

FORMULATING WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS

VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY: STRATEGIES FOR ADULTS

Published by the LNPWI

Temple University's Lenfest North Philadelphia Workforce Initiative (LNPWI) strengthens the earning potential of local communities by providing programs and training that result in outcomes that lead to sustainable employment.

Through the support of a grant from the Lenfest Foundation, Temple's LNPWI focuses on identifying opportunities for youth and adult employment, as well as professional and workforce development. In addition, LNPWI works to increase collaboration between Temple University, local employers and the North Philadelphia community.

This collaborative and community-informed initiative focus on providing resources to residents who reside in the ZIP codes immediately surrounding Temple's Main Campus and the Health Sciences Center.

FORMULATING WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS: A FOCUS ON NORTH PHILADELPHIA

On January 16, 2019, Temple University sponsored an event, "Formulating Workforce Solutions: A Focus on North Philadelphia." This event was an opportunity for individuals to come together to learn, discuss and shape workforce development opportunities for North Philadelphia residents. Over 200 people attended the event, which was open to community residents and leaders, volunteers and staff of community, faith and non-profit organizations and Temple University, as well as representatives of government agencies and employers.

The agenda included an overview of the Lenfest North Philadelphia Workforce Initiative at Temple University, a presentation from Meg Shope-Koppel, Ph.D., Chief Research Officer for Philadelphia Works, Inc., and a panel presentation facilitated by Nick Frontino, Managing Director with the Economy League of Greater Philadelphia, and with representation from Philadelphia Youth Network, Office of Workforce Development, Office of Adult Education, Philadelphia Department of Prison, Philadelphia Housing Authority and Congreso de Latinos Unidos.

Following the presentation, participants broke into small groups to reflect on the previous presentations and to discuss workforce development strategies and employment-related issues facing specific populations, such as youth, adults, ESL and immigrants, returning citizens, veterans and individuals with a disability. There was also two additional small groups, that discussed community and employer engagement. Each group was co-facilitated by a representative from Temple University and a representative from an external organization.

A Temple University social work student was assigned to each group. The student was responsible for taking notes at the event. and wrote a draft report on themes that emerged from the discussion. The report was shared with the co-facilitators, who provided input and feedback. In order to share the key points from the small group discussion, Temple University's LNPWI has published a series of reports, based on each small group. This report is based on the discussion on Adults. The small group was co-facilitated by Ulicia Lawrence-Oladeinde, Director of Community Education with Temple's Office of Community Relations, and David Thomas, Associate Vice President of Strategic Initiatives at the Community College of Philadelphia.

FORMULATING WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS: Focus on Adults

There was a total of 18 attendees at this breakout session. Participants included individuals from local educational and workforce development programs, the City of Philadelphia, community organizations, public health and healthcare agencies, employers, and higher education institutions.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

The co-facilitators used the following facilitation questions to guide the conversation:

1. What does sustainable employment mean and look like to you?
2. How many and what kinds of opportunities for sustainable employment exist for North Philadelphians? Are these opportunities taking full advantage of the talents, skills, and passion that exist in North Philadelphia?
3. Are employers offering jobs that meet the standard for sustainable employment? Why or why not?
4. Does the average unemployed, underemployed, or underpaid person in this population have the skills/experiences to fill sustainable employment opportunities? Why or why not?
5. There are open jobs, there are people who are unemployed or underemployed. What is the disconnect? How can we bridge the divide?
6. How much focus should be placed on on working with employers to improve and expand sustainable employment opportunities for North Philadelphians? How much focus should be placed on preparing North Philadelphians for sustainable employment and connecting them with employers?
7. What changes need to be made to prepare employers to hire and maintain employees from North Philadelphia in sustainable positions (policy, educational, cultural)?
8. What are other barriers that citizens face that can prevent them from finding and maintaining employment? (housing, food, education, transportation, race, gender identity, computer literacy, professional culture?) What can be done to minimize these challenges?
9. What are indicators that programs or interventions are successfully reducing the number of people who are unemployed, underemployed, and underpaid in North Philadelphia?

MAIN THEMES

1. The one-size-fits all approach to educational and workforce development programs is a barrier for many.

Educational and workforce development programs provide access to real skills and certifications that will attract employers. However, there is a great focus on a linear approach to education within these programs that is not reality for most people due to individual differences in learning styles, quality of past education, support systems, self-esteem, personal and familial obligations, and more. For example, many programs require individuals to read and write on a tenth-grade level to qualify for educational and workforce development programs. Due to the failing school system, some people may have a high school diploma but still only read on a fifth-grade level. Instead of working to support the goals and aspirations of these individuals by upskilling, many programs turn these individuals away. By not taking the opportunity to work with a student's current skill-level and upskill them so that they can achieve higher credentials and more sustainable employment opportunities, many individuals in the North Philadelphia region are left behind. As a result, workforce development programs and employers are missing out on driven, talented employees. To respond to this gap, more programs should operate with a nuanced understanding of the needs of specific populations in order to get them to sustainable employment.

2. We must redefine "Soft Skills" as "Primary" or "Power Skills".

Many of the group attendees felt that a significant part of being a good employee includes being timely, working well with others, having a positive attitude, being able to communicate effectively in person and in writing, being able to interpret social cues in the workplace, and possessing critical thinking skills—otherwise known as "soft skills." However, these skills sets are often not intuitive or embedded in someone who is entering the workforce for the first time. As a result, many individuals who have not yet developed these skills—even if they have the technical skills to be able to complete their tasks—struggle to maintain employment or advance in the workplace. Defining these critical skills as "soft skills" seems to undermine the importance of working to develop these skill sets within students who are preparing to enter career pathways. In re-defining them as primary or power skills, more weight and ideally more focus might be given to cultivating these skills in students of education and workforce development programs in addition to the technical skills they need to perform.



3. Being honest with job-seekers about employment requirements while emphasizing an individual's experiences as strengths is a crucial part of job preparation.

The group agreed that many if not most North Philadelphians have experiences, both personal and professional, that make them strong candidates for the workforce. However, some individuals are unaware that their experiences could contribute to their effectiveness in finding and maintaining employment. Working with program participants to identify their personal strengths and translate these into applicable job skills can help build an individual's resume, but also improve their self-esteem and boost engagement, which could have an even larger impact on their employment success overall. In addition, while it is important for providers to have a basic level of understanding and consideration around the individual's strengths and needs, they must also reflect and yield the standards and expectations of the employers. Therefore, educators and other providers must be franker about what it takes to succeed in a capitalist society, and should prepare individuals to make the shift to their professional self.

4. Educators and employers need to be able to holistically meet the needs of students or new employees in order to set them up for success.

While, some individuals struggle to find stable employment because they have not developed the necessary skills, the group felt that more often than not, finding and maintaining employment is difficult because individuals, particularly individuals who are extremely low-income, are facing a number of barriers to success. These barriers are varied, but could include lack of affordable childcare, unreliable transportation, housing insecurity, food insecurity, physical and mental health concerns, and familial obligations. In order to advocate for broader access to sustainable employment, more workforce development programs need to be aware of and address the environmental factors that can impact an individual's ability to obtain and maintain employment. Introducing wraparound services into education and workforce development programs could be instrumental in addressing certain barriers by providing necessary support such as connecting individuals with public benefits, helping them find stable housing, and providing childcare and transportation support. From an employer standpoint, being more flexible with employees about scheduling around childcare or healthcare needs, providing working schedules a few weeks in advance, and understanding that sometimes employees will be late due to unreliable public transportation or life events, will create an environment that enables individuals to be more successful.



5. Workforce development programs and employers need to work together to build stronger partnerships.

Partnerships between workforce development programs and employers are not a new practice. However, a number of participants noted that many of these relationships dissolve due to a number of factors. On the workforce development side, some participants felt that service providers are unable to maintain partnerships with employers because they do not adequately respond to the needs of the employers and lose their credibility as a result. This is an issue because employers rely on workforce development staff to accurately assess an individual's basic needs and skills, work to connect them to the appropriate resources, and ensure that they are prepared to enter the field before referring them out to employers. Failure to do this means that employers are unexpectedly receiving unprepared candidates, which ultimately creates more work for the employer and defeats the purpose of the partnership. On the other hand, some participants acknowledged that employers also need to buy-in to the mission of workforce development in order to maintain effective partnerships with workforce development programs. For example, if an employer's sole motivation for the partnership is to save time and money in screening and training employees, without understanding that many program participants have faced a number of barriers to sustainable employment, and may need to be given some flexibility, support, and the benefit of the doubt as they adjust to the work environment, then the partnerships are not likely to be successful. If an employer is unable or unwilling to understand the needs of employees (within reason) to set them on the path towards sustainable employment, then workforce development program participants will quickly become unemployed again and return to workforce development programming, which also defeats the purpose of the partnership.



6. Employers are the key to increasing sustainable employment opportunities.

While workforce development programs are important for preparing individuals for careers, employers play a key role in determining whether or not employment is accessible and sustainable. Employers determine wages and benefits for employees, set job requirements and recruitment strategies, and decide which positions are eligible for upskilling and advancement opportunities. In order to bring meaningful employment to North Philadelphians, employers must be willing to critically evaluate their current policies and practices for wage structure, job descriptions, hiring processes, scheduling practices, workplace culture, and employee benefits. Making the commitment to sustainable employment will require putting more money towards family sustaining wages; retooling job descriptions and recruitment strategies to identify and bring in more individuals who are willing to work, regardless of education or qualification; and dedicating more resources towards training and professional development.

While this may seem like a large task, throughout the conversation, group members identified a number of employers who are making a commitment to sustainable employment and initiatives that are being developed to acknowledge and commend employers who are doing quality work. Working to solidify these initiatives and establish a formal way to recognize employers committed to sustainable employment could create a standard and serve as a model for other employers to follow, and incentivize employers to make changes to their workplace.

7. The current provision of public benefits poses a major barrier to employment.

While public benefits such as SNAP, TANF, and subsidized housing are great assets to supporting low-income families, it can limit an individual's ability to enter the workforce. Within the current system, when an individual finds a job, many of their benefits dramatically decrease or are completely terminated. In theory, it makes sense that obtaining employment should mean self-sufficiency. In reality, in an environment without family-sustaining wages, affordable housing, comprehensive benefits, full-time positions, or affordable childcare, this system often places families in greater deficit when employed than when unemployed. Without processes that adequately assesses the needs of an individual based on their wages compared to living expenses, or a transition plan that eases individuals off of public benefits in order to allow time for an individual to prepare to manage their expenses on their own, many individuals who would like to work are forced to decide between being unemployed and being able to meet their needs, or being employed and struggling to make ends meet. To address this systemic barrier, providers, community members, and local government should mobilize to collectively advocate for improved legislation on both public benefits provisions for employed individuals and increased minimum wages.

8. Successful programs can be defined by many indicators.

Indicators that programs or interventions are successfully reducing the number of North Philadelphia residents who are unemployed, underemployed, and underpaid would include reinvestment within the neighborhood, increased number of residents being employed by Temple University, an increase in the median income, a decrease in the total number of people receiving SNAP benefits, and an increase in the high school graduation rate. In addition, we could monitor an individual's progression along their career path: Are they making positive strides to increase income? Are they moving closer to their goals? Are individuals learning how to translate skills and navigate agency culture? Other indicators included thriving public schools, lower levels of displacement, increased community diversity, and increased economic activity within the community.

SPECIAL THANKS

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Following the presentation, participants broke into small groups to reflect on the previous presentations and to discuss workforce development strategies and employment-related issues facing specific populations, such as youth, adults, ESL and immigrants, returning citizens, veterans and individuals with a disability. There was also two additional small groups, that discussed community and employer engagement. Each group was co-facilitated by a representative from Temple University and a representative from an external organization.

A Temple University social work student was assigned to each group. The student was responsible for taking notes at the event. and wrote a draft report on themes that emerged from the discussion. The report was shared with the co-facilitators, who provided input and feedback. In order to share the key points from the small group discussion, Temple University's LNPWI has published a series of reports, based on each small group. This report is based on the discussion related to Community Engagement. The small group was co-facilitated by Andrea Swan, the Director of Community and Neighborhood Affairs at Temple University's Office of Community Relations, and Jessica Collazo, the Assistant Program Officer at LISC Philadelphia (Local Initiatives Support Corporation).

FORMULATING WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS: Focus on Community Engagement

In total, 15 attendees with backgrounds in faith-based organizations, small businesses, local government, local nonprofits, and higher education institutions as well as long-term North Philadelphia residents participated in this break-out session.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

The co-facilitators used the following facilitation questions to guide the conversation:

1. What does sustainable employment mean and look like to you?
2. Are employers offering jobs that meet the standard for sustainable employment? Why or why not?
3. Does the average unemployed, underemployed, or underpaid person in this population have the skills, experiences to fill sustainable employment opportunities? Why or why not?
4. What or who are the biggest potential challenges in engaging the community? What or who are some of the biggest potential assets?
5. Are there untapped areas for potential partnership?
6. Who are we missing with our current connections to the community that could benefit from engagement?
7. What is the most effective way to ensure community buy-in? What is the most effective way to ensure buy-in from partnering organizations, including employers?
8. Where are jobs for this group usually listed/recruited from? Does that garner the most diverse pool of candidates? Is there a better way to conduct outreach for this population?

MAIN THEMES



1. The key to sustainable employment is work life balance.

The group members defined sustainable employment as a career that allowed someone to be able to not only make enough money to provide for the needs of themselves and their family (housing, utilities, food, healthcare, childcare, clothing, etc.) but also one that left time for people to relax, practice their hobbies and interests, and be engaged in the lives of their families, friends, and neighbors.

2. Strategies for sustainable employment should not just focus on preparing people to meet the needs of their employers, but also preparing the employers to meet the needs of their staff.

Part of achieving sustainable employment, according to the group members, is a shift in employer mindsets to be more understanding and responsive to the unique needs of their employees. One group member shared that the lack of flexibility from employers at many jobs proves to be a huge barrier to finding and maintaining sustainable employment, because it leaves little space for life (things like family obligations, school, unexpected illnesses and emergencies, public transportation delays, etc.) to happen. This lack of flexibility and employer investment in current employees not only disadvantages employees, but also employers since it is more expensive to recruit, hire, and train new employees than it is to retain and upskill current employees. Creating more employee-centric workplaces is an effective cost-saving measure that will actually benefit employers in the long run. In fact, one group member, who was an employer, shared that the reason his small business is so successful is because he understands that his employees are first and foremost people, and does his best to be flexible and understanding about what each staff person needs to succeed in the workplace.

To encourage this shift in workplace culture towards more employee-centric practices, group members offered a number of possible solutions. The first was to introduce educational opportunities for employers on the long-term benefits of implementing sustainable employment strategies such as flexible scheduling, equitable pay structures, investing in training and upskilling staff, and built-in opportunities for career advancement. Additionally, group members suggested that the development of training programs or workshops for employers on sustainable employment strategies might be an effective way to help employers implement best practices into their workplaces. Finally, group members suggested that incentives or official recognition of employers who are implementing best practices for employee retention might encourage employers to make changes in their environment, while also rewarding employers who have already made a commitment to sustainable employment.

3. Small businesses "get it", but need more support.

Many participants felt that often times, small business offered a model of sustainable employment because, as a small business, employers have close relationships with their staff which makes them more vested in being flexible to meet the needs of their staff. However, some small businesses are limited in their ability to offer more employment opportunities to the community because they lack access to financial and social capital and other essential resources. More resources would allow small business to provide better benefits and opportunities to existing staff and be able to expand to employ more community members. Potential solutions included more (or more connections to) loans and funding opportunities for new and existing small businesses and increased access to affordable technical and business support (i.e. website development, marketing, business planning, legal, operations, etc.).





4. One of the biggest challenge to sustainable employment is severe economic insecurity.

The group considered severe economic insecurity as the biggest barrier to sustainable employment because for individuals in this population, the larger need is not finding a career pathway, but finding a way to make ends meet. Realistically, participating in workforce development programs requires a sacrifice of time, energy, transportation funds that could be spent earning wages and spending time with family, which is a luxury people who are economically insecure do not always have. Instead, people who are experiencing economic insecurity may seek low-wage and low-skill employment because it offers some way to meet their most basic needs. This does not mean that they are unaware or unwilling to participate in programs that would lead them to more sustainable employment, however. Those who are willing to participate in workforce development programs are sometimes limited by childcare needs, inflexible work schedules, limited class time availability, or outside stressors, such as housing and food insecurity, that prevent their full engagement in a program. Engaging people in this population would require some larger structural changes to the ways that workforce development programs approach training. Some suggestions included covering the cost of transportation for participants, offering free childcare for program students, and shifting towards more on-the-job training (OJT) and apprenticeship based programs that would offer a source of income to its participants.

5. Existing community and civic organizations are a crucial, but largely untapped resource.

The group recognized that North Philadelphia is a community filled with leaders and robust social networks who are experts on the needs of the community and how to best serve them. Service providers should look more closely at the networks of community that exist throughout North Philadelphia such as faith-based organizations, parent groups, neighborhood associations, and block captains, and work alongside these community leaders to leverage their insight and influence in the community in order to create more effective outreach campaigns and service models.

6. The importance of face-to-face outreach in community engagement for workforce development programs.

Based on group members' experiences with members of the North Philadelphia community, it is apparent that direct community outreach through face-to-face meetings is crucial for engagement. For the most part, residents know what kinds of programs and resources are out there. In fact, it is likely that residents or someone close to the residents have participated in a number of programs with varying levels of success and satisfaction. Therefore, they are reasonably skeptical of how valuable programs can be, especially if said program would require them to sacrifice a substantial amount of time or pay for transportation, childcare, materials, etc. It is the job of service providers to bring the information to the community, and demonstrate that the programs are dedicated to supporting the individual on their journey towards sustainable employment. Having a familiar face at an agency and a person who can directly address concerns and questions is extremely valuable for residents because it increases their sense of familiarity and belonging in the program or organization. This relationship can ease some of the fear and uncertainty that prevents someone from seeking help, foster more authentic relationships between the clients and the agency, give residents access to detailed information without the use of technology (which is not accessible for some residents), and allows them to make informed decisions about their pathways to sustainable employment.

7. There needs to be mutual benefit to secure community and employer buy-in.

In order to transition more people into sustainable career pathways, employees need to see an immediate, tangible benefits to participating in workforce development training such as payment, childcare, direct connection to employers, relevant certifications, and more. At the same time, employers who make strides toward sustainable employment (OJT and apprenticeship opportunities, equitable pay structures, investing in employee training etc.) need to see immediate, tangible benefits to support change. This support could look like financial incentives that subsidize the wages of employees while they are in training (with the intention that the employers will eventually pay the employees total wage after training), grants to support program implementation, or cost and time-save measures such as workforce development programs taking the responsibility of screening and training potential employees before they enter the field.

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FORMULATING WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS: Focus on Employer Engagement

In total, there were 30 attendees in this session including representatives from local corporations, small businesses, higher education institutions, healthcare institutions, legislative advocacy organizations focusing on economic development, human services organizations, workforce development programs, city government, and federal agencies.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

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5. Are there untapped areas of potential partnership?
6. Who are we missing with our current connections to the community that could benefit from engagement around workforce development?
7. What is the most effective way to ensure employer buy-in?
8. What is the most effective way to ensure buy-in from partnering organizations?
9. Where are jobs for this group usually listed/recruited from? Does that garner the most diverse pool of candidates? Is there a better way to conduct outreach for this population?

MAIN THEMES

1. Sustainable wages are mutually beneficial.

The group agreed that the current wages (between \$7 to \$10 an hour) was not enough to sustain an individual or family. Despite the consensus, some group members felt that many employers do not truly understand the value of increasing wages. In today's society where people have access to a wealth of information, people know what their skills and time are worth, and they can find out which employers value their skills. If wages are not satisfactory, the best employees will either leave, decrease their productivity, or not apply at all. This put employers in a position of high turnover rates and substandard work, which is inefficient and requires significant spending on recruitment and training costs, in addition to lost productivity and lost employee investment. Employers who offer sustainable wages, on the other hand, have much higher rates of retention which saves thousands of dollars each year. It was noted that the transition to higher may be difficult for for-profit companies who would like to please shareholders with large profits. From a practical business model standpoint, however, if more people are making money, then more money is entering the economy through the purchases of good and services which ultimately goes back into the profits of for-profit businesses. In other words, we all do better when we all do better.

2. Employers who contract out can hold a higher standard of sustainable employment.

Institutions and organizations who are committed to sustainable employment can leverage their buying power in order to advocate for better employment practices. If powerful institutions and organizations only do business with employers who implement sustainable employment practices like local hiring, sustainable wages, providing opportunities for professional development and mobility, hiring retuning citizens, etc., then many companies who would like to contract with those organizations may make changes that would improve the job market overall.



3. The responsibility of anchor institutions to the community.

A key piece of the conversation hinged on the fact that the largest industries in Philadelphia are the "Eds and Meds" or higher education institutions and hospitals. As powerful institutions within the community, these anchor institutions could play a key role in transforming the economic landscape of the region by making a commitment to the community. To illustrate this, the group discussed Penn's Netter Center which employs a three prong approach to community responsibility: 1) academic-based community service, 2) university assisted community schools and 3) creating anchor institution strategies that will help the community directly. For Temple, making this commitment is especially important given the community perspective that Temple is resistant to partnering with the community and being inclusive. Temple has been making a concerted effort to honor its responsibility to the community by increasing the rate of local hires, and working with vendors who hold the same values of community engagement, but creating genuine Community University partnership is a long and continuous process.

4. The value in the "warm-hand-off".

The group agreed that job training programs that are able to build strategic relationships with employers and vouch for applicants is one of the most effective strategies for connecting job seekers with employment. For employers, this approach is critical because when an established organization or professional stakes their reputation on supporting an applicant, employers feel more assured about the competency of the applicant. Additionally building trust in these relationships facilitates the screening and training process for employers which saves time and money.

For individuals who are seeking employment, this warm-hand off is beneficial because it acts as a stepping stone to help the candidate build a rapport with the employer. Based on the income and diversity index data from PWI, this warm hand-off is especially important to individuals and various parts of North Philadelphia because economic and social networks, which are demonstrated to be a massive supporting factor in finding employment, is not something everyone has access to, it's a privilege. Therefore job training programs that directly connect with employers and vouch for candidates redistributes social capital to individuals and bridge the gap between job seekers and employers. For many, that foot in the door can make all the difference in their job search.



5. Information-sharing networks among employers and community partners.

Bringing stakeholders together to create a network for sharing information about ongoing programs, initiatives, resources for sustainable employment would be a significant asset in helping direct job seekers to viable opportunities. Creating these networks would also break down the silos between employers, workforce development programs, and job seekers. These connections could also help everyone understand the others' needs better, share information about established and emerging best practices, and to build buy-in among employers for innovative programming and sustainable employment practices. This exchange of knowledge could result in better job prospects for job-seekers and better talent pools for employers.

6. Challenges of changing "business as usual" in bureaucratic institutions.

Legal teams and boards usually take much longer to buy-in to new programs or policies that would move the needle towards sustainable employment. This resistance creates a lot of red tape for sustainable employment advocates in the workplace. Figuring out how to present changes in a way that quickly garners buy-in from executives will be a defining factor in how and when changes will take place. Group members recommended that advisory groups or corporate councils comprised of executives and professionals in workforce and economic development fields could be an effective way of bringing executives or other decision makers to the table to discuss systemic challenges and sustainable employment.

7. The importance of face-to-face contact from employers to job seekers.

Hiring has become a very technical process, where individuals are ultimately judged on their ability to submit a polished resume and answer questions in a form correctly, instead of judging the individuals on their skills and the way they present themselves. Even job fairs are no longer a place to meet face to face with someone who can give you a job, but somewhere that people go for flyers that list websites. These practices unfairly block a lot of applicants who may not have access to a computer or other resources to put together a perfect application, even though they have the drive and skills to perform well in the role. To increase the equity of job opportunities, hiring managers need to be more understanding and interactive in the recruitment process. For the group, this meant an increased hiring manager presence at job fairs, visiting workforce development programs to see their curriculum and workshops, and conducting employer information sessions to meet with potential applicants and answer their questions. By having hiring managers meet development programs to see their curriculum and workshops, and conducting employer information sessions to meet with potential applicants and answer their questions. By having hiring managers meet with interested individuals and share "inside secrets" about the job and the organization, hiring managers would not only help individuals discover which job opportunities and career pathways are right for them, they will also set applicants up for success and ease the screening and hiring process for employers.

8. Untapped talent pool.

There continues to be a lot of stigma around hiring returning citizens, even though they are a population with a lot of untapped potential. The group members felt that some employers are turned off by the job seekers background and the additional considerations that come with hiring returning citizens (state restrictions, scheduling around probation officers, additional legal requirements etc.). Representatives from organizations who hire or offer programs for returning citizens shared that with open and honest communication between the employers and the employees, these relationships are actually quite easy to manage. Confidentiality between the employee and HR in these relationships is also key in protecting an individual's job security and mobility. As long as the offense does not prevent them from doing their job or receiving a promotion, it is not the business of anyone's supervisor or co-workers. In order to tap into this talent pool, one attendee suggested that perhaps employers who are committed to hiring returning citizens can be a resource for other employers to learn about best practices for employing returning citizens.



9.. Community-informed, community driven strategies.

Without genuinely including everyone in the community in forming solutions, especially the job seekers, the group agreed that workforce and economic development strategies are always going to miss the mark. A united approach instead of a siloed one for development is crucial to understand the barriers to sustainable employment on all sides. A number of attendees agreed the small group conversations like the Table Talks from LNPWI are a great start, but creating ongoing opportunities for engagement should be a priority.

10. Employers and anchor institutions need to get the word better.

Many employers and anchor institutions acknowledged that they're doing work to support the community, but the message is not getting out to residents or other employers/providers. As a result, residents do not know about programs or how to take advantage of them. Outreach should be an ongoing priority, but anchor institutions and corporations need to be careful with how and when they do this. If outreach for community facing programs only happens once in a while it may look like a reactionary response to community critiques of the organization, especially if the organization does not have strong relationships with the community. This limits the impact and reach of the information being shared. Instead organizations should adopt a practice of constantly sharing the good work its doing in real time. This consistent information sharing with residents can help build a more stable relationship between residents and institutions by demonstrating the institution's commitment to the community and connecting residents to necessary resources and opportunities. The group suggested the institutions can achieve this goal though connecting with more diverse channels of communication such as listservs, social media, and local new outlets.

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FORMULATING WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS

VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY: STRATEGIES FOR ESL AND IMMIGRANT POPULATIONS

Published by the LNPWI

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The agenda included an overview of the Lenfest North Philadelphia Workforce Initiative at Temple University, a presentation from Meg Shope-Koppel, Ph.D., Chief Research Officer for Philadelphia Works, Inc., and a panel presentation facilitated by Nick Frontino, Managing Director with the Economy League of Greater Philadelphia, and with representation from Philadelphia Youth Network, Office of Workforce Development, Office of Adult Education, Philadelphia Department of Prison, Philadelphia Housing Authority and Congreso de Latinos Unidos.

Following the presentation, participants broke into small groups to reflect on the previous presentations and to discuss workforce development strategies and employment-related issues facing specific populations, such as youth, adults, ESL and immigrants, returning citizens, veterans and individuals with a disability. There was also two additional small groups, that discussed community and employer engagement. Each group was co-facilitated by a representative from Temple University and a representative from an external organization.

A Temple University social work student was assigned to each group. The student was responsible for taking notes at the event. and wrote a draft report on themes that emerged from the discussion. The report was shared with the co-facilitators, who provided input and feedback. In order to share the key points from the small group discussion, Temple University's LNPWI has published a series of reports, based on each small group. This report is based on the discussion related to ESL and Immigrant populations. The small group was co-facilitated by Patience Lehrman, Special Assistant to the Dean of the College of Public Health and Nicole Pumphrey, Deputy Director of the Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians.

FORMULATING WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS: Focus on ESL and Immigrant Populations

In total, there were 19 attendees at this breakout session on ESL/Immigrant Populations. This small group was composed of participants from a variety of programs and sectors, including but not limited to, workforce development, community development, community engagement, literacy program, education programs, immigration services, Juvenile minor programs, ESL program, policy, adult education and research programs.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

The co-facilitators used the following facilitation questions to guide the conversation:

1. What does sustainable employment mean and look like to you? This vision will set the tone for the rest of the conversation--how do we achieve this ideal?
2. How many and what kinds of opportunities for sustainable employment exist for the ESL and immigrant population? Are these opportunities taking full advantage of the talents, skills, and passion that exist among individuals from this group?
3. Are employers offering jobs that meet the standard for sustainable employment for ESL and immigrant populations? Why or why not?
4. Do most people from ESL or immigrant population in North Philadelphia have the skills and/or experiences to fill sustainable employment opportunities? Why or why not?
5. How much focus should be placed on working with employers to improve and expand sustainable employment opportunities for North Philadelphians? How much focus should be place preparing North Philadelphians for sustainable employment and connecting them with employers?
6. What changes need to be made to prepare employers to hire and maintain employees from ESL and immigrant populations in sustainable positions (policy, educational, cultural)?
7. What are other barriers that the ESL and immigrant populations face that can prevent them from finding and maintaining employment (e.g. housing, food, education, transportation, policy, childcare, computer literacy, professional culture)? What can be done to minimize these challenges?
8. What are indicators that programs or interventions are successfully reducing the number of people who are unemployed, underemployed, and underpaid in North Philadelphia?

MAIN THEMES

1. Pathways to sustainable, meaningful employment must be self directed.

Sustainable employment is not only about training people and connecting them to jobs for an acceptable income. It is also a job that has a future attached to it. Therefore, a job is not sustainable for individuals from ESL and immigrant populations if they don't feel engaged and able to access advancement opportunities. For the ESL and immigrant population, there are many different pathways to finding meaningful work that can differ based on the individual's experiences, skills, and aspirations. The group felt that while higher education and job training can be a critical in-road for individuals from the ESL and immigrant populations, it is not the only way to secure meaningful employment. Other pathways can involve finding ways to leverage the skills and expertise an individual has gained from their home country such as job counseling, job placement programs, job readiness training, and entrepreneurship. To better meet the needs of this population, workforce development agencies should be able to work with an individual, and help them find the path to employment that works best for them.

2. There are legal barriers to employment.

Most jobs in Philadelphia have requirements, such as proof of identity and proof of work authorization in the U.S. In addition, upon employment, most employees are required to complete legal documents for the federal and state governments and for their employers regarding taxes and terms of employment. For someone who is unfamiliar with U.S. bureaucracies or does not speak English as a first language, navigating the laws, policies, and systems of the state can be challenging. Furthermore, the issue of citizenship and legal status may exclude some residents from opportunities, despite their skills, or discourage them from applying at all. The group recognized that while there are organizations in the community that offer legal services to immigrants to help them navigate through the system, they are not able to provide services to everyone who needs them. The funding opportunities for legal services dedicated to the ESL and immigrant populations need to be increased so that more people can access assistance.



3. Educational funding priorities are not aligned with the needs of the population.

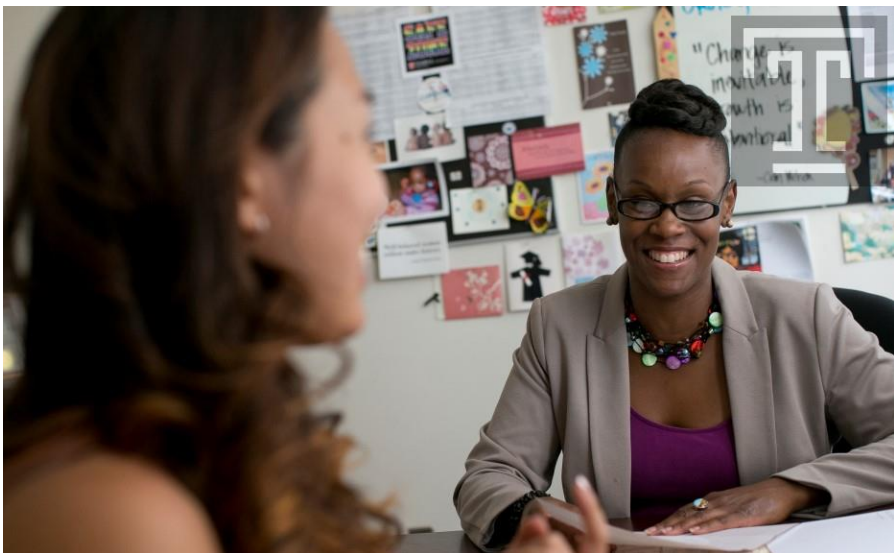
The current educational funding structure is problematic for individuals from ESL and immigrant groups because opportunities for higher education and workforce development are either not affordable to low income resident or are not designed to meet the unique needs of this population. Similarly, opportunities for the children of immigrants, such as heritage language learning programs, could be valuable in expanding employment opportunities for second generation of immigrants, but are difficult to find. However, there are significant funds available to teach ESL students, which are an important part of being able to participate in the workforce, but generally do not offer career pathways for participants. To serve the employment needs of this community, workforce development advocates should strive to find ways to make career pathways and education beyond ESL classes available and accessible.

4. Asset-based approaches are key.

Recognizing the skills, experience and tenacity of immigrant communities is essential and should be kept in the forefront of determining how any investment will be made. This looks like: meeting people where they are (skills, education, and language) and first helping people identify their strengths. Both employment and access to education are essential for the linguistic, economic and civic integration of immigrants in the region. However, many adult learners require a combination of basic education, ESL, and training services to advance and move into family-sustaining employment. A system that requires an individual to access these services sequentially, not people who immigrate to the U.S. and start out with a gateway or survival job. When an immigrant with only basic English skills takes a low-skilled job, they still may not have the skills necessary to obtain better employment or pursue training opportunities even when their language proficiency has improved. Simultaneously, the process is demoralizing, ineffective, and perpetuates institutional inequality.

5. The importance of digital literacy and technology.

Throughout the conversation, the group identified digital literacy and technology skills as critical to the success of individuals in their professional, personal, and civic lives. To this end, developing programs or bridges which help individuals develop the basic digital literacy skills that they need to access training and employment opportunities is essential.



6. Diversity and experience are an asset in the workplace.

Employers often take a very "in the box" approach to hiring by only looking at highly qualified and formally experienced applicants. This approach does not take full advantage of available talent pool because it ignores the fact that many individuals in the ESL/Immigrant population have equally applicable, and sometimes even better, knowledge, expertise and skills that they can bring to employers. In addition, many of these formal requirements are often not needed to perform the jobs, which unfairly leaves ESL/Immigrant populations with less job opportunities. The group recommended that training opportunities for employers regarding the strengths of the ESL/immigrant population and cultural competency, as well as a formal recognition for employers dedicated to hiring diverse employees could lead to more inclusive recruitment and hiring practices and more opportunities for the immigrant and ESL workforce.

7. Employer engagement is key.

While it is important for workforce development programs prepare job seekers for employment, to connect individuals with sustainable employment opportunities, they also need to focus on building relationships with employers who prepared to hire employees from ESL/immigrant backgrounds. Suitable employers include those which view diversity as a strength, have a workplace culture centered on employee support and retention, and consistently provide opportunities for advancement for employees at all levels. Without a referral stream between workforce development programs and vetted employers, workforce development efforts within this population will not be as effective.

8. Accessibility of information.

Participants at this breakout session suggested that developing a central information tool such as a database or map of employers with job opportunities for immigrants could be a useful tool for connecting individuals from the immigrant and ESL populations with access to sustainable employment.

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FORMULATING WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS

— VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY: STRATEGIES FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

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FORMULATING WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS: Focus on Individuals with Disabilities

In total, there were 9 attendees at this session with backgrounds in state and local government, nonprofits, and higher education institutions as well as long-term North Philadelphia residents and community organizers.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

The co-facilitators used the following facilitation questions to guide the conversation:

1. What does sustainable employment mean and look like to you?
2. How many and what kinds of opportunities for sustainable employment exist for North Philadelphians with disabilities? Are these opportunities taking full advantage of the talents, skills, and passion that exist in North Philadelphia?
3. Are employers offering jobs for individuals with disabilities that meet the standard for sustainable employment? Why or why not?
4. Do most individuals with disabilities have the skills and/or experiences necessary to fill sustainable employment opportunities? Why or why not?
5. How easy is it for people with disabilities to request accommodations in the workplace? How well to employers strive to meet that need?
6. How much focus should be placed on working with employers to improve and expand sustainable employment opportunities for North Philadelphians with disabilities? How much focus should be placed preparing North Philadelphians with disabilities for sustainable employment and connecting them with employers?
7. What changes need to be made to prepare employers to hire and maintain employees with disabilities in North Philadelphia in sustainable positions? (policy, educational, cultural?)
8. What are other barriers that individuals with disabilities face that can prevent them from finding and maintaining employment? (housing, food, education, transportation, computer literacy, professional culture?) What can be done to minimize these challenges?
9. What are indicators that programs or interventions are successfully reducing the number of people with disabilities who are unemployed, underemployed, and underpaid in North Philadelphia?

MAIN THEMES

1. Sustainable employment means having the opportunity to live comfortably and grow.

Some key elements of a sustainable job, as defined by the members of this session, is one that consistently offers a wage which covers basic needs (housing, food family), allows individuals to have savings, provides comprehensive benefits (medical and mental health), allows adequate time and funds for recreation, is accommodating to the differing needs and abilities of employees, and provides all employees with the opportunities and resources to grow not only professionally through career advancement, but also personally through homeownership, skill development, increased support networks, and education.

2. Employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities has changed over the years.

The group discussed how in the 80's and 90's manufacturing, housekeeping, and security jobs were an accessible employment option for individuals with disabilities because they required mostly hands-on work that could be easily tailored to an individual's level of ability and help them build skills. Over the years, many jobs that were once attainable for individuals with disabilities have moved out the city or changed their requirements, which puts individuals with disabilities at a disadvantage. Another change was the shift in the number of schools providing vocational programs. Some individuals felt that these programs are useful, but are too spread out and inconsistent to be a reliable resource for individuals with disabilities.



3. Some hiring strategies do not allow individuals to adequately display strengths.

One barrier to sustainable employment that the group identified is that traditional means of screening employees may not always give individuals with disabilities the opportunity to demonstrate their strengths. One example provided by a participant is that some jobs require applicants to take a test as part of their screening process. However, if the test does not provide accommodations for individuals with different abilities, then employers may be eliminating someone who is actually a great candidate just based on their testing ability. This not only hurts the individual by limiting their job prospects, but also the employer who is eliminating qualified candidates. Application and hiring processes that are designed to consider the ways that people can demonstrate their strengths would be a great stride in creating more accessible opportunities. To create this change, the group suggested working with employers who haven't hired an individual with a disability to identify why and what can be changed to create a more inclusive hiring process and work environment.

4. Improvements in hiring and retention strategies for employers could mean more opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

Despite the changes in available employment, the group identified a number of employers that could provide opportunities for employment if they are able to improve their hiring and retention strategies to be more inclusive. The group saw Temple University, Community College of Philadelphia, SEPTA, Aramark, Comcast, The Pearl (movie theater), the Divine Lorraine, Rite Aid, CVS, WorkReady, and Nursing Homes as areas that have the potential to provide (or provide more) sustainable employment opportunities to individuals with disabilities. To make this transition to more inclusive employers, the group suggested that programs and events designed to educate employers on the value of hiring individuals with disabilities are critical. Additionally, training employers on how to work with an individual with a disability would be instrumental in creating a more accommodating workplaces and expand employment options for individuals with disabilities. (**NOTE** : JEVS is educating employers about the value of hiring residents with disabilities, but are looking to increase their base of employers. PA CareerLink® Philadelphia Suburban Station is also addressing this issue by hosting a Disability Awareness event at the 1617 JFK Boulevard, 2nd Floor location in May. Nicki Woods is the contact for this event -- NWoods@pacareerlinkphl.org)



5. Schools could be a resource in preparing students with disabilities for employment pathways.

The transition from school to higher education or employment can present a barrier to sustainable employment for individuals with disabilities since many students leave feeling unprepared. Having supportive services in schools to facilitate the transition between employment and/or higher education would allow students explore their options, know about available resources, build up their power skills (a.k.a. soft skills) and self-esteem, and overall feel more equipped to navigate the process for either path. Another suggestion included schools building relationships with employers. These relationships between the schools, students, and employers could create more pathways to employment for individuals with disabilities by minimizing the shock of transitioning between the K-12 systems into higher education or employment and helping employers create more accommodating workplace environments.

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FORMULATING WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS

— VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY: STRATEGIES FOR RETURNING CITIZENS

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FORMULATING WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS: Focus on Returning Citizens

There was a total of 16 attendees from various social service agencies at this breakout session.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

The co-facilitators used the following facilitation questions to guide the conversation:

1. What does sustainable employment mean and look like to you?
2. How much and what kinds of opportunities exist for the returning citizen population of North Philadelphia? Are these opportunities taking full advantage of the talent, skills, and passion that exists in North Philadelphia?
3. How many employers hire returning citizens? Why or why don't they hire?
4. For employers that can hire returning citizens, but currently do not, what can be done to influence their decision?
5. Are employers offering job for returning citizens that meet the standard for sustainable employment? Why or why not?
6. Do most returning citizens have skills and/or experiences necessary to fill sustainable employment opportunities? Why or Why not?
7. How much focus should be placed on working with employers to improve and expand sustainable employment opportunities for North Philadelphians? How much focus should be placed preparing North Philadelphians for sustainable employment and connecting them with employers?
8. What changes need to be made to prepare employers to hire and maintain returning citizens in sustainable positions (policy, educational, cultural)?
9. What are other barriers that returning citizens face that can prevent them from finding and maintaining employment (housing, food, education, transportation)?
10. What might returning citizens struggle with in finding and maintaining work? What can be done to minimize these challenges?
11. What are indicators that programs or interventions are successfully reducing the number of returning citizens who are unemployed, underemployed, and underpaid in North Philadelphia

MAIN THEMES

1. Definition and scope of the problem.

For the purpose of this discussion the term “Returning Citizens” describes anyone who has touched the criminal justice system at any point in their lives. The impediments to reentry are a major issue in Philadelphia but more specifically North Philadelphia as it has the largest concentration of returning citizens in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the third largest in the nation.

2. Barriers to reentry into the community.

There are far too many barriers to identify them all in the time allotment. The following were the most significant and pervasive barriers cited by group members:

- Basic Needs: Housing/Shelter, clothing, food, transportation, proper forms of identification (birth certificate, SSN Card, Photo I.D.).
- Mental Health: General “demons,” substance misuse/abuse, emotional stability, mental health issues in general, institutionalization (retaining the mindset of a penitentiary resident rather than a community member).
- Decades have past: while incarcerated time stands still while the outside world evolves and advances. Understanding and uses of new technology, ill-equipped educationally or skills wise for the current job market, simply navigating the changing landscape, driving, social integration.
- Finances: Obtaining income and sustainable careers, restitution/legal fees, financial literacy and management, childcare, obtaining occupational licenses
- Intangibles: Family and personal relationships, support network, understanding one's charges, the relationship between the community and the police, general stability

3. Defining what sustainable employment looks like for returning citizens.

At present, we do not possess the capability of changing the stigma or the policies limiting job opportunities for returning citizens. This discussion revolved around what we, as a group, can do to circumvent and navigate those limitations. Given the limitations/restrictions placed on returning citizens, their employment opportunities are going to look different from the average citizen. The health care system is one of the largest employers in the nation, but one that is almost completely off limits for returning citizens. Instead, we have to look at other markets like the trade or construction industry. Apprenticeships and on the job training can eliminate the need for the immediacy of employment while developing individual skill sets.

4. Why employers might not hire returning citizens.

There was a general consensus amongst the group that, although not always founded, returning citizens can present some challenges for employers. The transition back into the community and the other barriers returning citizens may face could make being a productive employee difficult. Investing in training a new employee is expensive and returning citizens are inherently a greater risk to the employer. Unfortunately, every returning citizen is a representative of the population as a whole and one bad experience can damage the prospect of future hires by that company.

5. Why employers should hire returning citizens.

There was a general consensus amongst the group that although returning citizens are a risk for employers there is a huge upside to them as well. Employers receive tax deductions for hiring returning citizens. Fair chance hires have already been vetted, thus saving the employer time and effort. Returning citizens meet the employers need and have high levels of retention. With the employment rate so low, returning citizens represent an untapped reserve workforce.

6. Where social service organizations/providers are falling short.

There was an agreement in the room that, although as social service providers we have not failed, we could be more effective in addressing the issue. The concept of “silos” was brought up on numerous occasions. As providers, there is a heavy focus placed on employment and less on addressing the other needs the client might have. Other barriers or life problems could lead to a lack of job retention or inability to be a productive employee. There needs to be a greater focus on the totality of issues returning citizens have rather than solely the employment aspect.

As mentioned prior, every returning citizen is a representative of the population as a whole, and it only takes one bad experience to damage a relationship with an employer. Implementing a business approach, focusing on employers needs rather than a social services approach could alter this outcome.

Finally, social service providers/organizations tend to work separately and independently of each other. There needs to a concerted effort to coordinate services and implement plans for a shared vision.

7. What needs to change in Philadelphia.

With the sheer number of barriers returning citizens face, significant change needs to occur. Starting on a policy level with the creation of new and effective legislation, along with the proper enforcement of what currently exists. Buy-in from stakeholders is essential to the success of any intuitive, policy, or program. Prior to being released from incarceration, proper preparations need to occur, including education and career assessment/advisement. Skills can be gained while incarcerated, rehabilitation needs to start within a prison. There needs to be a sustainable living wage for low educational jobs. Although there was some disagreement in the group about whether manufacturing jobs will return to the city, one thing is clear, we need to adapt to whatever the job market looks like or will look like in future.

8. What are the existing opportunities that social service providers can capitalize on currently?

Although a number of things need to change to fully address sustainable employment for returning citizens, there are current opportunities to take advantage of.

- Detainer Alternative Program (DAP) is returning to offer prep for the trade industry
- Unions have qualifying exams that returning citizens are not barred from taking.
- SMART program grants exist.
- The fair chance hire initiative and tax incentives exist to promote the hire of returning citizens.
- There is an opportunity to create pipelines to anchor institutions like SEPTA or the Public-School System.
- There is an opportunity for more involvement in the city and state levels.
- Leverage current resources to improve outcomes.
- Implore Temple University and its ventures to hire North Philadelphia residents.
- Distribute information to target populations; create resource centers.
- Continue to advocate our clients and the community as a whole.
- Formulate solutions that target and clearly define the community we are dealing with.
- Create collaborations with employers and the city government.
- VOTE! Part of the challenge is ensuring proper representation for community members.



9. What we, as social service providers, need to change.

Despite the limited resources and funding dedicated to assisting returning citizens, the problem is not insurmountable. Actionable steps can be taken to address and eliminate barriers to sustainable employment for returning citizens.

- Starting with creating a collaborative effort with other agencies to address the problem and work towards implementing a shared vision. There needs to be a concerted effort to share resources and knowledge.
- There needs to be continuous and sustained effort to manufacture opportunities for employment, partnerships, education, and more. More training programs and educational opportunities need to be created.
- There needs to be a concerted effort to educate employers and the general population to reduce/eliminate the stigma surrounding the formerly incarcerated.
- Understating that there is no "one size fits all" solution, treatment plans need to be individualized. There needs to be treatment plans that consider the totality of the issue, not simply the employment aspect, i.e. wrap-around services. Additionally, efforts need to be made to address the issue at all levels starting with youth, including education, peer mentoring, and altering mindsets.
- Preparations for reentry need to start within the confines of prisons/jails. Legal challenges to Second Chance equal opportunity legislation need to occur ensuring fair and equal treatment.
- A level of personal responsibility needs to be instilled in every returning citizen.
- Finally, there needs to be proper/deliberate coordination with other agencies to produce meaningful and lasting change.

SPECIAL THANKS

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FORMULATING WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS

VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY: STRATEGIES FOR VETERANS

Published by the LNPWI

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Through the support of a grant from the Lenfest Foundation, Temple's LNPWI focuses on identifying opportunities for youth and adult employment, as well as professional and workforce development. In addition, LNPWI works to increase collaboration between Temple University, local employers and the North Philadelphia community.

This collaborative and community-informed initiative focus on providing resources to residents who reside in the ZIP codes immediately surrounding Temple's Main Campus and the Health Sciences Center.

FORMULATING WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS: A FOCUS ON NORTH PHILADELPHIA

On January 16, 2019, Temple University sponsored an event, "Formulating Workforce Solutions: A Focus on North Philadelphia." This event was an opportunity for individuals to come together to learn, discuss and shape workforce development opportunities for North Philadelphia residents. Over 200 people attended the event, which was open to community residents and leaders, volunteers and staff of community, faith and non-profit organizations and Temple University, as well as representatives of government agencies and employers.

The agenda included an overview of the Lenfest North Philadelphia Workforce Initiative at Temple University, a presentation from Meg Shope-Koppel, Ph.D., Chief Research Officer for Philadelphia Works, Inc., and a panel presentation facilitated by Nick Frontino, Managing Director with the Economy League of Greater Philadelphia, and with representation from Philadelphia Youth Network, Office of Workforce Development, Office of Adult Education, Philadelphia Department of Prison, Philadelphia Housing Authority and Congreso de Latinos Unidos.

Following the presentation, participants broke into small groups to reflect on the previous presentations and to discuss workforce development strategies and employment-related issues facing specific populations, such as youth, adults, ESL and immigrants, returning citizens, veterans and individuals with a disability. There was also two additional small groups, that discussed community and employer engagement. Each group was co-facilitated by a representative from Temple University and a representative from an external organization.

A Temple University social work student was assigned to each group. The student was responsible for taking notes at the event. and wrote a draft report on themes that emerged from the discussion. The report was shared with the co-facilitators, who provided input and feedback. In order to share the key points from the small group discussion, Temple University's LNPWI has published a series of reports, based on each small group. This report is based on the discussion related to Veterans. The small group was co-facilitated by Laura S. Reddick, the Associate Director of the Office of Veterans Affairs Military and Veteran Service Center at Temple University, and Dennis Miller, the Executive Principal of Wheel Dog Industries

FORMULATING WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS: Focus on Veterans

There was a total of 8 attendees at this breakout session. Participants included veterans, local veteran services providers, representatives from faith-based organizations, higher education staff working in Veterans Services, and Temple University faculty members.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

The co-facilitators used the following facilitation questions to guide the conversation:

1. What does sustainable employment mean and look like to you?
2. How many and what kinds of opportunities for sustainable employment exist for the veterans in North Philadelphia? Are these opportunities taking full advantage of the talents, skills, and passion that exist in North Philadelphia?
3. Are employers offering jobs to veterans that meet the standards for sustainable employment? Why or why not?
4. Do most veteran have the skills and/or experiences necessary to fill sustainable employment opportunities? Why or why not?
5. How much focus should be placed on working with employers to improve and expand sustainable employment opportunities for North Philadelphia with disabilities? How much focus should be placed preparing veterans for sustainable employment and connecting them with employers?
6. What changes need to be made to prepare employers to hire and maintain employees in North Philadelphia in sustainable positions (policy, educational, cultural)?
7. What are other barriers that veterans face that can prevent them from finding and maintaining employment? (housing, food, education, transportation, computer, literacy, professional culture?) What can be done to minimize these challenges?
8. What are indicators that programs or interventions are successfully reducing the number of people who are unemployed, underemployed, and underpaid in North Philadelphia?

MAIN THEMES

1. Veterans have the skills to enter the labor force, they just need to be able to translate them.

Today's veterans generally leave the service with a wealth of experience and training that would make them valuable assets in most employment environments. However, transitioning from service into non-military based employment can be difficult for veterans because they must figure out how their skills and experiences can be applied to the current labor market. This transition can pose a challenge for veterans in two ways. The first is because many veterans are unsure of how to translate the skills they gained during their service into skills that they can market to employers on their resumes and in interviews. The second, and perhaps larger issue, is because many employers appear to be unaware of the multitude of valuable skills veterans can gain during their service, and therefore have difficulty understanding how their military history would actually facilitate the training process and increase retention rather than hinder it. This combination of transitioning and failure to recognize veterans' skills can create a sense of stigma for some veterans in their job search, and can prevent them from finding work. To change this, there needs to be more job preparation service to help veterans transition into employment after serving in the military, but more importantly, there needs to be more understanding of the training and experience veterans already have. The group suggested that offering education and training for employers to inform them of the value of hiring veterans and best practices for recruiting, training and retaining employees who were veterans could create positive outcomes for the veteran population.



2. Sustainable employment for veterans relies on how well they are able to transition out of military service.

While veterans leave the military with many skills, transitioning from the military into mainstream life can be difficult for some veterans. Connecting veterans with services to meet their basic needs such as housing, medical and mental healthcare, public benefits, and job preparation are an important first step for ensuring stability in a veteran's life. In addition, employers need to be aware of the unique needs of their veteran employees and how to meet them in order for veterans to make as smooth of a transition as possible. This requires a flexible approach on the part of the employer, since transition is different for everyone. One potential way to meet this need could include educating employers and the public about military culture and the challenges of transitioning so that they can be more aware, more understanding, and more supportive.

3. There needs to be improved outreach to connect veterans with available resources.

The group discussed how there are a number of resources available to support veterans on their path to sustainable employment, but engagement has been an ongoing challenge. Some strategies to bridge the gap include creating a Clearinghouse of information that can direct veterans to resources; asking websites that veterans might visit to include information on veteran services in the area; using social media, email, and a mailing list to inform and invite veterans to participate in events, services, and programs; building a veteran task force team to go out into the neighborhoods and speak to the veteran community about programs; and using specific events to get the message out about the resources available like the Army, Navy Game.

4. Building a relationship between the North Philadelphia community and the veteran community is essential for increasing engagement and creating sustainable employment opportunities.

In order to be effective in building sustainable employment opportunities and pathways for veterans, organizations and employers must work to build trust and understanding between the veterans and the community. The group felt that the community in general want to support veterans, but are unaware of how many barriers veterans have to overcome after they leave the military, and unsure of how to best support them. As a result, many veterans are unsure about how well available programs and services are able to meet their needs, and may not engage because of that mistrust. Having community members, faith-based organizations, higher education institutions, community-based organizations, non-profits, unions, and employers begin building relationships with veterans by either going into veteran community spaces, partnering with veteran-focused organizations, or meeting veterans one-on-one will help these vital resources to understand the needs and assets of the veteran community. This understanding and partnership with veterans and veteran-focused organizations can then be utilized to begin building more effective, collaborative strategies for supporting veterans' transition from the military into career pathways and sustainable employment. These relationships can be utilized not only for local-level change, but also advocating for policy changes (at the employer, local, and federal level) that encourage organizations and employers to offer more opportunities to veterans.



5. Highlighting veterans voices could help employers better meet the needs of the veteran community.

The group felt that since many veterans struggle to find sustainable employment, current employer-based approaches, such as hiring quotas, and job preparation programs are not as effective as they could be in giving veterans an equal opportunity to sustainable employment. Coordinating veteran advisory groups with key employer and service provider partners could be an effective way of identifying why obtaining and maintaining sustainable employment is difficult for veterans in certain settings, and how employers, organizations, and the city can better bridge the gap.



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A Temple University social work student was assigned to each group. The student was responsible for taking notes at the event. and wrote a draft report on themes that emerged from the discussion. The report was shared with the co-facilitators, who provided input and feedback. In order to share the key points from the small group discussion, Temple University's LNPWI has published a series of reports, based on each small group. This report is based on the discussion on Youth. the small group was co-facilitated by Michael Clemmons, Acting Director for Temple University's Center for Community Partnerships, and Scott Emerick, Executive Director for Youth Build Philadelphia.

FORMULATING WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS: Focus on Youth

The attendees of this session included representatives from youth workforce initiatives throughout the city of Philadelphia. The organizations represented included, but were not limited to: Youth Build, Philadelphia Works, Saxbys, Job Corps, HOPE Center, Congreso de Latinos Unidos, and PA CareerLink. Importantly, there were also three youth in attendance: two current students in a youth workforce initiative, and one who had recently graduated.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

The co-facilitators used the following facilitation questions to guide the conversation:

1. What does sustainable employment mean and look like to you?
2. How much focus should be placed on working with employers to improve and expand sustainable employment opportunities for youth? How much focus should be placed on preparing youth for suitable career pathways and connecting them with employment experience?
3. What other barriers might youth face that can prevent them from starting career pathways (e.g. housing, food, education, transportation, computer literacy, professional culture)? What can be done to minimize these challenges?
4. What skills do young people need to enter the workforce but are not getting (e.g. in schools, at work, at home, in community)?
5. What supports are in place to help youth find employment or professional development opportunities?
6. What are indicators that programs or interventions are successfully reducing the number of people who are unemployed, underemployed, and underpaid in North Philadelphia?

KEY CONCEPTS

There were a number of key concepts and issues mentioned and discussed by the facilitators and attendees of the "youth" breakout session group. The following are the main themes that emerged during this discussion:

1. Defining "Sustainable Employment"

Defining "sustainable employment" took on varying definitions depending on the perspective of the respondent. Regardless, there was some overlap between the differing perspectives in the room.

Student Perspective. Both the current and recently graduated students believed sustainable employment to be a job that offers benefits, beyond receiving a paycheck for their labor. Some of the benefits discussed were healthcare, opportunities for promotions, and transferable skills. Furthermore, all were in agreement that sustainable employment are those jobs that help youth to "elevate in job surroundings." In their view, sustainable employment helps the youth grow in and outside of workplace settings.

Employer Perspective. The employers in attendance spoke at length about the importance of matching youth to opportunities relating to their personal interests and how doing so is a major component of sustainable employment. Several employer representatives discussed the importance of gaging the interests of their youth, whether it be trade school, college, training, etc. and connecting their youth to these types of resources. In congruence with the student perspective, employers stated that jobs that provide sustainable employment are those that teach youth transferable skills. In similarity with the students, employers agreed that hiring internally leads to more sustainable employment because doing so, provides youth the opportunity to be promoted to higher positions. All in all, there seemed to be a general consensus among employers that jobs that offer youth opportunities to attain personal and professional goals correlate with sustainable employment. A final point about sustainable employment as it relates to the youth population was that, jobs ought to teach/coach youth leadership qualities that are necessary for success.

Career Development Perspective. Representatives from career development organizations/programs were in agreement with employers that sustainable employment is largely achieved by matching youth to jobs that take into account their personal situations, skills, and needs. Representatives from this perspective also emphasized youth needs, e.g. providing youth with what is needed on a day to day basis.

2. Lack of Necessary Skill Set for Success in the Workplace

There was consensus in the group around systemic barriers to employment facing low-income young people. Some group members recognized that opportunity youth often need additional work-based learning opportunities to develop necessary workforce skills. According to some in attendance, additional opportunities to develop soft and social skills like demonstrating emotional intelligence, listening, being on time and showing respect prove important for many low-income young people. In addition to these challenges, other attendees also recognized the valuable perspective and life experience that these young people bring into the workforce. Attendees discussed the need for soft skills to be taught daily so that these skills can be more easily acquired and retained. Youth are typically sent away or fired from places of employment due to their lack of soft and social skills. Thus, failure to acquire and retain these skill sets present a serious threat to employment and success in the workplace for young people. Mentorship was posed as a possible solution to this common problem.

3. Working with Employers to Improve and Expand Sustainable Employment Opportunities for Youth

Not only is there a need to train and prepare youth for sustainable career pathways, but there is a simultaneous need to prepare employers for working with opportunity youth. This discussion focused on the need to prepare employers and managers to more effectively develop and support young people who might have less previous experience with interviewing and less overall career experience than other candidates. More can be done to help employers find the right balance of high expectations and high support for opportunity youth and low-income young people entering the labor market with limited previous work experience. However, an important and somewhat complex question arose as result of this discussion: *How do employers balance running a business and hold all team members to equal standards?*

It was suggested that partnerships between career development and employers and/or partnerships between providers and educators be built. In addition, the group agreed that employers need to visually show youth that they want everyone to have a chance at any given job and succeeding in it to help overcome this barrier. When employers, providers, and educators fail to be properly trained to understand and respond to the challenges specific to this population barriers are created, and rejection becomes the only consistency for these youths.

4. Additional Barriers to Youth Employment and Career Pathways for Youth Population

Multiple barriers to employment and career pathways were delineated in this session. A summary of the additional barriers discussed is below:

Exposure. The group expressed great concern over the lack of exposure for young people in regard to the workplace. Young adults are not generally exposed to the wide-range of jobs and careers that they have not learned or heard about.

Therefore, there is a need for schools, parents, and community organizations to expose youth to non-traditional jobs and career pathways. The group also discussed the need for youth to be exposed and experience the workplace at "low stakes." It is especially important for the youth population to be given chances to make mistakes in the workplace without risking employment at high stakes.

Overlooking of Basic Needs. When employers and youth workforce initiative programs/organizations overlook basic needs of youth, it creates a potential barrier to employment. Basic needs and the lack thereof, effect youth's performance at work. Employers must be aware of each individual situation and recognize when and if their basic needs aren't being met and how this in turn effects workplace performance.



Thinking short-term. There was a general consensus among the group that too many of the initiatives targeting opportunity youth intentionally and unintentionally focus on youth's short-term goals, with minimal to no attention to their long-term goals. In doing so, youth are taught to think short-term and this may severely limit their potential for undertaking certain career paths. Youth employers and youth workforce initiatives must begin to encourage youth to think beyond their short-term goals and aid them in the process of achieving their long-term goals (personally and professional).

5. Supports to Help Youth Find and Maintain Employment and Support Them Throughout the Process

There was a general consensus among the group about what types of supports have been demonstrated to help youth throughout the employment process and further, aid them in finding and maintaining employment. Follow-up with youth for at least one year was named as an effective supportive strategy. Included in the group's definition of follow-up was frequent one on one "check-ins" with the youth. The group also stated that consistent meetings with individual youth throughout the process is a necessary support to increase youth's probability of finding and maintaining sustainable employment. In the event that youth need fare for transportation or for interview/job clothing, it was argued that whenever possible, providers, educators, or employers should pay these expenses. The group also agreed that a web-of support, e.g. mentorship and having more than one mentor (e.g. a workplace mentor and a mentor at a community organization) is helpful in supporting youth throughout the process of employment or attainment of post-secondary education/training. Finally, financial planning was named as a necessary and critical support for youth seeking sustainable employment.

6. Indicators of Success.

The group discussed and listed several indicators that they believed were indicative of program or intervention success at reducing the number of people who are unemployed, underemployed, and underpaid in North Philadelphia. The indicators included: youth sustaining long-term employment, youth obtaining jobs that turn into careers, increase in attendance rates at schools or workforce programs, youth locating jobs that they will actually prosper from, and youth expressing that they have had a positive experience. Each of these indicators were discussed in varying detail, but the group, nonetheless all agreed that these were some of the strongest indicators

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