and I lost my voice. My wife couldn’t taste. The doctor told all of us to stay home for two weeks, so that’s what we did for a minute. I had to take vacation one week. My wife and I started a real estate investing company about a year ago. We’ve been researching, talking to different people, going to different houses and looking at them. We’ll work for a couple more years, then replace that income with our real estate investing income, then parlay it into bigger dreams. We’ve been putting a plan together. At that point, I really want to start my own rec center. I want to open up a rec center or build a rec center in a community that doesn’t have one.”

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<th>Interviewee:</th>
<th>Gary</th>
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<tr>
<td>Race or Ethnicity: Black</td>
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<td>Employment Status: Retired</td>
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“I was going to be a senior in high school when my parents left for Germany. I stayed in the States, and went down to live with my brother in Georgia, where I took the opportunity to take my GED. After the GED, I went to Atlanta, and couldn’t find any job opportunity. So I joined the military.

I had an injury in the military in 1992. I had a training injury. Being that I could not participate in the military functions anymore, I was medically discharged in 1994. After that, after a two-year hiatus, I started working for the correctional office, becoming a correctional officer. I went to bootcamp for correctional officers. Education, to me, was only necessary when needed. I got all my education from the military. I took a few college courses during those periods of time here and there, off and on, continuously, but never finished because it was never needed. I am not impacted by the coronavirus in too much of any way, shape, form, or fashion. My checks don’t stop. My lights are still on. I have no problem with coronavirus because actually I’ve been on coronavirus since 2010 in a sense. I’m home anyway. As far as education, I went through all the logistical management in the military, got certified in that so I didn’t have to go to a regular school or college outside the military. I went to a logistical management college in the military. These programs were necessary as part of my career development; it would help you get promoted to the next rank in the military. I never paid for any of my training. I paid with the offering up of my life. I’m glad they didn’t utilize it, but that’s the price you have to pay. I’m trying to look at it in a college sense. The time was valuable. Military training teaches you to be on time for things over and over and over again. Then you have that embedded in your system. You don’t do things longer than you should. It teaches you time management skills. I don’t have a relationship or didn’t get personal with my military or my coworkers too much throughout my whole career. I had to survive.”

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**TOWARD ECONOMIC JUSTICE | APPENDIX 157**
Community-Based Feedback Sessions

Interviewer-Advisor:
Myiah Watson

Interviewee: Chelsea
Age: 30
Race or Ethnicity: Black
Location: Las Vegas, NV
Education: Bachelor's degree
Employment Status: Part-time self-employed DJ and professional dancer
Interview Date: 2020-04-03
Relationship to Advisor: Myiah’s close friend

“I was born in St. Louis, but my parents’ split created a lot of bouncing back and forth between St. Louis and the San Francisco Bay Area until first or second grade, when my mom and I just stayed in the Bay Area. I went to a performing arts high school then went to college for an AA in acting and music. After college, I was able to use my skills to work in a dance studio in San Francisco. I was able to get that job due to my education providing me with credibility that employers could see. But I feel like college was a waste of time and money for me because I realized after the fact that my industry of choice had a lot of different ways I could get into what I wanted to be in. In high school though, it was great to be around other creative performing kids. I enjoyed high school, but I did not enjoy college.

Right now, I am crashing with a friend. I’m not paying rent, but I am paying water, garbage, and utilities. The part-time job I had shut down completely due to COVID-19 because it was a pop-up museum. But I’m not worried about bills and groceries because there are so many ways to work from home or through apps that I can always get money if I need it. In the past, before these things, I had to worry about food and bills, and it was horrible to be constantly in survival mode and distracted from the substance of life. I’m working with Postmates, and it is great because it allows me the flexibility that I am used to and that I need to perfect my creative passions. I would love to learn more within DJing and dance but, a master’s degree is no longer something I want to do because everything that I want for myself is so accessible now. Further education for me just seems like a waste of time.”

Interviewee: Andrya
Age: 37
Race or Ethnicity: White
Location: Vallejo, CA
Education: Bachelor's degree
Employment Status: Full-time architectural designer at an architecture firm
Interview Date: 2020-04-03
Relationship to Advisor: Parent of a student the school where Myiah works

“The Marine Corps was valuable because I gained a level of self-confidence that I didn’t have before. I didn’t think I could do it. I was amazed—I pushed my body to limits that I didn’t know I had. It’s also an incredibly sexist environment, so there were definitely downsides to the whole experience. Later on, while I was pregnant with my first child, I got my bachelor’s degree. Actually, it took me a while to finish my degree because it’s really distracting to have two small babies while you’re in school. But still, this is not what I imagined my life would be. That’s probably my number one dissatisfaction. I expected to be more financially solvent; like, not necessarily straight up rich, but not worrying—about how I was going to pay this bill and what’s going to have to be late—for everything to be able to stay cohesive.

Earlier in my career I struggled with imposter syndrome because I didn’t have an architecture degree. I had a design degree, and I started at an architecture firm, so I was like, ‘I’m not qualified to be here; I’m so sorry.’ And they were like, ‘You’re for sure qualified, and you’re amazing at what you do.’ But I eventually want to own my own business. I want to create a line of lighting, a line of furniture. Eventually, I’d like to create products that I can sell so that I’m not working on an hourly basis—so that my income isn’t tied to my clock. I think I’d like to be known as someone that is dependable that you can rely on, whether it’s my designs—I would absolutely, definitely like to be valued for my designs—or more globally, I want everyone that knows me to know that I’m here. I want to be of service to everyone.”
COMMUNITY-BASED FEEDBACK SESSIONS

**Interviewer-Advisor:
MYIAH WATSON**

**Interviewee:
Priscila**

- **Age:** 29
- **Race or Ethnicity:** Hispanic
- **Location:** Vallejo, CA
- **Education:** Bachelor’s degree
- **Employment Status:** Full-time instructional assistant at a charter school
- **Interview Date:** 2020-04-06
- **Relationship to Advisor:** Myiah’s coworker at a charter school

“I most belong to the Latinx community. I grew up to become very proud of my roots, my heritage, and it’s something that I put forth very clearly. I identify as Black next, right away, and I’m pretty involved in the social justice aspect of it too. My identity comes from my upbringing, and my drive for social justice does, too. Growing up in a Mexican household, your expectation is to learn how to cook and clean, and find a husband and have children. I think my 10-year-old self would be very happy that I was able to break out—I don’t want to say break out of my family—but out of the expectations that were put on me.

The job that I had before this one—where I worked at a Montessori school—the demographic of the school was very different from the things that I was used to, so I feel like I had to tone it down a lot and kind of make other people not feel uncomfortable. I had to speak in a different way and look a certain way. I wouldn’t really comment on others’ conversations with me about ‘touchy’ things. I do want to go back to school eventually. It’s something I want to work on, something that will both be very fulfilling and help me—not that I’m not financially stable now—but to be able to meet all of my financial needs. So a mix of good pay, and it makes me feel good. But my career, although it is very important, it’s not what ultimately will make me happy. I think it’s more my personal relationships. My family and my own well-being—that will make me happy.”

**Interviewee:
Alexandra**

- **Age:** 28
- **Race or Ethnicity:** Black
- **Location:** Oakland, CA
- **Education:** Some college
- **Employment Status:** Full-time esthetician at European Wax Center
- **Interview Date:** 2020-04-08
- **Relationship to Advisor:** Myiah’s cousin who attended cosmetology school

“I was originally born and raised in Richmond. Due to my parents splitting, we kind of went from house to house for a little bit. So in terms of shelter and food and water, although those things were always provided, they weren’t mainly stable until I was in middle school. When I was pre-high school, I struggled a little bit in terms of reaching the standard current-grade goals. Because I struggled, a lot of my basic and fundamental development was delayed. So once I reached early high school years, because it intimidated me so much, I started off a little bit behind. Peer pressure is huge in high school, so I kind of played the role of faking it until I made it and didn’t really care too much about my education until my junior year of high school. In junior college, I wanted to take it seriously in terms of making sure that my fundamental things that I needed—to progress at a rate that would make me successful—were acquired. I went to a JC to accomplish that. And then once I felt comfortable is when I transferred to the HBCU, but culturally, it was different. After going to college and realizing that the culture was completely different, I decided to move back home. I discontinued college and went straight into working. But college is something that I’ve always had on my list of things to actually complete, but I haven’t had the time to do so.

In the meantime, I’ve done schooling or nontraditional schooling, such as a form of seminary school at my church. That is also how I’ve gotten to be so heavily involved in my church. School has always been a scary thing for me, personally, how my beginning years went. It always intimidates me. And so the best approach for me is slow. I eventually got into cosmetology school, realizing that I wanted to make people feel good about themselves. So I went to beauty school, became an esthetician, and I’ve been an esthetician for the last 10 years. I’m able to save. I’m not working to live anymore. I’m able to actually enjoy my life and not be fixated on making sure that bills and all of these things are covered with absolutely nothing at the end of the day.”
The landscape analysis conducted for this work was led by Kenneth Fang, Garima Manocha, and Allie Polk. The analysis required extensive study of business models, service models, target market segments, user experience, and funding history across nearly 100 labor platforms, including countless dual-customer training programs. These organizations along with key information available at the time of secondary research are listed below.
# Detailed List of Labor Platforms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Website</th>
<th>Company Description</th>
<th>Year Founded</th>
<th>Tax Status</th>
<th>Headquarters</th>
<th>Money Raised (in $mm)</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Revenue Model</th>
<th>Finalized Funding Model</th>
<th>Remaining Funding Need</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4:13 Strong</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>413strong.org</td>
<td>Intensive residential program that provides training and job placement for at-risk men</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>Nashville, TN</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>On-ramp</td>
<td>Philanthropic and public funding</td>
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<tr>
<td>8th Light</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>8thlight.com/services/consulting</td>
<td>Custom software developer and paid training program</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Paid training</td>
<td>Outsourced service</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acadium</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>acadium.com/courses</td>
<td>Matches students and employers for digital apprenticeships in marketing; offers free short courses in marketing</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>Ottawa, Canada</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Paid training</td>
<td>SaaS</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>AlwaysHired</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>alwayshired.com</td>
<td>In-person immersive sales training boot camp for candidates seeking full-time sales jobs with technology companies</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
<td>$500,000</td>
<td>Paid training</td>
<td>Outsourced recruitment</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>Andela</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>andela.com</td>
<td>Software recruiting company that recruits, trains, and embeds software developers in Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Egypt and Ghana</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
<td>$18,000,000</td>
<td>Paid training</td>
<td>Outsourced service</td>
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<tr>
<td>App Academy</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>appacademy.io</td>
<td>Ruby on Rails developer training bootcamp</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Bootcamp</td>
<td>Deferred tuition</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>Apprenti</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>apprenticareers.org</td>
<td>Paid tech-industry training program for members of underrepresented groups combining on-the-job training and education</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>Seattle, WA</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Paid training</td>
<td>Outsourced recruitment</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bitwise Industries</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>bitwiseindustries.com</td>
<td>Provides coding training, real estate for aspiring technologists, and custom software development</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>Fresno, CA</td>
<td>$27,000,000</td>
<td>Paid training</td>
<td>Outsourced service</td>
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<tr>
<td>Boise CodeWorks</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>boisecodeworks.com</td>
<td>Bootcamp in which students work in teams led by industry professional who can provide reference letters</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>Boise, ID</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Bootcamp</td>
<td>Tuition</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>BrainStation</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>brainstation.io</td>
<td>Collaborative, project-based bootcamps in web development, data science, and UX design, both in person and online</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Bootcamp</td>
<td>Income share agreement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brooklyn Workforce Innovations</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>bwny.org</td>
<td>Full-time intensive skills training and two years of career counseling and job placement support for jobless and working New Yorkers</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>Brooklyn, NY</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>On-ramp</td>
<td>Mixed (public, philanthropic, earned revenue)</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>Building Skills Partnership</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>buildingskills.org</td>
<td>Among other services, offers vocational training and on-the-job ESL courses for members of the service industries in California</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>Los Angeles, CA</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Joint labor-management program</td>
<td>Mixed (public, philanthropic, earned revenue)</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>Calbright College</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>calbright.org</td>
<td>Digital college, part of the California Community College system, that focuses on careers, not credentials; uses a combination of online classes, mobile apps, and in-person apprenticeships to provide working adults with the skills they need to move into higher pay jobs and provides hiring managers with a reliable pool of qualified applicants whom they can get to know from the start of the learning process</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>Sacramento, CA</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>On-ramp</td>
<td>Mixed (public, philanthropic, earned revenue)</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Since June 2020, according to Crunchbase and Owler
## Detailed List of Labor Platforms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Website</th>
<th>Year Founded</th>
<th>IRS Status</th>
<th>Headquarters</th>
<th>Money Raised (in $mm)</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Revenue Model</th>
<th>Note</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capital IDEA</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>capitalidea.org</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>Austin, TX</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>On-ramp</td>
<td>Mixed (public, philanthropic, earned revenue)</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>Catalyte</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>catalyte.io</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>Baltimore, MD</td>
<td>$63,000,000</td>
<td>Paid training</td>
<td>Outsourced service</td>
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<tr>
<td>Climb Hire</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>climbhire.co</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Bootcamp</td>
<td>Mixed (public, philanthropic, earned revenue)</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cluster Inc</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>clusterinc.com</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>Culver City, CA</td>
<td>$1,900,000</td>
<td>Labor platform</td>
<td>SaaS</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coalfield Development Corporation</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>coalfield-development.org/training-and-events</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>Wayne, WV</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Paid training</td>
<td>Mixed (public, philanthropic, earned revenue)</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code Fellows</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>codefellows.org</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>Seattle, WA</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Bootcamp</td>
<td>Tuition</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consortium for Worker Education</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>cwenet.net</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Joint labor-management program</td>
<td>Mixed (public, philanthropic, earned revenue)</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating IT Futures</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>creatingitfutures.org</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>Downers Grove, IL</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>On-ramp</td>
<td>Mixed (public, philanthropic, earned revenue)</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>Culinary Academy of Las Vegas</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>theculinaryacademy.org</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>Las Vegas, NV</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Joint labor-management program</td>
<td>Mixed (public, philanthropic, earned revenue)</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC Central Kitchen</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>dccentralkitchen.org/ enroll</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>Washington, DC</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Paid training</td>
<td>Outsourced service</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital Creative Institute</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>digitalcreativeinstitute.com</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>San Antonio, TX</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Paid training</td>
<td>Deferred tuition</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>District 1199C Training &amp; Upgrading Fund</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1199ctraining.org</td>
<td>1974</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>Philadelphia, PA</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Joint labor-management program</td>
<td>Mixed (public, philanthropic, earned revenue)</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Website</th>
<th>Tagline</th>
<th>Year Founded</th>
<th>Revenue Model</th>
<th>Tax Status</th>
<th>Headquarters</th>
<th>Money Raised (in $mm)</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Revenue Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Easterseals Greater Cincinnati</td>
<td></td>
<td>easterseals.com/gc/our-programs/our-businesses</td>
<td>Provides job training for disabled and chronically unemployed job seekers, as well as work opportunities at its businesses (e.g., retail store, construction, fulfillment, visual arts)</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>Cincinnati, OH</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Paid training</td>
<td>Mixed (public, philanthropic, earned revenue)</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>Epicodus</td>
<td></td>
<td>epicodus.com</td>
<td>Twenty-week full-time programming bootcamp that provides training in job-search skills, job and internship prep, and a five-week internship</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>Portland, OR</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Bootcamp</td>
<td>Deferred tuition</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farestart</td>
<td></td>
<td>farestart.org/hire-farestart-graduate</td>
<td>Social enterprise providing job training and placement in the culinary industry for homeless and disadvantaged workers, including youth</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>Seattle, WA</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Paid training</td>
<td>Outsourced service</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flatiron School</td>
<td></td>
<td>flatironschool.com</td>
<td>Technology bootcamp in software engineering, data science, and UX/UI design</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
<td>$15,700,000</td>
<td>Bootcamp</td>
<td>Income share agreement</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flockjay</td>
<td></td>
<td>flockjay.com</td>
<td>Ten-week part-time training program in tech sales</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
<td>$3,100,000</td>
<td>Bootcamp</td>
<td>Income share agreement</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus: HOPE</td>
<td></td>
<td>focushope.edu</td>
<td>Detroit community organization that provides both workforce development courses (in truck driving, IT, and manufacturing) and pre-apprenticeship programs (in manufacturing, culinary, and construction) and other services</td>
<td>1968</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>Detroit, MI</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>On-ramp</td>
<td>Mixed (public, philanthropic, earned revenue)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Futuro Health</td>
<td></td>
<td>futurohealth.org</td>
<td>Union-affiliated nonprofit focused on increasing healthcare workforce in California; supports job seekers in completing credentialing programs and transitioning into allied healthcare jobs, and offers recruiting services for employers</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>Sacramento, CA</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Joint labor-management program</td>
<td>Mixed (public, philanthropic, earned revenue)</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>Galvanize</td>
<td></td>
<td>galvanize.com</td>
<td>Offers hybrid online and in-person bootcamps in data science and coding in partnership with Hack Reactor at eight campuses across the US</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>Denver, CO</td>
<td>$167,600,000</td>
<td>Bootcamp</td>
<td>Income share agreement</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>General Assembly</td>
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<td>generalassembly</td>
<td>Offers training in coding, data science, design, and digital marketing both online and at multiple campuses</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
<td>$119,500,000</td>
<td>Bootcamp</td>
<td>Deferred tuition</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>Generation</td>
<td></td>
<td>usa.generation.org</td>
<td>Provides free online training to reskill current workers, prepare job seekers for careers, and place them in positions in IT, digital marketing, construction, customer service, and medical administration</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>Washington, DC</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>On-ramp</td>
<td>Mixed (public, philanthropic, earned revenue)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hired</td>
<td></td>
<td>hired.com</td>
<td>Matches tech workers with employers; offers them job search coaching and a job comparison tools, and offers employers information about competing offers for workers</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
<td>$192,700,000</td>
<td>Labor platform</td>
<td>SaaS</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>Holberton School</td>
<td></td>
<td>holbertonschool.com</td>
<td>College alternative that provides two-year project-based training in software engineering</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
<td>$12,500,000</td>
<td>Bootcamp</td>
<td>Income share agreement</td>
<td>N</td>
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<tr>
<td>HOPE Project DC</td>
<td></td>
<td>hopeprojectdc.org</td>
<td>IT training program that prepares students for entry-level positions in helpdesk and application support</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>Washington, DC</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>On-ramp</td>
<td>Mixed (public, philanthropic, earned revenue)</td>
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<tr>
<td>i.c.stars</td>
<td></td>
<td>icstars.org</td>
<td>Offers project-based immersive training in app development for low-income young adults; supplies contract-to-hire and direct-hire workers for employers</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>On-ramp</td>
<td>Mixed (public, philanthropic, earned revenue)</td>
<td>N</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Since June 2020, according to Crunchbase and Owler*
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
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<th>Headquarters</th>
<th>Funding Raised (in $mm)</th>
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<td>Incredible Health</td>
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<td>incredibleHealth.com</td>
<td>2017</td>
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<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
<td>$15,000,000</td>
<td>Labor platform</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
<td>$15,000,000</td>
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<td>Instawork</td>
<td></td>
<td>instawork.com</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
<td>$28,000,000</td>
<td>Labor platform</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
<td>$28,000,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Institute for Career Development</td>
<td></td>
<td>icdlearning.org</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>Merrillville, IN</td>
<td></td>
<td>Joint labor-management program</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Merrillville, IN</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interapt</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>interapt.com</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>Louisville, KY</td>
<td></td>
<td>Paid training</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Louisville, KY</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ironhack</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>ironhack.com/en</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>Madrid, Spain</td>
<td>$7,000,000</td>
<td>Bootcamp</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Madrid, Spain</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jane Addams Resource Corporation</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>jane-addams.org</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
<td></td>
<td>On-ramp</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
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<tr>
<td>JVS Human Services</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>jevshuman-services.org</td>
<td>1941</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>Philadelphia, PA</td>
<td></td>
<td>On-ramp</td>
<td>1941</td>
<td>Philadelphia, PA</td>
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<tr>
<td>JobTrain</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>jobtrainworks.org</td>
<td>1965</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
<td></td>
<td>On-ramp</td>
<td>1965</td>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
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<tr>
<td>JVS Boston</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>jvs-boston.org</td>
<td>1973</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>Boston, MA</td>
<td></td>
<td>On-ramp</td>
<td>1973</td>
<td>Boston, MA</td>
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<tr>
<td>JVS San Francisco</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>jvs.org</td>
<td>1973</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
<td></td>
<td>On-ramp</td>
<td>1973</td>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenzie Academy</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>kenzie.academy</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>Indianapolis, IN</td>
<td>$212,000,000</td>
<td>Bootcamp</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Indianapolis, IN</td>
<td>$212,000,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>KnackApp</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>knackapp.com</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
<td></td>
<td>Labor intermediary</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lambda School</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>lambdaschool.com</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
<td>$48,000,000</td>
<td>Bootcamp</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
<td>$48,000,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Launch School</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>launchschool.com</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>Scottsdale, AZ</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bootcamp</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Scottsdale, AZ</td>
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<tr>
<td>Launchcode</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>launchcode.org</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>St. Louis, MO</td>
<td></td>
<td>Paid training</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>St. Louis, MO</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Since June 2020, according to Crunchbase and Owler
**DETAILED LIST OF LABOR PLATFORMS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Website</th>
<th>Category Description</th>
<th>Year Founded</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Revenue Model</th>
<th>Funding Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LearningFuze</td>
<td>learningfuze.com</td>
<td>Immersive 12-week web development bootcamp</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>Irvine, CA</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) Bridges to Career Opportunities</td>
<td>lisc.org/our-initiatives/financial-stability/bridge-programs</td>
<td>Trains workers for “middle skills” jobs and connects employers with qualified workers</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lloyd E. Williams Pipe Trades Training Center</td>
<td>pipetradetraining.org</td>
<td>Union-affiliated apprenticeship program involving on-the-job training and evening classes</td>
<td>1961</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>San Jose, CA</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marcus Graham Project</td>
<td>marcusgrahamproject.org/ict8-programs/</td>
<td>Trains ethnically diverse people for jobs in advertising, entertainment, marketing, and the media industry</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>Dallas, TX</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merit America</td>
<td>meritamerica.org</td>
<td>Provides training for in-demand careers for working adults without bachelor’s degrees</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>Washington, DC</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Microverse</td>
<td>microverse.org</td>
<td>Full-time 22-week online software development bootcamp</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
<td>$3,400,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mthree</td>
<td>mthree.com</td>
<td>Sources and trains candidates, then embeds them for up to 24 months in employers’ teams, at which point they can be hired, reskills employees</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>Hoboken, NJ</td>
<td>$57,900,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nashville Software School</td>
<td>nashvillesoftwareschool.com</td>
<td>Web development, UX design, and analytics bootcamp</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>Nashville, TN</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Urban League</td>
<td>nul.org/program/urban-tech-jobs-program</td>
<td>Urban Tech Jobs Program connects people experiencing long-term unemployment to jobs in IT</td>
<td>1916</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NextStep</td>
<td>nextstep.careers</td>
<td>Recruits, trains, and places workers in CNA and home healthcare jobs; offers professional development badging</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>Seattle, WA</td>
<td>$6,800,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nomad Health</td>
<td>nomadhealth.com</td>
<td>Nomad Health is an online marketplace for healthcare jobs. It enables doctors and nurses to search for work by price, location, and more. Nomad eliminates the chaotic healthcare staffing system of yesterday and replaces it with a simple, modern technology platform that just works</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
<td>$50,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPower</td>
<td>npower.org</td>
<td>Offers technology skills training programs to military servicemembers and veterans, women, and members of marginalized groups</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>Brooklyn, NY</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NuPaths</td>
<td>nupaths.org</td>
<td>Offers short courses in IT skills based on industry certifications and aligned with in-demand roles</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>Enola, PA</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OpenClassrooms</td>
<td>openclassrooms.com</td>
<td>An online education platform offering certifications in web development, data, IT, and project management, as well as mentorship support</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>Paris, France</td>
<td>$69,700,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Since June 2020, according to Crunchbase and Owler
### DETAILED LIST OF LABOR PLATFORMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Revenue Model</th>
<th>Tax Status</th>
<th>Headquarters</th>
<th>Money Raised (in $mm)</th>
<th>Founding Year</th>
<th>Website</th>
<th>Category Description</th>
<th>Year Founded</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>On-ramp</th>
<th>Mix Public, Philanthropic, Earned Revenue</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OpenTech LA</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Outsourced recruitment</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>Los Angeles, CA</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>opentech.la</td>
<td>Coordinates employers, education partners, and foundations to promote candidates into professional apprenticeship programs</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>California</td>
<td>On-ramp</td>
<td>Mixed (public, philanthropic, earned revenue)</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pared</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Outsourced recruitment</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
<td>$13,700,000</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>pared.com</td>
<td>Matches restaurants with trained staff</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>California</td>
<td>Labor platform</td>
<td>Outsourced recruitment</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per Scholas</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Outsourced recruitment</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>Bronx, NY</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>perscholas.org</td>
<td>Provides unemployed or underemployed adults with no-cost training for careers in tech</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>New York City</td>
<td>On-ramp</td>
<td>Mixed (public, philanthropic, earned revenue)</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>PreHired</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Outsourced recruitment</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>Charleston, SC</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>prehired.io</td>
<td>Professional membership association offering training for software sales representative roles</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>Bootcamp</td>
<td>Income share agreement</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>Project JumpStart</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Paid training</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>Baltimore, MD</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>projectjumpstarttraining.org</td>
<td>Pre-apprenticeship career training program preparing low-income job seekers for careers in construction</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>On-ramp</td>
<td>Mixed (public, philanthropic, earned revenue)</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Quest</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Outsourced recruitment</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>San Antonio, TX</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>questsa.org</td>
<td>Prepares job seekers for in-demand occupations that offer living wages</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>On-ramp</td>
<td>Mixed (public, philanthropic, earned revenue)</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pursuit</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Outsourced recruitment</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>Long Island City, NY</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>pursuit.org</td>
<td>Trains low-income workers for higher-paying jobs in tech</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>New York City</td>
<td>On-ramp</td>
<td>Mixed (public, philanthropic, earned revenue)</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>Qwick</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Outsourced recruitment</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>Phoenix, AZ</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>qwick.com</td>
<td>On-demand staffing company that connects service industry professionals with shifts at hotels, event venues, caterers, and restaurants</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>Labor platform</td>
<td>Outsourced recruitment</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilient Coders</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Bootcamp</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>Boston, MA</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>resilientcoders.org</td>
<td>Twenty-week coding bootcamp</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>Bootcamp</td>
<td>Mixed (public, philanthropic, earned revenue)</td>
<td>N</td>
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<tr>
<td>Revature</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Paid training</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>Reston, VA</td>
<td>$20,000,000</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>revature.com</td>
<td>Hires, trains (12-week program), and places entry-level tech workers</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>Labor platform</td>
<td>Outsourced service</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rigup</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Outsourced recruitment</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>Austin, TX</td>
<td>$42,500,000</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>rigup.com</td>
<td>Recruiting platform for the oil, gas, solar, and wind energy industries; also offers equipment and vendor management and on-demand service fulfillment</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>Labor platform</td>
<td>Outsourced recruitment</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rithm School</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Bootcamp</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>rithmschool.com</td>
<td>Four-month coding bootcamp</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>California</td>
<td>Bootcamp</td>
<td>Deferred tuition</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rivet School</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Bootcamp</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>Richmond, CA</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>rivetschool.org</td>
<td>Rivet School partners with accredited universities, like Southern New Hampshire University and Brandman University to enable students to earn bachelor’s degrees in two years. Programs are delivered online and students receive support from instructors, personal academic coaches and supplemental career coaches along the way.</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>On-ramp</td>
<td>Income share agreement</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sabio Enterprises, Inc.</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Deferred tuition</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>Culver City, CA</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>sabio.la</td>
<td>Immersive coding and cybersecurity bootcamp</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>California</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Deferred tuition</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>SHIFT</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Outsourced recruitment</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>shift.org</td>
<td>Places transitioning military members in technology internships during their final three to six months of active duty service</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>California</td>
<td>Labor platform</td>
<td>Outsourced recruitment</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Since June 2020, according to Crunchbase and Owler*
### Detailed List of Labor Platforms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Website</th>
<th>Category Description</th>
<th>Year Founded</th>
<th>Tax Status</th>
<th>Headquarters</th>
<th>Money Raised (in $mm)</th>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Revenue Model</th>
<th>Year Founded</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Springboard</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>springboard.com</td>
<td>Part-time online bootcamp in data science, design, analytics, and coding; pairs students with mentors and helps them find jobs</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
<td>$22,000,000</td>
<td>Bootcamp</td>
<td>Deferred tuition</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Startup Institute</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>startupinstitute.com</td>
<td>Offers courses in coding, design, marketing, and sales</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>Boston, MA</td>
<td>$4,300,000</td>
<td>On-ramp</td>
<td>Outsourced recruitment</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SV Academy</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>sv.academy</td>
<td>Employer-paid four- or 12-week fellowships for members of underresourced or underrepresented communities, leading to sales careers in tech</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
<td>$11,500,000</td>
<td>Bootcamp</td>
<td>Outsourced recruitment</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Talent Path</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>talentpath.com</td>
<td>Identifies, screens, and recruits candidates for a 90-day paid training program followed by a two-year term as a paid consultant, after which clients have the opportunity to hire them directly</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>Houston, TX</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Paid training</td>
<td>Outsourced service</td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tech Elevator</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>techelevator.com</td>
<td>Fourteen-week full-time coding bootcamp that helps students from diverse backgrounds build career-readiness skills</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>Cleveland, OH</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Bootcamp</td>
<td>Tuition</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Techtonic</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>techtonic.com</td>
<td>Software developer that offers accredited paid apprenticeships</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>Boulder, CO</td>
<td>$10,800,000</td>
<td>Paid training</td>
<td>Outsourced service</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Techtonica</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>techtonica.org</td>
<td>Provides six months of free full-time tech training, living stipends, and laptops to women and nonbinary adults with low incomes in the Bay Area, then places them in jobs</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>On-ramp</td>
<td>Mixed (public, philanthropic, earned revenue)</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Last Mile</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>thelastmile.org</td>
<td>Trains and employs incarcerated people in software development, provides paid apprenticeships after release</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>On-ramp</td>
<td>Mixed (public, philanthropic, earned revenue)</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mom Project</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>themomproject.com</td>
<td>Connects companies and mothers returning to work after parental leave; advocates for workplace and policy changes for working parents</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
<td>$35,500,000</td>
<td>Labor platform</td>
<td>Outsourced recruitment</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinkful</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>thinkful.com</td>
<td>Offers full-time online, synchronous coding bootcamp and flexible part-time coding bootcamps</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>Brooklyn, NY</td>
<td>$16,000,000</td>
<td>Bootcamp</td>
<td>Income share agreement</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transmosis</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>transmosis.com</td>
<td>Cybersecurity workforce intermediary that trains and places IT and cybersecurity professionals</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>Phoenix, AZ</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Bootcamp</td>
<td>Mixed (public, philanthropic, earned revenue)</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trusted Health</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>trustedhealth.com</td>
<td>Connects nurses to flexible job opportunities and provides help with resumes, credentialing, and job searching</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
<td>$25,500,000</td>
<td>Labor platform</td>
<td>Outsourced recruitment</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tulsa Work Advance</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>workadvance.org/</td>
<td>Offers no-cost technical training, full-time job placement, and career coaching in the manufacturing, transportation and healthcare sectors</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>Tulsa, OK</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>On-ramp</td>
<td>Mixed (public, philanthropic, earned revenue)</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAW-Ford National</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>uawford.org</td>
<td>Auto union-affiliated organization providing, among other programs, training, retraining, and professional development activities to union members</td>
<td>1941</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>Detroit, MI</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Joint labor-management program</td>
<td>Mixed (public, philanthropic, earned revenue)</td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upwardly Global</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>upwardlyglobal.org</td>
<td>Trains recent immigrants and refugees to adapt their skills and experience to the US context, and connects them with employers</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>On-ramp</td>
<td>Mixed (public, philanthropic, earned revenue)</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Since June 2020, according to Crunchbase and Owler*
### Detailed List of Labor Platforms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Website</th>
<th>Company Description</th>
<th>Year Founded</th>
<th>Tax Status</th>
<th>Headquarters</th>
<th>Money Raised (in $mm)</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Revenue Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vendition</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>vendition.com</td>
<td>Paid bootcamp and apprenticeship program leading to entry-level jobs in tech sales</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
<td>$600,000</td>
<td>Bootcamp</td>
<td>Outsourced recruitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership (WRTP)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>wrtp.org</td>
<td>Provides education, on-the-job training programs leading to construction-related apprenticeships</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>Milwaukee, WI</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Joint labor-management program</td>
<td>Mixed (public, philanthropic, earned revenue)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workyard</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>workyard.com</td>
<td>Staffing platform for construction companies</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>LLC</td>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
<td>$10,800,000</td>
<td>Labor platform</td>
<td>Outsourced recruitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YearUp</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>yearup.org</td>
<td>Provides paid training, six-month corporate internships, and coaching to prepare young adults for careers in IT, financial operations, customer support, business operations, and software development</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>501c3</td>
<td>Boston, MA</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>On-ramp</td>
<td>Mixed (public, philanthropic, earned revenue)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Since June 2020, according to Crunchbase and Owler*
7 QUANTITATIVE SUPPLY-SIDE SEGMENTATION ANALYSIS
QUANTITATIVE SUPPLY-SIDE SEGMENTATION ANALYSIS

The broader research team, led by Garima Manocha and supported by Kara Foley, undertook a quantitative research study of 1,044 working adults in the U.S. The primary goal of the study was to validate insights uncovered with and through real working adults during qualitative research. To build out the research protocol, we began with insights uncovered during qualitative design research, including community-based feedback sessions (which were conducted by members of the working-adult Advisory Board). We combined these beneficiary perspectives and insights with a landscape analysis of existing operators to develop initial hypotheses, learning goals, and lines of inquiry. The quantitative study revealed five distinct supply-side market segments that substantially validated the insights uncovered during qualitative research.

IN SCOPE AND OUT OF SCOPE

As with any study, there are caveats. The study aimed to define segments of workers based on needs, motivations, life circumstances, access to resources, behaviors, and beliefs. The study also aimed to size, profile, and describe each segment in terms of motivators, needs, behaviors, and demographics. The study did not aim to identify specific interventions that are likely to improve enrollment, completion, and/or job placement for particular segments, nor did the study aim to provide a tool for dual-customer training programs to use in designing services and interventions for particular segments. Finally, the study did not aim to identify new offerings (beyond dual-customer training programs) that are needed by individuals in particular segments.

DESCRIBING THE SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Our sample was made up of 1,044 people in the U.S. across racial, gender, age, and other demographics whose income is at or below 400% of the Federal Poverty Level. We deployed a number of inclusion criteria and quota dimensions to design the sample. The two key inclusion criteria were were age between 18 and 65, inclusive, and household income below $50,000.

The four quota dimensions controlling the sample were gender, educational attainment, race/ethnicity, and geographic region, with an aim to be largely representative of the 201 U.S. Census. With respect to gender, we targeted a minimum of 30% males and 30% females. With respect to educational attainment, we targeted a minimum of 15% with some high school, 40% with high school/GED, and 35% attainment beyond high school. With respect to race/ethnicity, we targeted a minimum of 20% non-Hispanic white, 20% non-Hispanic Black, 10% Hispanic, and 10% Asian. With respect to geographic region, we targeted a minimum of 20% Midwest, 20% Northeast, 40% South, and 20% West. The actual demographic characteristics of the 1,044 survey respondents are described visually on the following charts.
QUANTITATIVE SUPPLY-SIDE SEGMENTATION ANALYSIS

- **Age**: 34.3% 18-24, 42.1% 25-44, 23.6% 45+
- **Socio-economic status**: 36.0% At or below 100% of FPL, 42.4% 101% to 200% of FPL, 16.4% More than 200% of FPL, 5.1% 201% to 400% of FPL
- **Race/ Ethnicity**: 57.3% White, 24.0% Black or African-American, 12.6% Hispanic or Latinx, 6.1% Other
- **Gender**: 43.0% Male, 56.3% Female, 0.7% Non-binary
- **Educational background**: 40.4% Some high school, no diploma, 17.8% High school diploma, or equivalent, 8.4% Some college, but no degree, 15.3% Technical or vocational certificate, 4.5% Two-year associate’s degree, 13.5% Four-year bachelor’s degree or higher
- **Geographic location**: 38.9% Midwest, 19.8% Northeast, 20.8% South, 20.4% West
In addition, survey respondents were greatly impacted by the emergence of COVID-19 in the U.S. in spring of 2020 and the corresponding economic fallout. The survey instrument was live in field during the date range May 21–29, 2020. At the time of their survey responses, 31.5% of respondents reported having been laid off or furloughed in relation to COVID-19; 42% reported their income had been reduced in relation to COVID-19; and 40.5% reported their working hours had been reduced in relation to COVID-19.

SUPPLY-SIDE SEGMENTATION

The following key factors impact who could potentially be served by dual-customer training programs. These factors take into account the ability of workers to participate, the ability of dual-customer training programs to reach and serve workers, and the interest of workers in participating. In particular, internal motivations and goals, perceptions regarding education and training, and explicit interest in programs and services were inputs used to create five segments from the survey data using factor and cluster analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Segmentation Factor Category</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internal motivations and goals</td>
<td>Sense of purpose and sense of achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions regarding education and training</td>
<td>belief that job training leads to a path of long-term stability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicit interest in programs and services</td>
<td>Willingness to spend time in training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life circumstances and resource availability</td>
<td>Internet access and housing security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program awareness and external influencer</td>
<td>Availability of reliable information on training programs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The segmentation exercise is both an art and a science. Conclusions about a segment might not apply to every individual in the segment, but are an indication of the general trend within the segment. Thus, each segment profile is a snapshot of key differentiators of that segment, not a deep dive into nuanced characteristics. The segments and personas are not static. They can evolve over time. The segments are given geometric-shape code names that contain no meaning other than to differentiate them in a memorable way for ease and speed of study.
### TRIANGLE SEGMENT
(26% of sample)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics of This Segment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27% 18-24 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27% 25-34 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19% 35-44 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17% 45-54 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11% 55-64 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26% at or below 100% FPL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44% 101-200% FPL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21% 201-400% FPL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9% more than 400% FPL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51% Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49% Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0% Non-binary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Attainment:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10% Some high school, no diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36% High school/GED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21% Some college, no degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4% Technical or vocational certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10% Associate’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19% Bachelor’s degree or higher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54% White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27% Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14% Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5% Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11% Midwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25% Northeast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38% South</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21% West</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Needs Snapshot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Common Qualities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Comfortable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Financially motivated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Limited income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Less educated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Defining Attitudes and Motivations, Listed By Level of Importance (Segment Mean/Sample Mean, where 1=strongly disagree, 4=strongly agree)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>→ Being able to provide housing, food, and other basic necessities for me and my family (3.6/3.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Achieving financial stability where I can always make ends meet (3.5/3.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Being able to create my own path in life (3.4/3.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Finding consistent, steady work (3.4/3.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Being successful in my line of work (3.3/3.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Feeling a sense of achievement by challenging myself to be the best I can be (3.3/3.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Being a strong role model for my family and friends to look up to (3.3/3.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Pursuing a long-term career that is meaningful to me (3.3/3.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Having flexibility and freedom to move around in my career and choose my direction (3.2/3.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Finding purpose and contributing to something bigger than myself (3.1/3.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Feeling respected, recognized, and valued by my peers (3.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Being part of a community with others I can relate to (2.9/2.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Making my friends and family happy with my career choices (2.6/2.6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education and Employment Snapshot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Income:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High ($2,300/month)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior job training enrollment:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low (79% had not previously participated)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top Five Rated Services (and Rating)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial compensation (Medium)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational training (Medium)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job readiness training (Medium)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial assistance (Medium)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career advising (Medium)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Echos from Qualitative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I want to be an electrician because it’s a skill that is something to fall back on when I retire. And it’s something useful that you can utilize among your household as well as helping out loved ones or people close. [I passed on] a job that takes me away from family. The normality is no longer there, you know?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—Bradley, 27, Chicago, IL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Defining Attitudes and Motivations, Listed By Level of Agreement (Segment Mean/Sample Mean, where 1=strongly disagree, 4=strongly agree)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>→ Participating in a job training program + college degree significantly increases the chances of getting a job (3.4/3.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Job training leads to long term job stability and strong career prospects (3.4/3.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Traditional college education is a long-term investment in oneself (3.1/3.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ My job should directly relate to my training/education I received (3.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Having relevant skills is more effective at helping to get a job than is having a college degree (3.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Job training is more important than going through a traditional college degree program for getting a job (2.6/2.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Education/training is only valuable to me if it provides a credential that gets me a job (2.8/2.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ The cost of college does not justify enrolling in one (2.8/2.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ A job is worth taking if it matches my skills and interests even if the pay is low (2.7/2.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Traditional college degrees do not provide individuals with skills needed for a job (2.7/2.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Social networks and connections play the most important role in getting a job (2.6/2.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ It is very difficult to get a job without a college degree (2.6/2.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Finding a job is really based on one’s luck and chance, not on real skills (2.5/2.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Social networks and connections play the most important role in getting a job (2.5/2.5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## CIRCLE SEGMENT

(21% of sample)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Qualities</th>
<th>Top Five Rated Services (and Rating)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>→ Content</td>
<td>→ Financial assistance for books, etc. (Medium)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Supportive</td>
<td>→ Financial compensation (Medium)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Family-oriented</td>
<td>→ Job-readiness training (Medium)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Limited income</td>
<td>→ Job-search assistance (High)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Unemployed</td>
<td>→ Vocational training (Medium)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Less educated</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Needs Snapshot

- Resource-constrained but satisfied
- Dependents: 1 or more in household (50%)
- Perceived ease of supporting family: Easy (66%)
- Government benefits recipient: Medicare/Medicaid (44%), TANF (10%)
- Internet connection: Medium-high reliability (50%)
- Housing stability: Stable place to live for more than one year (67%)
- Primary barrier to participating in job-training program: Family obligations (74%)

### Education and Employment Snapshot

- Income: Low-medium ($1,840/month)
- Primary earner: Somewhat more likely to be primary earner (67%)
- Education attained: Majority have high school diploma or less (57%), some have college experience (17%)
- Employment: Largely unemployed or working part-time (72%)
- Openness to new jobs: Medium (71% actively or looking or open to opportunities)
- Prior job-training enrollment: Low (73% had not previously participated)
- Interest in job-training programs: 64% somewhat or extremely interested

### Demographics of This Segment

- **Age:**
  - 26% 18–24 years
  - 27% 25–34 years
  - 22% 35–44 years
  - 15% 45–54 years
  - 10% 55–64 years
- **Income:**
  - 46% at or below 100% FPL
  - 39% 101–200% FPL
  - 12% 201–400% FPL
  - 3% more than 400% FPL
- **Gender:**
  - 38% Female
  - 61% Male
  - 1% Non-binary
- **Educational Attainment:**
  - 13% Some high school, no diploma
  - 44% High school/GED
  - 18% Some college, no degree
  - 7% Technical or vocational certificate
  - 6% Associate’s degree
  - 14% Bachelor’s degree or higher
- **Race/Ethnicity:**
  - 48% White
  - 32% Black
  - 12% Hispanic
  - 8% Other
- **Region:**
  - 21% Midwest
  - 20% Northeast
  - 39% South
  - 20% West

### Defining Attitudes and Motivations, Listed By Level of Importance

- **(Segment Mean/Sample Mean, where 1=not a priority, and 4=high priority)**
  - Being able to provide housing, food, and other basic necessities for me and my family (3.4/3.5)
  - Achieving financial stability where I can always make ends meet (3.3/3.4)
  - Being able to create my own path in life (3.2/3.4)
  - Being a strong role model for my family and friends to look up to (3.2/3.2)
  - Being successful in my line of work (3.1/3.2)
  - Feeling a sense of achievement by challenging myself to be the best I can be (3.1/3.2)
  - Finding consistent, steady work (3.1/3.1)
  - Making my friends and family happy with my career choices (2.9/2.9)
  - Finding purpose and contributing to something bigger than myself (3/3.1)
  - Feeling respected, recognized, and valued by my peers (3/3)
  - Pursuing a long-term career that is meaningful to me (2.9/3)
  - Being a strong role model for my family and friends to look up to (2.9/3)
  - Making my friends and family happy with my career choices (3/2.7)
  - Feeling a sense of achievement by challenging myself to be the best I can be (3/3)
  - Finding consistent, steady work (3.1/3.1)
  - Achieving financial stability where I can always make ends meet (3.3/3.4)
  - Being able to provide housing, food, and other basic necessities for me and my family (3.4/3.5)

### Defining Attitudes and Motivations, Listed By Level of Agreement

- **(Segment Mean/Sample Mean, where 1=strongly disagree, 4=strongly agree)**
  - Job training leads to long-term job stability and strong career prospects (3.2/3.2)
  - Participating in a job training program + college degree significantly increases the chances of getting a job (3.1/3.1)
  - Traditional college education is a long-term investment in oneself (3/3.1)
  - Having relevant skills is more effective at helping to get a job than is having a college degree (3/3)
  - My job should directly relate to my training/education I received (3/3)
  - Job training is more important than going through a traditional college degree program for getting a job (3/2.9)
  - Education/training is only valuable to me if it provides a credential that gets me a job (3/2.8)
  - Social networks and connections play the most important role in getting a job (2.9/2.7)
  - A job is worth taking if it matches my skills and interests even if the pay is low (2.9/2.8)
  - The cost of college does not justify enrolling in one (2.9/2.8)
  - Traditional college degrees do not provide individuals with skills needed for a job (2.8/2.7)
  - It is very difficult to get a job without a college degree (2.8/2.6)
  - Social networks and connections play the most important role in getting a job (2.6/2.4)
  - Finding a job is really based on one’s luck and chance, not on real skills (2.5/2.3)

### Echos from Qualitative

“Care about my community, and that’s most important. I like jobs that give back. People are there for me and I’m there for them. The community here is strong, everyone knows everyone. It’s important that we’re there for each other, and that we invest in the community. I’ve always felt this way, about giving back. Maybe it’s from my southern roots. As small children in South Carolina, if we had company over for dinner, we didn’t eat until they left. It’s about caring for other people.”

—Katherine, 51, New Rochelle, NY

“My willingness to finish my BA and my schooling has been forever. I’ve been wanting this forever. I’ve been wanting to help women, children—to say, ‘You could do so much in life, and there’s so many opportunities here, and there’s people willing to help you.’ I want to guide them.”

—Noemi, San Jose, CA
Common Qualities

- Weary
- Ambivalent
- Physically limited
- Limited income
- Unemployed
- Less educated

Needs Snapshot

- Resource-constrained but stable
- Dependents: in household (79%)
- Perceived ease of supporting family: Difficult (60%)
- Government benefits recipient: Medicare/Medicaid (59%), SNAP (33%)
- Internet connection: High reliability (67%)
- Housing stability: Stable place to live for more than one year (84%)
- Primary barrier to participating in job-training program: Health (60%)

Demographics of This Segment

Age:
- 13% 18–24 years
- 17% 25–34 years
- 12% 35–44 years
- 21% 45–54 years
- 37% 55–64 years

Income:
- 48% at or below 100% FPL
- 37% 101–200% FPL
- 12% 201–400% FPL
- 5% more than 400% FPL

Gender:
- 35% Female
- 64% Male
- 0% Non-binary

Educational Attainment:
- 22% Some high school, no diploma
- 47% High school/GED
- 13% Some college, no degree
- 2% Technical or vocational certificate
- 8% Associate’s degree
- 8% Bachelor’s degree or higher

Race/Ethnicity:
- 78% White
- 13% Black
- 5% Hispanic
- 4% Other

Region:
- 27% Midwest
- 18% Northeast
- 36% South
- 18% West

Defining Attitudes and Motivations, Listed By Level of Importance (Segment Mean/Sample Mean, where 1=not a priority, and 4=high priority)

- Being able to provide housing, food, and other basic necessities for me and my family (3.8/3.5)
- Achieving financial stability where I can always make ends meet (3.3/3.4)
- Being able to create my own path in life (3.8/3.4)
- Feeling a sense of achievement by challenging myself to be the best I can be (3/3.2)
- Being a strong role model for my family and friends to look up to (2.8/3.2)
- Finding purpose and contributing to something bigger than myself (2.8/3.1)
- Feeling respected, recognized, and valued by my peers (2.7/3.1)
- Being successful in my line of work (2.6/3.1)
- Being part of a community with others I can relate to (2.6/3.1)
- Having flexibility and freedom to move around in my career and choose my direction (2.8/3.1)
- Finding consistent, steady work (2.4/3.1)
- Pursuing a long-term career that is meaningful to me (2.4/3.3)
- Making my friends and family happy with my career choices (2/2.6)

Echos from Qualitative

“Throughout my life I have believed that a person could get the work if they wanted to—that someone along their way would connect them to opportunities. But after my injury, I can’t stand by this thinking anymore. There are certain things I can no longer do on the job.”

—Brenda, 59, Berkeley, CA

“Well, I’ll be honest with you. I’m very happy that I’m still alive. All my friends are dead. You know, right now I just have associates and people that I’ve met and I know, I deal with at this point. But everybody that I grew up with is getting on. I’m kind of like the last of a dying breed.”

—Tyrone, 62, New Rochelle, NY
RHOMBUS SEGMENT
(18% of sample)

Common Qualities

- Driven
- Goal-oriented
- Training advocate
- Higher income
- Employed
- Has participated in job training

About

This person has participated in job training in the past and, though not actively seeking new opportunities, would participate again if the right opportunity arises. This person highly values career success and sees both college and job training as valuable. This person is a strong candidate for job-training programs and is in a life position where they could commit to another program. This person has average interest in services, with no notably higher interest in any service.

Needs Snapshot

- Stable and able to support self fairly comfortably
- Household size: 27% live alone
- Perceived ease of supporting family: 71% somewhat/very easy
- Government benefits recipient: More likely to receive CHIP (9%)
- Internet connection: Fairly high
- Housing stability: Somewhat unstable (37% without place to live over past year)
- Primary barrier to participating in job-training program: Limited availability (65%) and/or awareness (62%)

Demographics of This Segment

Age:
- 23% 18-24 years
- 26% 25-34 years
- 20% 35-44 years
- 16% 45-54 years
- 16% 55-64 years

Income:
- 25% at or below 100% FPL
- 48% 101-200% FPL
- 25% 201-400% FPL
- 4% more than 400% FPL

Gender:
- 52% Female
- 47% Male
- 1% Non-Binary

Educational Attainment:
- 6% Some high school, no diploma
- 35% High school/GED
- 21% Some college, no degree
- 5% Technical or vocational certificate
- 15% Associate’s degree
- 20% Bachelor’s degree or higher

Race/Ethnicity:
- 48% White
- 26% Black
- 18% Hispanic
- 8% Other

Region:
- 21% Midwest
- 25% Northeast
- 29% South
- 26% West

Defining Attitudes and Motivations, Listed By Level of Importance (Segment Mean/Sample Mean, where 1=not a priority, and 4=high priority)

- Being able to create my own path in life (3.5/3.4)
- Being able to provide housing, food, and other basic necessities for me and my family (3.5/3.5)
- Achieving financial stability where I can always make ends meet (3.5/3.4)
- Being successful in my line of work (3.4/3.2)
- Feeling a sense of achievement by challenging myself to be the best I can be (3.3/3.2)
- Having flexibility and freedom to move around in my career and choose my direction (3.3/3.1)
- Finding purpose and contributing to something bigger than myself (3.3/3.1)
- Pursuing a long-term career that is meaningful to me (3.2/3.1)
- Finding consistent, steady work (3.2/3.1)
- Feeling respected, recognized, and valued by my peers (3.2/3.1)
- Being a strong role model for my family and friends to look up to (3.2/3.2)
- Being part of a community with others I can relate to (3/2.9)
- Making my friends and family happy with my career choices (2.7/2.6)

Echos from Qualitative

“Taking that Talent Path program is what boosted me to get a head start in the store. So many other Assistant Managers that had been with the company for 5 years, 10 years, 12 years that had been trying to get a store—they just weren’t doing what it takes to get promoted. So I got some outside help, because I’m very inquisitive and knowledge to me is power.”
—Derrick, 41, Decatur, GA

“At first, I didn’t want to do it. My girlfriend was telling me about STRIVE for a long, long time, telling me, ‘Hey, they can help you find a career. They won’t just put you in any jobs.’ It’s not just medical skills and terminology that you learn, they teach you life skills, public speaking, how you carry yourself professionally. So it was overall just bettering yourself as a professional.”
—Joel, 26, New York, NY

Top Five Rated Services (and Rating)

- Financial compensation (Medium)
- Financial assistance (Medium)
- Job search assistance (Medium)
- Job readiness training (Medium)
- Career advising (Medium)

Education and Employment Snapshot

- Income: High ($2,200/month)
- Primary earner: Highly likely to be primary earner (82%)
- Education attained: Mix of education attained; more two-year degree attainment than other segments (13%)
- Employment: Employed; mix of part- and full-time
- Openness to new jobs: Medium (44% open to opportunities)
- Prior job-training enrollment: High (84% previously participated)
- Interest in job-training programs: High (76% interested)

Defining Attitudes and Motivations, Listed By Level of Agreement (Segment Mean/Sample Mean, where 1=strongly disagree, 4=strongly agree)

- Participating in a job training program + college degree significantly increases the chances of getting a job (3.4/3.3)
- Traditional college education is a long-term investment in oneself (3.3/3.1)
- Job training leads to long-term job stability and strong career prospects (3.3/3.2)
- Having relevant skills is more effective at helping to get a job than is having a college degree (3.1/3)
- My job should directly relate to my training/education I received (3.1/3)
- Job training is more important than going through a traditional college degree program for getting a job (2.9/2.9)
- A job is worth taking if it matches my skills and interests even if the pay is low (2.9/2.8)
- Social networks and connections play the most important role in getting a job (2.9/2.7)
- Education/training is only valuable to me if it provides a credential that gets me a job (2.9/2.8)
- The cost of college does not justify enrolling in one (2.8/2.8)
- It is very difficult to get a job without a college degree (2.7/2.6)
- Traditional college degrees do not provide individuals with skills needed for a job (2.7/2.7)
- Social networks and connections play the most important role in getting a job (2.3/2.2)
- Finding a job is really based on one’s luck and chance, not on real skills (2.3/2.3)
### SQUARE SEGMENT
(15% of sample)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Qualities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>→ Striving</td>
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<tr>
<td>→ Achieving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Actively seeking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Limited income</td>
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<tr>
<td>→ Unemployed</td>
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<tr>
<td>→ Less educated</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Needs Snapshot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>→ Stable and able to support self fairly comfortably</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Household size: Only 12% live alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>→ Housing stability: Fairly unstable (42% without stability for 4+ months in past year)</td>
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<td>→ Primary barrier to participating in job-training program: Limited availability (75%) and/or awareness (62%)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Career advising (High)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>→ Basic supports (High)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Demographics of This Segment
- **Age:**
  - 33% 18–24 years
  - 25% 25–34 years
  - 20% 35–44 years
  - 12% 45–54 years
  - 10% 55–64 years
- **Income:**
  - 46% at or below 100% FPL
  - 43% 101–400% FPL
  - 9% 401–499% FPL
  - 4% more than 400% FPL
- **Gender:**
  - 40% Female
  - 59% Male
  - 1% Non-binary
- **Educational Attainment:**
  - 19% Some high school, no diploma
  - 41% High school/GED
  - 16% Some college, no degree
  - 4% Technical or vocational certificate
  - 3% Associate’s degree
  - 16% Bachelor’s degree or higher

**Race/Ethnicity:**
- 59% White
- 21% Black
- 13% Hispanic
- 7% Other

**Region:**
- 12% Midwest
- 17% Northeast
- 59% South
- 16% West

#### Echos from Qualitative

“I’m definitely trying to do and learn more, trying to keep my skills as sharp as possible. It’s been my frustration now because I’ve been unemployed since. I’m hearing this in the field, it’s very in demand. I know the importance of security. It’s something that every company should have. But in my search, I’ve kept applying and applying. I’ve seen the same old job post come up again and again and again that I’ve been rejected from.” —Akil, 28, New York, NY

“...and I think of nothing but how I can improve and learn more. Not just in that job but also in my life, and become a better person, become a better worker. I just want to get a job. But I’m always open for new skills, anything that will make my resume shine that is related to my job, which could be like, you know, like for instance public speaking, or any other types of tools that would aid in better communications on my job I would look into.” —Darius, 46, San Francisco, CA
The overall architecture of the quantitative survey instrument we used in supply-side segmentation analysis is broken into five key parts:

- Part 1: Basic information (e.g., age, household income, education background, language, etc.)
- Part 2: Attitudes and beliefs (e.g., primary needs and motivations; perceptions toward education, job, and career)
- Part 3: Access to resources (e.g., internet access, childcare access, etc.)
- Part 4: Current employment (e.g., satisfaction with current occupation, industry in which employed, etc.)
- Part 5: Interest in job training programs and related services (e.g., enrollment or completion of a program in the past, interest in specific services, etc.)
Part 1 - Basic Information (1)

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. The goal of this survey is to understand your perspectives on education and job training, as part of a study being conducted by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to inform ways to support individuals seeking upskilling, reskilling, and/or better career opportunities. It will take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete.

For the purpose of this survey, job training programs are defined as short-term programs which offer a combination of vocational training, career counseling, and job search and placement assistance. Vocational training can include both classroom and on-the-job learning opportunities.

Your response will be anonymized and kept confidential. Our research, if published, will be reported at the aggregated-level and will not be linked back to you as an individual.

If you have any questions about the survey, please feel free to contact us at survey-feedback@guildeducation.com.
Please begin the survey now by clicking the arrow below.

**Part 1 of 5 – Basic Information**

How old are you?

- Under 18
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65-74
- 75-84
- 85 or older

How many individuals (including yourself) currently reside in your household?

- 1 - I live alone
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
What is your estimated monthly household income before taxes? Household income includes the combined income of all earning members of your household, including yourself.

- $0-$999
- $1,000-$1,999
- $2,000-$2,999
- $3,000-$3,999
- $4,000-$4,999
- $5,000-$5,999
- $6,000-$6,999
- $7,000-$7,999
- $8,000-$8,999
- $9,000-$9,999
- $10,000+

**Part 1 - Basic Information (2)**

Which of the following best describes you?

- Male
In which state do you currently reside?

What is your current ZIP code?

Which of the following describes you? Select all that apply.

- Hispanic or Latinx
- Asian
- White
- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Black or African American
- Other, please specify:

What is the highest level of formal education you have completed?

- Some high school, no diploma
- High school diploma or equivalent (GED)
- Technical or vocational certificate
- Some college, but no degree
- Two-year associate’s degree
- Four-year bachelor’s degree or higher

Which of the following is your native or first language?

- English
- Mandarin
- Spanish
- Other, please specify:

What is your current citizenship status in the U.S.?

- U.S. citizen
- Permanent resident or green card holder
- Resident alien
- Non-resident alien
- No legal permanent status in the U.S.
### Part 2 - Attitudes and Beliefs

#### Part 2 of 5 - Attitudes and Beliefs

How much do you prioritize each of the following aspects of your life?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Not a priority</th>
<th>Low priority</th>
<th>Medium priority</th>
<th>High priority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Making my friends and family happy with my career choices</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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</table>

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement about education and work?

**Job training leads to long-term job stability and strong career prospects**

- Strongly agree

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How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement about education and work?

**College is the only path to long-term job stability**

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement about education and work?

**Social networks and connections play the most important role in getting a job**

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement about education and work?

**Having relevant skills is more effective at helping to get a job than is having a college degree**

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement about education and work?

**Job training is more important than going through a traditional college degree program for getting a job**

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement about education and work?

**Finding a job is really based on one’s luck and chance, not on real skills**

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement about education and work?

**It is very difficult to get a job without a college degree**

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement about education and work?
Education/training is only valuable to me if it provides a credential (such as a bachelor’s/associate’s degree, certificate, and/or industry certification) that gets me a job

○ Strongly agree
○ Somewhat agree
○ Somewhat disagree
○ Strongly disagree

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement about education and work?

Traditional college degrees do not provide individuals with skills needed for a job

○ Strongly agree
○ Somewhat agree
○ Somewhat disagree
○ Strongly disagree

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement about education and work?

https://entangled.az1.qualtrics.com/Q/EditSection/Blocks/Ajax/GetSurveyPrintPreview?ContextSurveyId=SV-37b1/7y/7c/43455&ContextLibraryId=UR_boGFY-- 11/30
My job should directly relate to my training/education I received

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement about education and work?

The cost of college does not justify enrolling in one

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement about education and work?

Traditional college education is a long-term investment in oneself

- Strongly agree
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement about education and work?

**A job is worth taking if it matches my skills and interests even if the pay is low**

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement about education and work?

**Participating in a job training program in addition to a college degree significantly increases the chances of getting a job**

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
Part 3 - Access to Resources

How frequently do you have access to reliable internet connection?

- Never
- Sometimes
- Most of the time
- Always

How many children under the age of 18 currently reside in your household?

- None
- 1 child
- 2 children
- 3 children
- 4 or more children
How would you rate your access to reliable childcare?

- Very good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor
- Very poor

Are you the primary earner in your household?

- Yes
- No

Thinking about your current household income, what best describes how easy or difficult it is to provide for yourself and others in your household?

- Very easy; I am able to comfortably support my family
- Somewhat easy; I am able to support my family fairly comfortably
- Somewhat difficult; It is possible to support my family but challenging
- Very difficult; I am unable to support my family on my household income alone
Are you currently a recipient of any of the following government benefit programs? Select all that apply.

- [ ] Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
- [ ] Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)
- [ ] Medicare/Medicaid
- [ ] Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) food benefits
- [ ] Other, please specify:
- [ ] None of the above

Over the past 12 months, for how much time (collectively) did you **not** have a stable place to live?

- [ ] N/A - I have lived in a stable place over the past year
- [ ] Less than 1 month
- [ ] 1–3 months
- [ ] 4–6 months
- [ ] 7–12 months

How long have you lived in your current place of residence?

- [ ] Less than 6 months
- [ ] 6–12 months
Part 4 – Current Employment

Part 4 of 5 – Current Employment

How many hours per week are you currently working?

- 0 hours (not employed)
- Less than 10 hours per week
- 10–19 hours per week
- 20–29 hours per week
- 30–39 hours per week
- 40+ hours per week

Have you recently been laid off or furloughed because of the Covid–19 pandemic?

- Yes
- No
How has your income been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic?

- Significantly increased
- Slightly increased
- No impact
- Slightly reduced
- Significantly reduced

How have your working hours been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic?

- Significantly increased
- Slightly increased
- No impact
- Slightly reduced
- Significantly reduced

How satisfied are you with your current occupation?

- Very satisfied
- Somewhat satisfied
- Not very satisfied
- Not at all satisfied
Which statement best describes you?

- I’m actively looking for a new job
- I’m not actively looking for a new job, but I’m open to new opportunities
- I’m not interested in or open to new job opportunities

Which of the following best describes your current company’s industry?

- Architecture/Construction
- Financial Services or Banking
- Government, Education, Nonprofits
- Healthcare/Medical
- Hospitality/Travel
- Manufacturing
- Natural Resources and Mining
- Professional and Business Services (legal, consulting, research, etc.)
- Restaurants or Food Service
- Retail
- Technology and Software
- Telecommunications
- Other (please specify): [ ]
What was the last industry you worked in?

- Architecture/Construction
- Financial Services or Banking
- Government, Education, Nonprofits
- Healthcare/Medical
- Hospitality/Travel
- Manufacturing
- Natural Resources and Mining
- Professional and Business Services (legal, consulting, research, etc.)
- Restaurants or Food Service
- Retail
- Technology and Software
- Telecommunications
- Other (please specify):

When was the last time you were employed?

- Less than 1 week ago
- 2–3 weeks ago
- 1–3 months ago
- 4–6 months ago
- 7–12 months ago
- More than 12 months ago
Part 5 - Interest in job training programs and related services (1)

Part 5 of 5 - Interest in job training programs and related services

Reminder: Job training programs are defined as short-term programs which offer a combination of vocational training, career counseling, and job search and placement assistance. Vocational training can include both classroom and on-the-job learning opportunities.

Are you currently enrolled in a job training program?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Have you enrolled in or completed a job training program in the past?

☐ Yes
☐ No
What is/are the name(s) of the job training program you completed or are currently enrolled in?

How did you hear about the job training program(s) you completed or are currently enrolled in?

- Print media (e.g., newspaper)
- Paper mail
- School/college
- Job board
- Social media
- Teacher/instructor
- Word of mouth (e.g., family or friend)
- Website advertisement
- Website search for programs
- Job center
- Case manager/counselor
- Email
- Other, please specify:
How interested would you be in participating in another job training program?

- Extremely interested
- Somewhat interested
- Not very interested
- Not at all interested

How interested would you be in participating in a job training program?

- Extremely interested
- Somewhat interested
- Not very interested
- Not at all interested

Where would you look for information and/or advice on how to enroll in a job training program?

- Newspaper
- School/college
- Local job center
- Word of mouth - Family/Friend
- Paper mail
Which of the following services offered by job training programs, if any, had you heard of before today?

- Teacher/instructor
- Case manager/counselor
- Email
- Other online forums such as web advertisements, job boards, etc.
- Social media
- Job board
- Other, please specify:
- Basic supports such as food assistance, healthcare/medical, housing, etc.
- Childcare
- High school GED preparation
- English language instruction
- Job readiness training (e.g., resume building, interviewing techniques)
- Career advising and navigation support (e.g., career advice based on skills/interests, help navigating possible career options)
- Financial assistance for books/fees, certification fees, technology, and work supplies
- Academic counseling/advising (e.g., help with class schedules, taking the right courses, helping with assignments)
- Transportation assistance
- Financial compensation (e.g., "earn and learn", income share agreement)
- Digital literacy
- Vocational training

If you were to consider enrolling in a job training program, how important would each of the following services be to you?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Not at all important</th>
<th>Not very important</th>
<th>Somewhat important</th>
<th>Very important</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High school GED preparation</td>
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<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Job search assistance (e.g., application process, securing interviews, job placement support)</td>
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<td>Transportation assistance</td>
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<td>Career advising and navigation support (e.g., career advice based on skills/interests, help navigating possible career options)</td>
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<tr>
<td>English language instruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Job readiness training (e.g., resume building, interviewing techniques)</td>
<td>Not at all important</td>
<td>Not very important</td>
<td>Somewhat important</td>
<td>Very important</td>
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<td>Academic counseling/advising (e.g., help with class schedules, taking the right courses, helping with assignments)</td>
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<td>Digital literacy</td>
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<td>Financial assistance for books/fees, certification fees, technology, and work supplies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Childcare</td>
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<tr>
<td>Basic supports such as food assistance, healthcare/medical, housing, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Financial compensation (e.g., &quot;earn and learn&quot;, income share agreement)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

How likely would you be to relocate to another location to enroll in a job training program?

- [ ] Very likely

https://entangled.x1.qualtrics.com/Q/EditSection/Blocks/Ajax/GetSurveyPrintPreview/?ContextSurveyID=SV_e3Ttile7OkS4455X&ContextLibraryID=UR_bhQfY--- 26/30
Approximately how many hours per week would you currently be able to spend in a job training program?

- 5 hours or less
- 6–10 hours
- 11–20 hours
- 21–30 hours
- 31–40 hours
- More than 40 hours

What would be the ideal duration of a job training program that fits your interests and goals?

- Less than 3 months
- 3–6 months
- 7–12 months
- More than a year
After completing a job training program, what would be your wage expectation for a potential job placement?

- [ ] Less than $15.00 per hour
- [ ] $15.00-$19.99 per hour
- [ ] $20.00-$29.99 per hour
- [ ] $30.00-$39.99 per hour
- [ ] $40.00 or more per hour

What are the primary challenges that would limit your ability to participate in a job training program? Select all that apply.

- [ ] Limited availability and/or proximity of programs in my area
- [ ] Family obligations
- [ ] Childcare responsibilities
- [ ] Limited awareness of job training programs
- [ ] Peer and/or family perception of job training programs
- [ ] Health challenges and/or disabilities
- [ ] Current job hours limiting availability
- [ ] Other, please specify:

**Part 5 - Interest in job training programs and related**
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

**I feel pressured by friends, family, or society at large to do what’s expected of me related to my education and career choices**

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

**I would enroll in a job training program if my friends or peers decide to enroll as well**

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

**I have access to reliable information about job training programs near me**

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

**Part 5 - Interest in job training programs and related services (3)**

Do you have any other comments that you would like to share?

[Input Box]

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REFERENCES
REFERENCES

INTRODUCTION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

VOLUME I: EXAMINE THE LANDSCAPE
REFERENCES


VOLUME II: SEE THE SYSTEM


REFERENCES


VOLUME III: BEAR WITNESS


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