The background features a series of overlapping, semi-transparent silhouettes of diverse individuals in various professional roles, such as a teacher, a doctor, and a scientist, set against a light beige background.

WHERE ARE THE WORKERS?

Exploring the Experiences and Perceptions of the Modern Greater New Orleans Workforce

April 2024

Funded by
**GREATER
NEW ORLEANS
FOUNDATION**
GIVING IN ACTION

Gratitude & Acknowledgements



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Executive Summary

Purpose

In 2023, a group of workforce development providers in the Greater New Orleans (GNO) region worked together to survey job seekers to identify and prioritize barriers and gaps in career services, training programs, and other disparities in access to employment.

While a significant amount of research exists on national workforce trends, Where Are The Workers - Greater New Orleans (WATW GNO) seeks to understand challenges and experiences specific to the workers of the Orleans and Jefferson Parish communities with a goal to create informed recommendations for strengthening the broader workforce development ecosystem.

Methods

The WATW GNO project combined broad literature review with targeted data collection to produce qualitative findings on the state of the GNO workforce. An online survey was distributed through partner channels including newsletters, social media, and flyers, resulting in 362 valid responses. Focus groups were conducted virtually and in-person with 22 unemployed and underemployed individuals to more deeply understand narrative experiences around job seeking, workforce training, and employment in the region. Research questions were designed to investigate the following:

- What are the experiences and barriers to sustainable employment for underemployed or



unemployed people who live below the ALICE threshold?

- What is the role of employers and businesses in meeting the needs of today's workforce?
- What role should service providers play in addressing participants' needs, such as responsive resources and interventions?
- What is the biggest opportunity for job training programs to drive recruitment, retention, and completion?
- How can the ecosystem of service providers strategize collaboration to support job seekers?

Key Findings: Challenges

The findings from our research suggest that worker perceptions are tied to a set of broader challenges that exist in the New Orleans job landscape, which are highlighted below and expounded upon further in the report.

Perceptions of Limited Opportunities and Nepotism: A prevalent belief in the job market that access and advancement are primarily tied to connections rather than merit undermines confidence in the fairness of the system. This unique challenge, not widely documented nationally, impacts job seekers' morale and their willingness to engage in further training or skill development.

Age Discrimination and Wage Disparities: Discrimination, especially against older workers, coupled with below-average wages, exacerbates the struggle for sustainable employment. This not only affects individuals' financial stability but also contributes to a general sense of disillusionment with job prospects.

Lack of Awareness and Skepticism Towards Workforce Programs: Despite available workforce development programs, many individuals, particularly those from marginalized communities, are unaware of these resources. Moreover, unemployed workers express skepticism about the value of investing time in training programs, believing they already possess adequate skills for desired jobs.

Disconnect Between Program Satisfaction and Employment Outcomes: While participants in job training programs generally report high satisfaction levels, transitioning into sustainable employment remains a challenge. The gap between program completion and job placement underscores the need for continued support and mentorship to facilitate successful transitions into the workforce.

Systemic Inequities and Barriers to Participation: Access to transportation and affordable childcare emerge as significant barriers, particularly for those below the ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) threshold. Women of color, in particular, face challenges balancing childcare responsibilities with workforce participation. Efforts to address these systemic barriers are crucial for promoting inclusivity and equitable access to opportunities.

Remote and Hybrid Work Trends and Digital Skills Gap: The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the shift towards remote and hybrid work models, highlighting the importance of digital skills. However, there is a notable gap in proficiency with essential software tools among unemployed workers, necessitating targeted efforts to bridge this divide.

Key Findings: Recommendations

Addressing these multifaceted challenges will require a collaborative effort from stakeholders across the workforce ecosystem. However, some initial recommendations from our research include the following:

- 1. The workforce ecosystem of providers** should increase its focus on pre-program recruitment, needs assessment, program matching, and expectation-setting.
- 2. Workforce program funders** should invest in the social services that minimize barriers to participation, and the workforce ecosystem should explore how to continue these social services.
- 3. Training providers** should continue to increase industry and skill-specific training, but ensure they are not neglecting the importance of interpersonal and transferable skills.
- 4. Employer collaboratives** should be explored to share the costs and benefits of job training across sectors.
- 5. Program providers and employers** should work together to provide continued support and ensure long-term outcomes.
- 6. Training providers** must prioritize rigorous evaluation and impact assessments, including collecting and reporting information on their failures.
- 7. Employers** should increase transparency and communication throughout their hiring processes.

Addressing the issues brought forward in this research will require collaborative efforts from policymakers, employers, educational institutions, and community organizations. By addressing these challenges, the community can create a more inclusive and resilient workforce ecosystem that fosters equitable access to opportunities and supports sustainable employment outcomes for all residents.

“Of the 48% of employed respondents, 26% of them work multiple jobs, signifying the sheer effort it takes for these individuals to meet their basic needs. However, working multiple jobs does not guarantee that you will be able to provide for yourself or your family. Of those who had multiple jobs, 30% still reported incomes that were below the ALICE threshold”

Where Are The Workers? Report, 2024



Introduction

In November 2021, dozens of nonprofits, funders, and workforce development program participants came together for a convening called “Together, Stronger, Better” with the goal of strengthening collaboration and impact across the workforce development ecosystem in New Orleans. Of the many interventions and ideas generated during this engagement, one of them was to *survey job seekers to identify and prioritize barriers and gaps in career services, training programs, and other lacks in access to employment*. While a significant amount of research exists on national workforce trends, this project seeks to understand challenges and experiences specific to the workers of Orleans and Jefferson Parish communities. Where Are The Workers - Greater New Orleans (WATW GNO) was inspired by a major evaluation in Northeast Ohio by the Fund for Our Economic Future.



SECTION 2

National and Regional Workforce Landscape

2.1 National Workforce Landscape

Many of the challenges and opportunities to be detailed in this report are not unique to the GNO area and are contextualized by national shifts across the labor market. Marked by dramatic changes from the COVID-19 pandemic, the American workforce is undergoing a dramatic transformation. While job openings abound, employers struggle to find skilled talent, revealing a critical disconnect between available workers and the demands of a changing economy. This labor shortage, fueled by early retirements, slowing immigration, and sector-specific trends, necessitates a reevaluation of both employment opportunities and the skillsets required for success in the years ahead. Understanding the demographic, technological, and economic drivers of these national workforce trends serves to ground the local and regional analysis to be detailed in later sections of this report.

Although the national unemployment rate is at its lowest since pre-pandemic levels, data from December 2023 shows that the United States has 9.5 million job openings, but only 6.5 million unemployed workers.¹ In sheer numbers, there are more Americans participating in the workforce today than before the pandemic, but the percentage of Americans participating has significantly dropped. “If our labor force participation rate today was the same as it was in February of 2020, we would have 1.27 million more Americans in our workforce to help fill those open jobs.”¹

The aging American population is a key factor in the labor shortage. During the COVID-19 pandemic, workers experienced layoffs, business closures, and significant health concerns within the workplace. This caused many older workers to evaluate their options for income, with many choosing to enter early retirement. By October 2021, more than 3 million adults retired early.¹ As younger generations are having fewer children, the American workforce is becoming significantly older despite early retirements during the pandemic.

In addition to the high volume of retirements, immigration into the United States significantly slowed during the pandemic, which has affected employers needing both highly-skilled workers and seasonal labor. Employers of highly-skilled workers across the tech, finance, and manufacturing industries rely upon the H-1B visa program to fill open positions, but despite over 780,000 H-1B visa applications submitted by employers for their 2024 workforce needs, only 85,000 will be granted due to regulatory caps set by Congress in 1990.² Similar constraints exist for the seasonal labor needed via the H-2B visa program; despite the Biden Administration increasing the cap for H-2B visas in 2022, “less than half of the seasonal workers sought by American businesses obtained a visa, leaving many companies in a bind with numerous open positions going unfilled.”²

The significant decline in women’s labor force participation during and following the pandemic has also supported the national labor shortage. Women were more likely to experience pandemic-related layoffs than their male counterparts and are also much more likely to leave their jobs to take on childcare responsibilities.³ The childcare industry was severely impacted by the pandemic, losing more than 370,000 jobs in spring of 2020 - 95% of which were held by women.³ Post-pandemic recovery has been slow, causing rising costs and limited availability of childcare across the country, which is likely to continue to exacerbate the gender disparity of labor force participation and the overall labor shortage issue nationally.

In addition to drastic demographic shifts, industry-specific trends are contributing to changing national workforce demands. Projected workforce needs by industry show goods-producing fields such as mining and construction to experience a steady decline, but the utilities and retail trade industries have the highest projected decrease in employment demand between 2022 and 2032.⁴ As the world continues to adapt to a post-pandemic landscape, demand for services in the healthcare, education, and entertainment sectors are projected to exponentially increase. Specifically, employment demands for healthcare support, computer and mathematics, and healthcare practitioners are anticipated to be the top fastest growing needs (respectively).⁴ Specifically, “over one-quarter (3.3 million) of new jobs in the next seven years will be in the healthcare and social assistance sector,” partially due to the needs of an aging American population.⁴

In a world dominated by technology and the exponential rise of Artificial Intelligence, jobs of the future will increasingly require digital skills that “only the most educated and experienced people will have.”⁵ According to the hiring site, Indeed, 10 of the top 20 most in-demand skills in 2023 were digital skills: cloud computing, artificial intelligence, mobile app development, video production, audio production, UX design, SEO marketing, blockchain, digital journalism, and animation.⁶ The other 10 most in-demand skills centered on soft skills such as people management, creativity, collaboration, adaptability, time management and persuasion; the remaining top skills were sales leadership, analysis, translation and industrial design.⁶

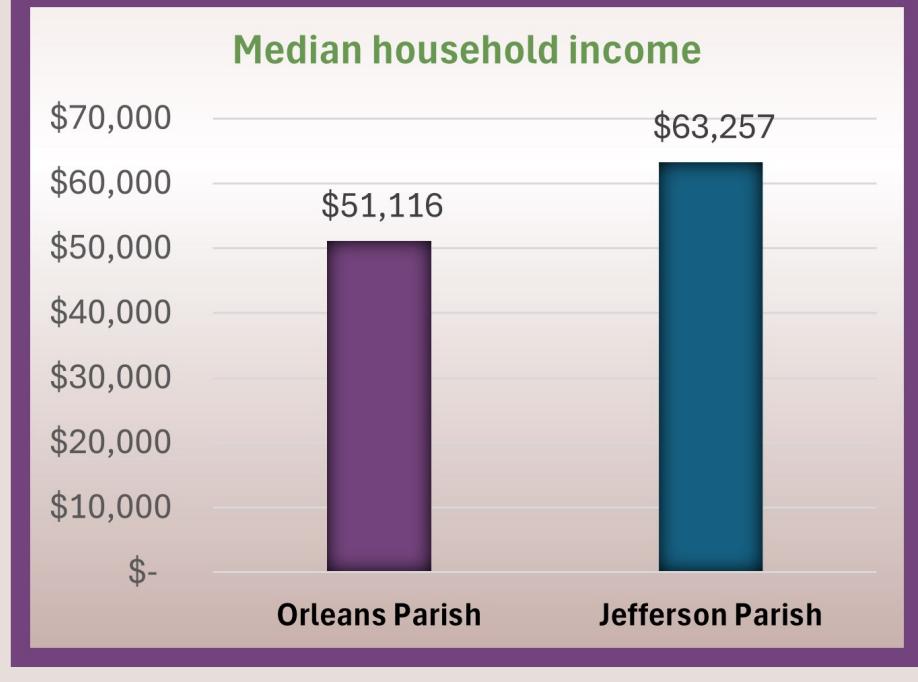
The combination of an aging workforce with the gap in formal education within the IT sectors signifies that employers will need to proactively invest in reskilling and job training in order to meet their own workforce needs. The overwhelming demand for digital skills will likely affect older Americans who started their careers in a drastically different world of work. This is particularly important to acknowledge as “over the past two decades, there has been a remarkable 117% increase in the number of workers aged 65 or older, and it is projected that the number of workers aged 55 or older will grow three times faster than the number of workers aged 25-54.”⁶ Age is not the only determinant for digital readiness, though, as students pursuing Bachelors’ degrees in business continue to outpace other majors by far; over 387,000 business degrees were awarded in 2022 compared to only 97,000 in computer and information sciences.⁶ Of the 1 million Associates degrees awarded in 2021, only 3% of them were in the computer and information sciences.⁷

2.2 The Greater New Orleans Workforce Landscape

Louisiana is no exception to the national workforce participation rate, with family care and low wages as the driving factors to non-participation in the workforce. The Louisiana worker shortage is among the highest in the nation with only 55 available workers for every 100 open jobs across the state.⁸ For Orleans and Jefferson Parishes specifically, the latest census data shows 61% of the Orleans population and 63% of the Jefferson population is participating in the workforce, which is on par with both the state and national averages, which are 60% and 64% respectively.⁹ Research conducted for the Louisiana Workforce Commission examined reasons for Louisiana working-age adults not participating in the workforce and a lack of access to child and eldercare was the most commonly cited reason, aligning with national trends. The second most commonly-cited reason was low wages, which aligns with our own findings (Section 4.2); “if the wage is not viewed as ‘livable’, people will not take the position and would rather stay out of the labor force.”⁹

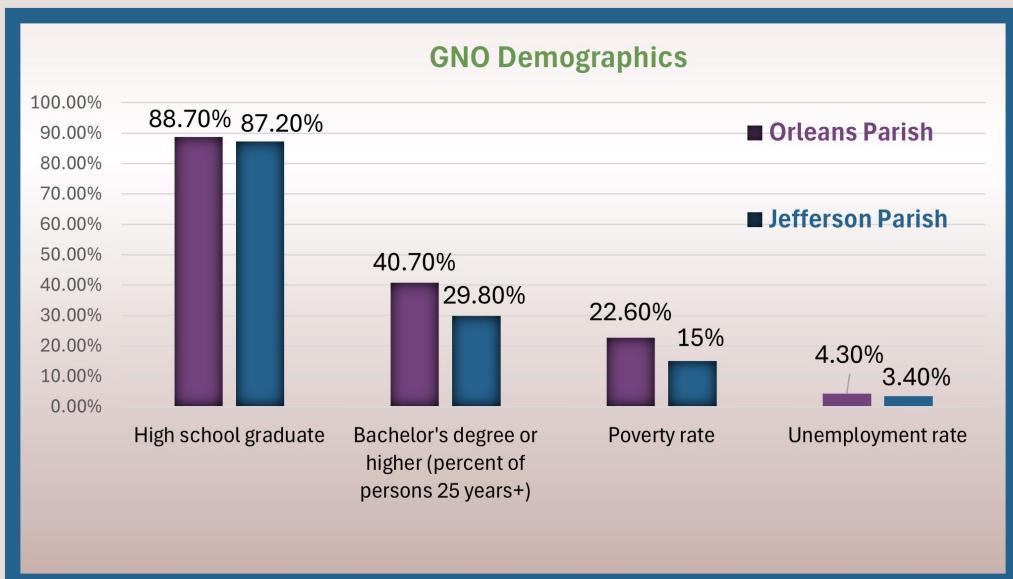
Interest in attracting and expanding jobs within high-growth sectors such as tech and energy is a hallmark of economic development in the GNO region, but access to these jobs requires specialized training.

According to GNO Inc., the seven industries projected to drive economic growth across the region include: Technology, Advanced Manufacturing, Trade & Logistics, Health Sciences, Environmental Management, Energy, and Offshore Wind.¹⁰ Although levels of post-high school



Census data (2018-2022)

educational attainment are growing in our region, these industries are characterized by a need for specialized skills, signifying an expanding need for demand-driven training across these fields. Of the various occupations reviewed in the 2022 Jobs Report, the number of job openings were the highest for Registered Nurses (12,373 openings listed in 2022), Medical and Health Services Managers (3,709), Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers (2,833), and Software Developers (1,977).¹¹



Census data (2018-2022)

Major economic development leaders including GNO Inc., Louisiana Economic Development (LED), and the Louisiana Workforce Commission (LWC) offer employer-facing programs focused on filling the gaps in these growing industries. GNO Inc's program, GNOu, partners with major employers and local universities to assess, design, and implement demand-driven training programs and university curricula.¹² Similarly, LED's FastStart program uses a Recruit, Train, and Sustain framework to partner with employers in building customized job application boards and designing virtual reality-supported training opportunities, as well as working with higher education institutions to align talent pipeline development with employer's evolving needs.¹³ In addition to LWC's support services offered directly to unemployed individuals, they also facilitate workforce development training partnerships such as the Incumbent Worker Training Program, focused on reskilling and training existing employees, and support the creation of apprenticeship programs to create pathways for new employees with partnering employers.¹⁴ Both the City of New Orleans and Jefferson Parish have Workforce Development Boards to serve workers and employers in their respective communities¹⁵ and to coordinate broader efforts across Southeast Louisiana, such as Region One's Demand-Driven Workforce program.¹⁶

In addition to these employer-focused economic development programs, the Greater New Orleans area has an abundance of worker-focused training resources offered by a variety of local institutions and nonprofits, some of which are partners on the WATW GNO project.* Despite these efforts, the research that follows demonstrates a great need for additional coordinated efforts to meet the needs of our workforce across the region.

Tourism and the hospitality industry remain vital players in shaping our local workforce needs. Despite interest in attracting and expanding new sectors in the GNO area, the hospitality and tourism industries employ, by one estimate, 12% of all GNO workers.¹⁷ Nationally, the leisure and hospitality industry has experienced the highest quit rates of all industries, which the US Bureau of

*See GNO Worker Resources at the end of this report for a full list of WATW Partners (pg. 59)..



Labor Statistics measures as the number of quits in a month as a percentage of total employment. Accommodation and food services, specifically, has experienced a quit rate between 4.5% and 6% since July 2021, compared to the steady financial industry with a quit rate of just 1.3% in December 2023.⁴ As quit rates generally indicate low satisfaction with workplace conditions or wages, this national data highlights the instability that exists for many GNO workers. In fact, a 2018 report found that only 17% of hospitality jobs in New Orleans are “good jobs” that pay living wages.¹⁸

Aligned with national trends, the GNO workforce is aging, signifying a need for reskilling programs that will equip older workers with the resources they need to adapt to a changing economy. Across the GNO region, 44% of all jobs are held by workers 45 years or older and most of these workers (56%) are stuck in low-wage jobs, with median wages below \$20/hr.¹⁹ As our own data collection shows, older, unemployed workers are also struggling to secure jobs, with digital literacy and age discrimination as common challenges shared by our research participants.



SECTION 3

Methodology and Data Overview

Inspired by both the Fund for Our Economic Future's *Where Are The Workers* project in Ohio and the challenges that local partners experience in recruiting participants to workforce development programs, the WATW GNO project combined broad literature review with targeted data collection to produce qualitative findings on the state of the GNO workforce, with a goal to create informed recommendations for strengthening the broader workforce development ecosystem.

3.1 Research Questions and Definitions

Research Questions

- What are the **experiences and barriers to sustainable employment** for underemployed or unemployed people that live below the ALICE threshold?"
- What is the role of **employers and businesses** in meeting the needs of today's workforce?
- What role should **service providers** play in addressing participants' needs, such as responsive resources and interventions?
- What is the biggest opportunity for **job training programs** to drive **recruitment, retention, and completion**?
- How can the **ecosystem of service providers** strategize collaboration to support job seekers?

Definitions

- Unemployed - individuals who are without a job.
- Underemployed - individuals who have the capacity, desire, and/or skills for full-time

employment but who are working 35 hours/week or less.

- Sustainable employment - successfully finding and maintaining full-time work that sustains the individual's and/or family's cost of living.
- Service provider - nonprofit organization, public agency, or other entity that provides resources, training, direct assistance, or programs for the unemployed and/or underemployed. This is a broad term that encompasses both those who provide training and those who provide accompanying services. "Training provider" is more specific to those offering direct education and skilling, most commonly educational institutions.
- ALICE population (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) - a United Way metric that captures individuals who live in households with income above the Federal Poverty Line (FPL) but cannot afford the basic costs of living in their communities. *Note:* throughout this report, reference to individuals "below the ALICE threshold" is inclusive of those at or below the FPL.

3.2 Data Collection Methods

WATW GNO is a qualitative research project that relied on data collected from an online survey, focus groups, and literature reviews.

An **online survey** was distributed through partner channels including newsletters, social media, and flyers. Our survey was modified from the original WATW project in Ohio and was open to anyone 16 years or older living or working in Orleans or Jefferson Parishes. Participation was incentivized via random selection of 2 survey participants to receive \$100 gift cards. The survey was open for 34 days. Our survey instrument is included in the appendix.

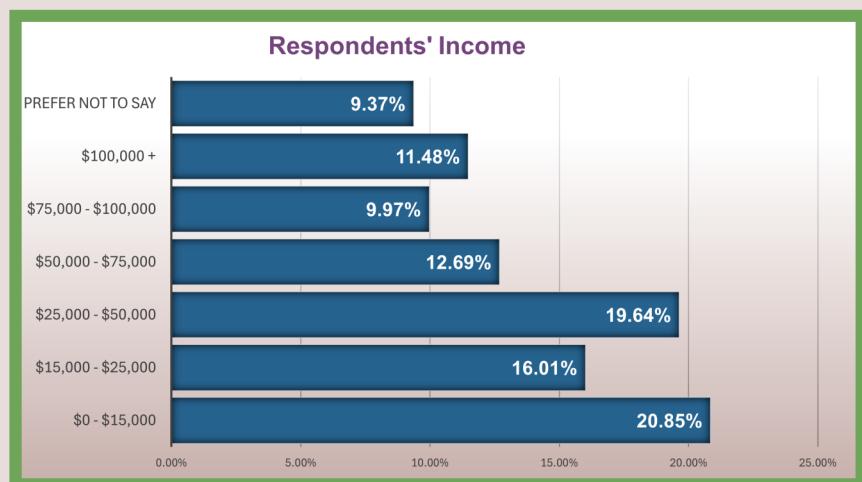
In response to a high volume of spam survey responses, extensive quality control was conducted which included review for repetitive answers, incoherent language, and/or inconsistencies in response data. Details on how we managed quality control of our survey data is included in the appendix.

A Spanish language survey was offered, although we received no complete responses from this effort. This suggests further outreach and support will be needed in future research to better understand the unique experiences of Spanish-speaking workers in the Greater New Orleans region.

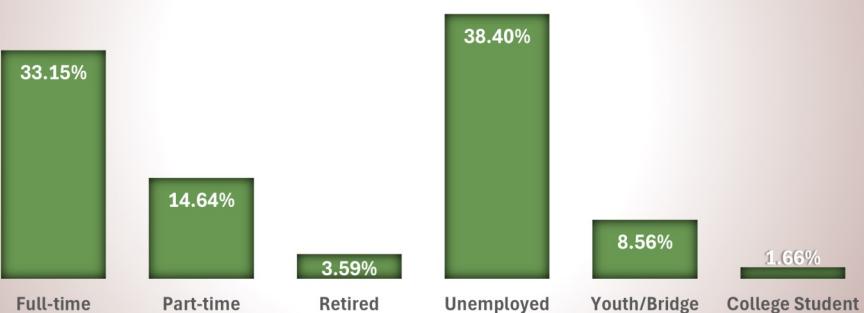
Focus groups were conducted both virtually and in-person. Participants were given \$50 gift cards for their time and participation. Survey participants were invited to sign up for focus groups, which were organized by employment status.

3.3 Survey Respondent Demographics

Of the 661 complete English survey responses, 362 were acceptable data and 299 were spam/unusable responses. Of the 362 valid responses, the group had the following demographics.

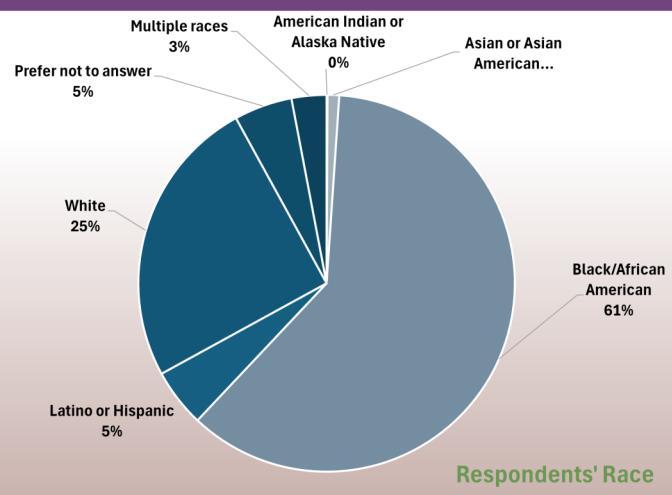


Respondents' Employment Status

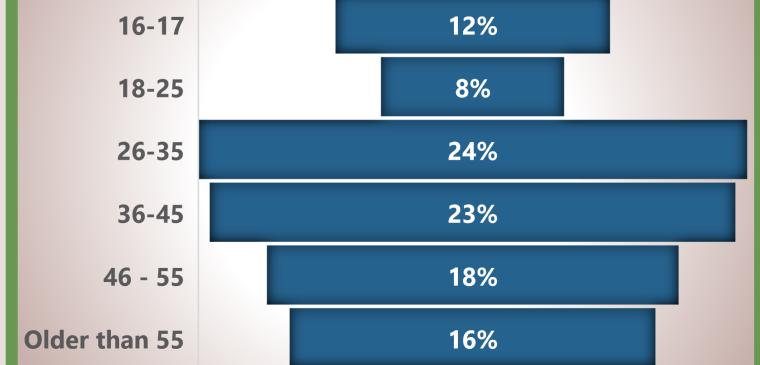


ENGLISH AS A FIRST LANGUAGE

96%



Respondents' Age

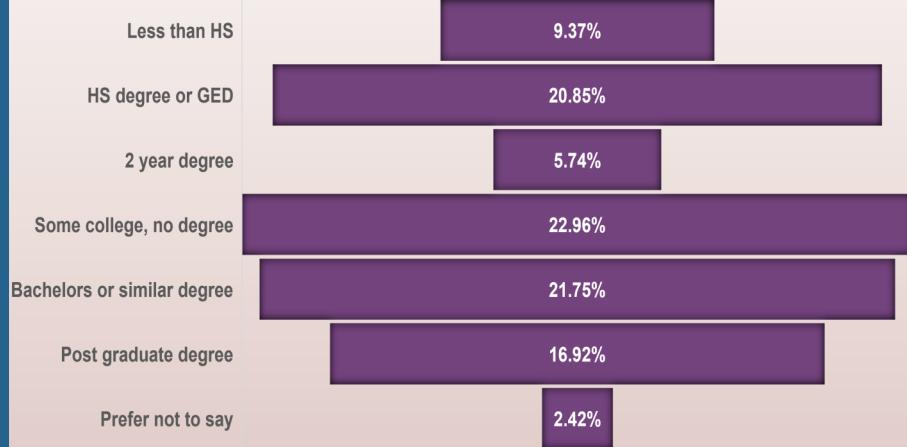


71%

FEMALE

MALE 26%,
PREFER NOT TO ANSWER 3%
NON-BINARY OR OTHER
GENDER IDENTITY 0.50%

Respondents' Education Level





SECTION 4

Challenges to Finding and Keeping Good Jobs

4.1 Defining “Good Jobs”

A primary goal of this research was to understand the challenges that New Orleanians experience in finding good jobs and the resources that are necessary to support workers in overcoming these obstacles. This requires a foundational understanding of what New Orleanians define as a “good job.” Based on 362 open-ended survey responses, the following key themes emerged:

Compensation, Benefits, and Security

This is the most frequently mentioned sentiment, with many respondents emphasizing the importance of a job that allows them to cover their basic needs and expenses without struggling. Along with livable wages, respondents are seeking benefits including healthcare, dental, vision, 401k and retirement plans, and paid time off. A sense of security is critical; beyond fair compensation, respondents shared that good jobs have the opportunity for advancement with a low risk of layoffs.

Positive Work Culture

The second most commonly cited characteristic of a “good job” is a positive work environment and culture. Respondents shared their need for a safe, clean, and healthy workplace, which includes positive relationships with colleagues and supervisors. Many respondents emphasize the importance of respect and appreciation within the workplace, sharing the need to feel valued and to

be treated fairly by their employers and colleagues. Many view positive interpersonal relationships as a key factor to a good job.

Work-Life Balance & Fit

For many, a positive work environment also provides flexibility and understanding of their personal lives, with scheduling and/or remote work options that allow them to have time for their families. Some respondents mentioned the importance of a job that is close to home or has a convenient commute.

Meaning and Purpose

Another theme that emerged was the hope for a job that provides meaning and purpose. Respondents desire jobs that are fulfilling, contribute to a greater purpose, or align with their personal values. Some respondents mentioned enjoying their work, feeling appreciated, and making a positive impact on the community or world. This suggests that people are increasingly seeking jobs that offer more than just a paycheck, and that prioritize both their well-being and their sense of fulfillment.

Opportunity for Continued Learning and Development

Finally, survey respondents commonly shared that continued learning and development are important in a job. This theme includes the desire for jobs that offer opportunities to learn and grow, acquire new skills, and progress in one's career. Some respondents also mentioned flexibility, independence, and autonomy as important factors.

4.2 Challenges to Finding and Keeping Good Jobs

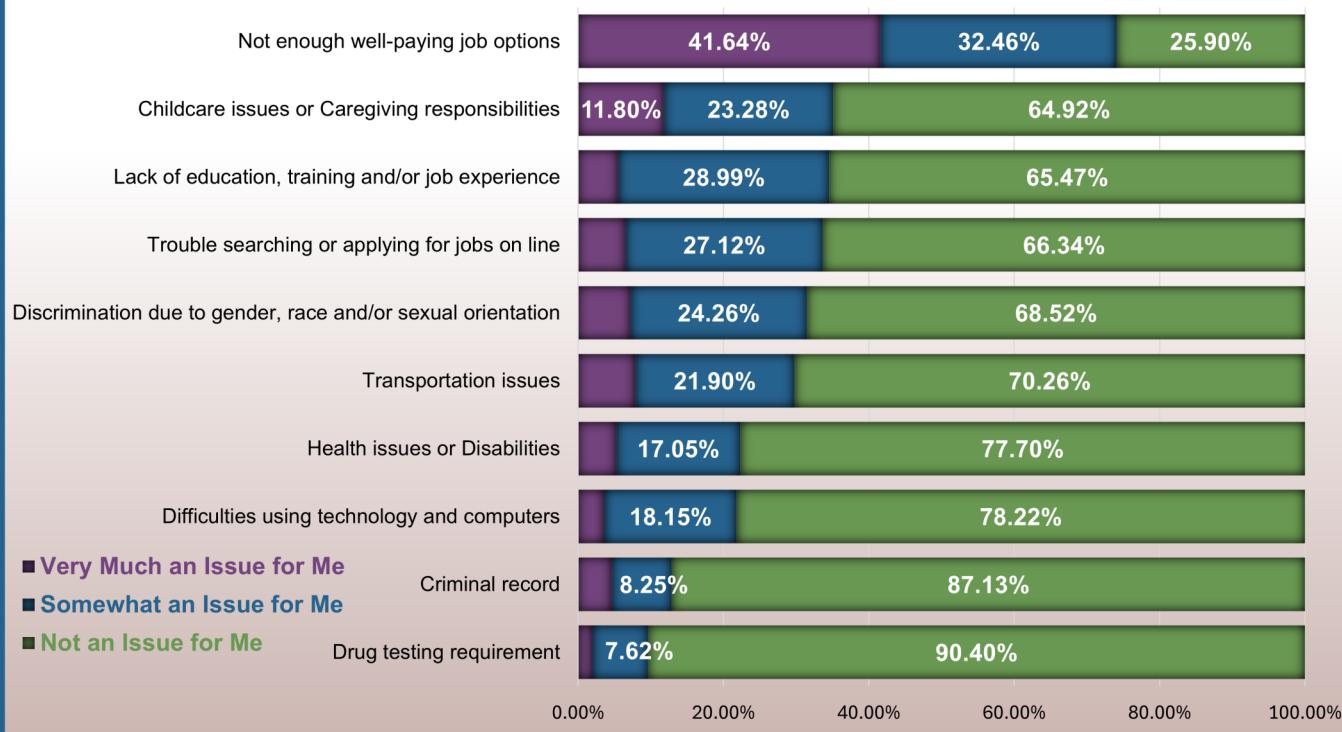
Low Wages + High Cost of Living

Overall, survey respondents see a lack of well-paying jobs as the leading challenge in finding and keeping good jobs. **42% of survey respondents said a lack of well-paying available jobs was “very much an issue” in finding/keeping good jobs, followed by an additional 33% who said this is “somewhat of an issue.”** This perception was pervasive throughout the survey and our focus groups; many feel they are qualified and ready to work, but struggle to land a job that covers their basic costs of living. Across 362 open-ended survey responses on challenges, “low wages” is the most frequently mentioned challenge, with many respondents highlighting the difficulty of making ends meet with current pay rates. The high cost of living in New Orleans is also mentioned as a contributing



Source: U.S. BLS, Occupational Employment Wages Statistics, May 2022.

Issues & Challenges with Finding & Keeping Good Jobs



N = 307; Data excludes full-time students and retired survey respondents.

factor. Several respondents mentioned that their current jobs don't even allow them to afford basic necessities like food, rent, and transportation. Many respondents felt that New Orleans' reliance on tourism limited the availability of good jobs with stable salaries and benefits.

Data from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics demonstrate the reality of low wages in the New Orleans area.²⁰ For HR managers in GNO, their average hourly wage of \$54.40 is significantly lower than the national average of \$70.07. Construction workers in GNO earn an average of \$18.62 an hour, below the national average of \$22.29. And for cooks, a significant job in our food-driven economy, their hourly wage average of \$11.09 is also short of the national average of \$13.43. These data points bring some validation to the perception of many New Orleanians engaged in our research - the wages offered are not high enough and they are struggling to cover their basic needs, even when employed.

Although it is difficult to identify exactly how the GNO area stacks up in terms of Cost of Living, what is known is that **“35% of Orleans parish residents and 31% of Jefferson Parish residents pay more than 50% of their household income on housing and utilities, which is higher than the national average of 27%.”**²¹ Additionally, work conducted by the United Way entitled the “ALICE household survival budget” calculates the minimum wages necessary to cover basic living necessities. For Orleans Parish (2021), a single adult requires at least \$15/hour to survive; this jumps to \$22.52/hr if you have a child.²² Compare this to the fact that 75% of the most common occupations in Louisiana pay less than \$20 an hour²², and it becomes clear that many New Orleanians are struggling to make ends meet with their average wages.

Childcare & Caregiving

The second most significant challenge is caregiving responsibilities, with 34% of all survey respondents saying this is “very much” or “somewhat” an issue to finding and keeping a good job. Of the 163 respondents who reported 1 or more dependent, 53% cited childcare as a challenge to their job prospects. Open-ended responses suggest affordability in childcare services is a major barrier, especially for single parents. Some mention the difficulty of finding jobs with flexible schedules or reasonable working hours, which creates additional burden on parents. This challenge is felt more by women, with 14% saying this is “very much an issue” compared to only 5% of men respondents. Income is another factor in how likely caregiving is a challenge; 14% of respondents at/below the ALICE threshold cited childcare as a major challenge, compared to only 8% of respondents above the ALICE threshold.

Management, Discrimination & Nepotism

Many survey respondents shared negative experiences with bad managers and toxic work environments, including experiences of discrimination based on race, ethnicity, age, or other factors. 30% of survey respondents cite discrimination as a challenge to finding or keeping good jobs. Those above the ALICE threshold were more likely to cite discrimination as an issue (44%), compared to only 22% of those below the threshold.

Another common perspective across our research was that nepotism is a challenge, with many research participants feeling like personal connections are necessary to securing employment. While our survey did not specifically ask about nepotism and/or personal connections as a challenge, multiple open-ended responses cited this as a challenge; the feeling that hiring and promotion processes are influenced by “who you know” was mentioned in all 6 of our focus groups.

Transportation & Safety

Many respondents mentioned the difficulty of getting to and from work due to unreliable or expensive public transportation options. 30% of survey respondents cite transportation as “very much” or “somewhat of an issue”. This is particularly true for lower-income workers; while 13% of those below the ALICE threshold cited transportation as a major issue, only 2% of respondents above the ALICE threshold experience challenges with transportation.

Geography plays another role in finding and keeping good jobs - some respondents expressed concerns about safety and crime in the city, which made them hesitant to take certain jobs depending on the location or work hours.

Poor Communication from Prospective Employers

Finally, it is important to note that many focus group participants and survey respondents share a lack of clarity in what their unique needs or challenges are due to poor communication from prospective employers. One respondent shared, “I’m unsure of what I am missing and why I have been unemployed for so long,” with another stating “the jobs that I apply to don’t call me in for an interview, so there’s no feedback of what I need.” This is a common struggle; many participants described their persistent and consistent job application efforts, but see little return in terms of interviews or feedback on why they were not selected. This lack of clarity makes professional development challenging, as many are unaware of what particular skills will make them successful in obtaining employment.



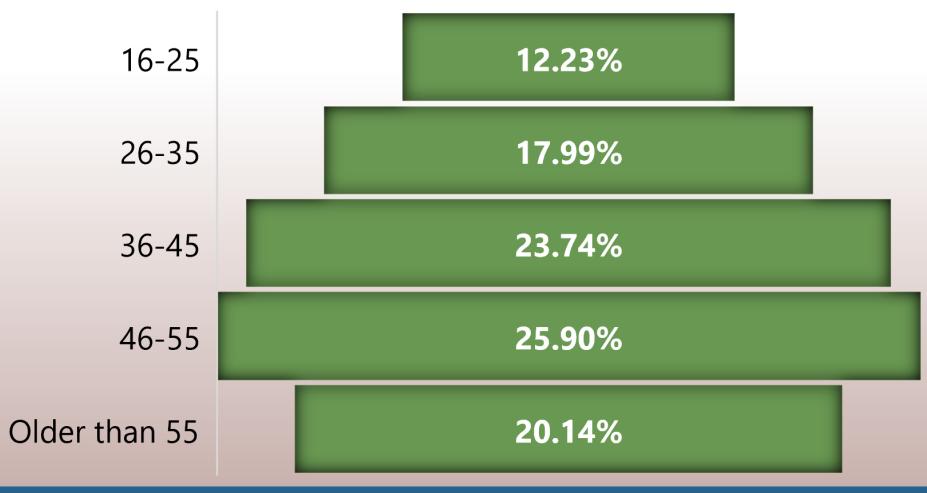
SECTION 5

The Experiences and Needs of the Unemployed

5.1 Unemployed Survey Respondents Demographics

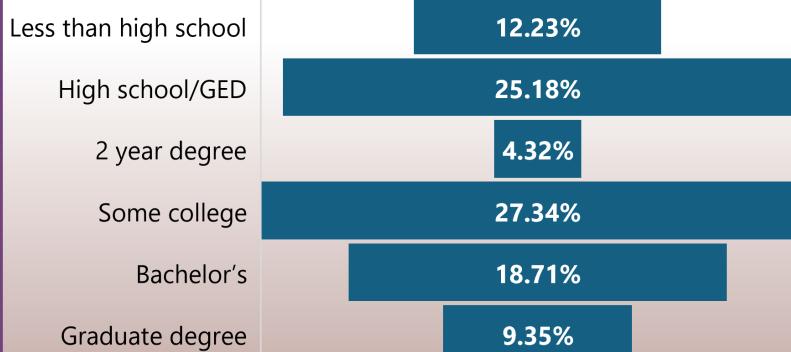
Unemployed and Not Looking for Work: Only 8% of unemployed respondents stated they are not currently looking for work; reasons included being a full-time student, caretaker, or having a disability.

Unemployed Survey Respondents' Age



Age demographics were relatively evenly distributed, with the majority of respondents being between the ages of 26 - 55 years old.

Unemployed Survey Respondents' Education

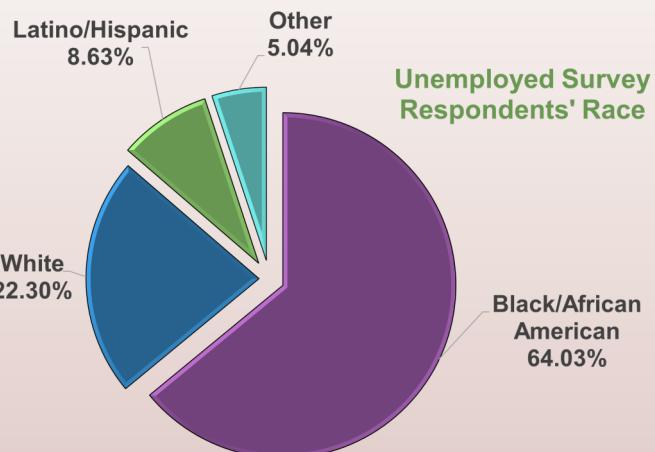


Nearly 60% of unemployed survey respondents had some level of college education.

LENGTH OF TIME UNEMPLOYED IS LESS THAN 1 YEAR

82%

1-2 YEARS 5.76%
MORE THAN 2 YEARS 12.23%

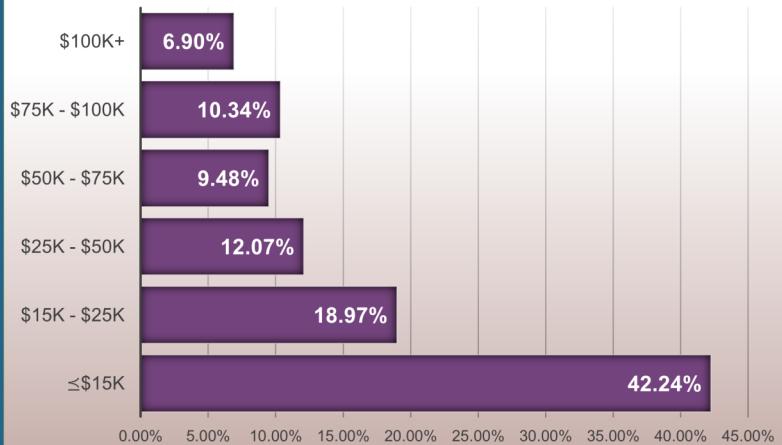


68%

FEMALE

MALE 28%,
NO RESPOND/OTHER 4%

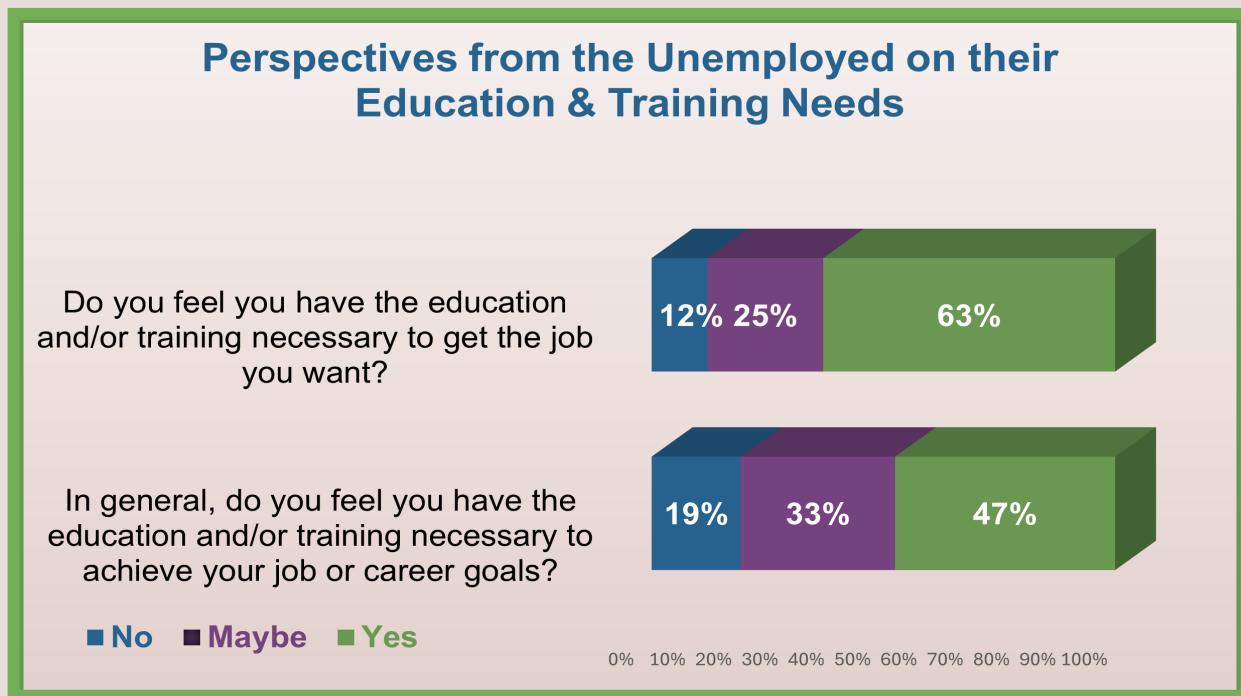
Unemployed Survey Respondents' Income



The majority of unemployed respondents reported an annual household income of \$15,000 or less.

5.2 Training Needs of the Unemployed

Of the unemployed survey respondents, 63% feel they have the training they need to get the job they want, followed by 25% who feel they “may” have the training and skills they need. Across all unemployed survey respondents, open-ended responses suggest that computer and technology skills, followed by interpersonal skills, are the leading needs for further training and development.



N = 139; Unemployed survey respondents

When unemployed respondents engaged with the more general question that was posed to all survey respondents, “Do you have the education and training necessary to achieve your job or career goals?”, they were slightly less likely to say yes, with 47% of respondents stating that to be the case. It is possible that this variation in perceived readiness stems from unemployed respondents feeling they have the education and training to get the job they want in the short-term, but as they assess long-term job and career goals, they are more likely to desire additional skills.

Computer + Technology	Social + Interpersonal
<p>“I need skills training on the computer the company is using. There is an attitude that most people know how to use any type of</p>	<p>“Learning how to be around other people and not get aggravated about certain things.”</p>
“Excel, Microsoft, Word”	“Teamwork skills”
“Google Suite Training”	“Communication skills”

This answer aligns with the high rate of unemployed respondents who have some type of college degree (38%) or have gone to some college (27%). Many have participated in some type of advanced education but remain unemployed.

Select open-ended responses related to training needs from the unemployed:

Additionally, many open-ended responses alluded to the perception that a Bachelor's degree is the needed "training" to overcome unemployment. Others cited industry-specific certifications or licensing requirements such as "Commercial Drivers License," "Forklift Certification," or project management certifications.

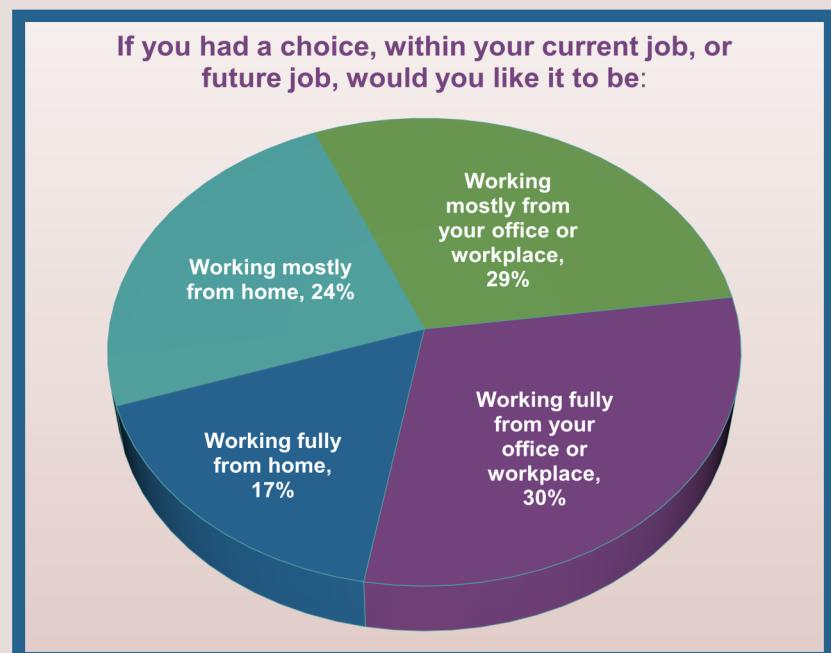
Beyond Training - Employer Engagement and Feedback

Open-ended survey responses and focus group insights both suggest that prospective employers could do more to communicate with candidates. Unemployed participants commonly shared that they are actively applying for jobs but rarely get interviews.

- "I am not sure [what training I need]. The jobs that I apply to don't call me in for an interview so there's no feedback on what I need."
- "I need potential employers to be open minded about my specific skill set and how it translates to their needs."

5.3 Effects of the Pandemic on Unemployed Workers

Our research, conducted in Fall 2023, demonstrated that the COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect the current workforce. Many focus group participants experienced layoffs during the pandemic. For those of middle age and older, these layoffs have been particularly challenging to overcome. They are now in a job market that functions significantly differently from their prior experience, including online job searches and applications and job expectations inclusive of technical/computer-based skills. The perspective of older workers is that their age is a significant factor in remaining unemployed, as employers may be hesitant to hire someone nearing retirement age. Two focus group participants in their late 50s experienced layoffs during the pandemic from jobs they had held for more than 20 years, making the return to the workforce a significant challenge. At the time of our focus group, they remained unemployed since their pandemic-induced



N = 139; Unemployed survey respondents



layoffs, despite both of them sharing they had participated in job training programs and have been consistently applying for jobs.

Of the 139 unemployed survey respondents, 11 of them reported their age as the leading challenge to finding and keeping employment (write-in responses).

Remote Work Preference

A May 2022 national survey on unemployed workers identified various causes for participants not returning to work. Although national employment rates have risen since this survey, our own research aligns with many of these insights from the height of the pandemic. About half of The Pandemic Unemployed Survey respondents were not willing to take jobs that do not offer the opportunity for remote work.²³ Unemployed survey respondents in our own survey were interested in flexible work opportunities, with 41% of unemployed respondents seeking their next role to be either fully or mostly from home, compared to 35% of employed respondents. This suggests that work training programs may have the opportunity to focus on computer skills and preparing workers for the realities of a hybrid or remote work environment, including identifying and landing these remote work opportunities.

The national Pandemic Unemployed Survey also highlighted how the need to care for family members, especially among women, was a significant barrier to returning to work during the pandemic.²³ Over a year later, independent of pandemic impacts, this has remained a significant challenge for workers.

The national pandemic and its related layoffs caused a considerable number of workers to consider or pursue industry switches. According to the Pandemic Unemployed Survey, nearly one in three individuals expressed a preference for working in a different industry than their previous job.²³ This aligns with our anecdotal data, which was collected well over a year after the Pandemic Unemployed Survey was conducted. Some focus group participants were looking to switch industries or had successfully left their previous industry. In open-ended survey responses, some respondents mention the perceived need to switch industries in order to secure a good job while others mention the challenges of switching careers or finding jobs in their current industry that utilize their existing skills and experience.



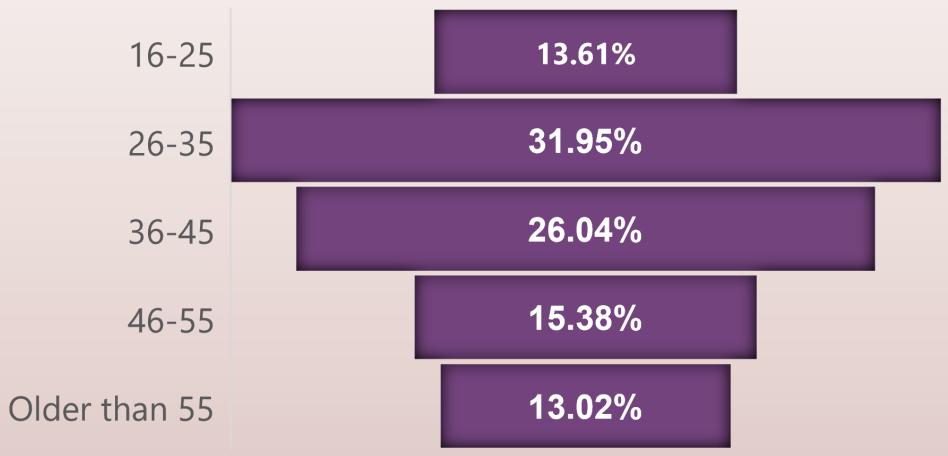
SECTION 6

Experiences and Challenges of Employed Workers

Section 6.1 Employed Survey Respondents Demographics

Over half of survey respondents were employed in some way, with 36% working more than 30 hours a week and 16% working part-time. In the following page we will visualize report demographics for all employed workers, and then dive into some themes from part-time workers who were more likely to be unemployed.

Employed Survey Respondents' Age



6.1 Employed Survey Respondents Demographics

Employed Survey Respondents' Income

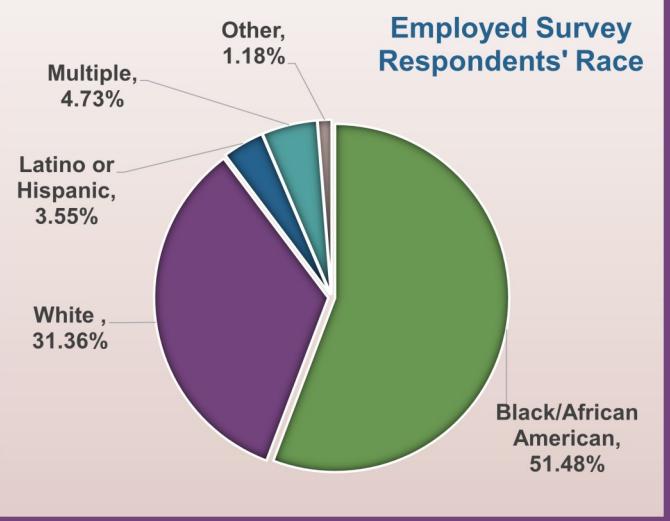


73.37%

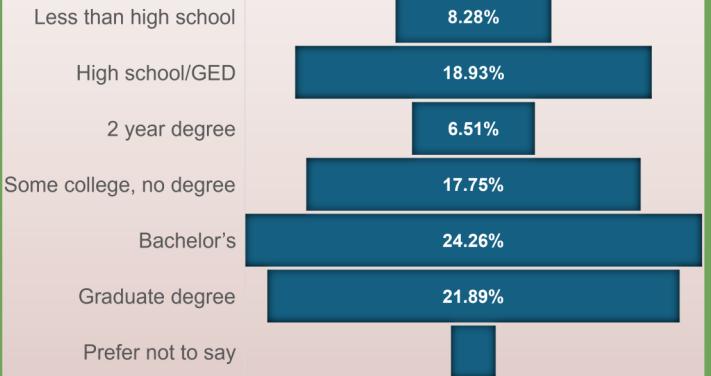
FEMALE

MALE 23%,
NO RESPONSE/OTHER 4%

Employed Survey Respondents' Race



Employed Survey Respondent's Education



6.2 Part-Time Workers

Who is Working Part Time?

Our survey data suggests that Black and African American workers are slightly more likely to be working part-time than their white counterparts. (17 % vs. 12%). Though our sample size of Latino workers was low, they reported similar rates of part-time work as white workers, but higher rates of unemployment than both Black/African American and White workers.

Female survey respondents were twice as likely to work part-time as their male counterparts. With family care being cited as a leading reason for remaining part-time, this gender disparity supports the idea that women carry the burden of child rearing, affecting their ability to maintain full-time employment.

Finally, employed respondents below the ALICE threshold were nearly twice as likely to work part-time (20%) compared to those who are above the ALICE threshold (11%). Based on previously shared data demonstrating the ALICE population's significant need for social services such as childcare, this suggests that ALICE workers are also likely to remain part-time due to family obligations.

Experiences of Part-Time Workers

Part-time workers across the Greater New Orleans region often juggle work with significant personal responsibilities, especially those involving family care. The narratives shared by these workers consistently emphasize their commitments outside the workplace, indicating a preference for part-time work to accommodate these responsibilities. Many voiced a desire for full-time positions but are constrained by minimal pay rates or the seasonal nature of their current roles. For instance, a trade show worker highlighted the seasonal and part-time nature of their job, expressing a preference for a full-time position with benefits but acknowledging the minimal pay rates are a characteristic of the industry.

These workers frequently encounter challenges in their workplaces, such as reduced hours or slower work periods, which impact their ability to secure full-time roles. Some reported their hours were reduced or that work was currently slow in their respective roles, further impacting their ability to secure full-time employment. Many part-time workers also appear to have limited awareness of training or development resources. They are less likely to be aware of training opportunities or certifications available at their workplaces, and they are also less likely to have received on-the-job certifications compared to the average across all respondents.

These gaps in training awareness and opportunities are reflected in their responses related to if they have the education or training necessary to achieve their goals, where they are significantly less likely than both full-time and unemployed workers to feel confident that they have the skills they need. More than half indicated they are unsure and 22% do not think they have the necessary skills.

Insights from the 2022 Unemployed Pandemic Survey indicate a shift in perspective among workers, as the significance of returning to full-time work has diminished. While over half still view full-time employment as



*N=118 full-time survey respondents;
51 part-time respondents; 139 unemployed respondents*



essential, only a third expressed a strong desire to return to full-time roles. This shift aligns with broader societal changes observed during the pandemic, where individuals have begun prioritizing family and health over traditional full-time work arrangements, emphasizing the evolving landscape of work preferences and priorities in the post-pandemic era.

6.3 Employment and the ALICE Population

Of the 48% of employed respondents, 26% of them work multiple jobs, signifying the sheer effort it takes for these individuals to meet their basic needs. However, working multiple jobs does not guarantee that you will be able to provide for yourself or your family. **Of those who had multiple jobs, 30% still reported incomes that were below the ALICE threshold.** These findings emphasize the struggle of this population to attain financial security even when working tirelessly across multiple roles.

Industry-specific experiences further exemplify the challenges. In the hospitality sector, respondents described unfair pay structures, a lack of respect, and grueling hours without equitable compensation. Meanwhile, in nonprofits, the prevalence of contracted work and limited employer resources—ranging from inadequate benefits to minimal professional development opportunities—stifle their chances for advancement and stability.

The narrative of the ALICE population underscores the harsh realities faced by hardworking individuals, where the pursuit of economic stability and career growth remains an uphill battle against systemic barriers and industry-specific challenges. Moreover, the requirement for a college degree in various fields exacerbates the barriers to achieving sustainable employment, along with concerns about nepotism influencing job growth opportunities. These obstacles not only restrict their personal growth but also impede their ability to secure stable and adequate employment.



SECTION 7

Workforce Training: Perceptions & Challenges

7.1 Participation in Programs by Demographics

Over half of survey respondents have participated in some sort of workforce training program. Frequency of participation stayed fairly consistent across the 5 most common programs: Community College Courses, General Workforce Training, Internships or Apprenticeships, On-the-Job Certifications or Technical Training, with roughly 20% of all respondents participating in each of those. Participants were much less likely to have participated in a “Boot-Camp” type program.

However, when disaggregating, **male respondents were much more likely than female respondents to access workforce training**, across all categories, particularly technical training. Full-time workers were much more likely to have participated in training across the board, but particularly on-the-job certifications and internships/apprenticeships.

Participation in Training Programs: Comparison by Employment Status

Have you participated in any of the following types of training programs?

	Full-Time Respondents	Part-Time Respondents	Unemployed Respondents	All survey Respondents
Technical Training	25	22	20	22
General Workforce Training	26	18	16	21
On-the-job Certification	35	8	17	23
Internships or Apprenticeships	26	10	13	18
Community College Course	23	18	13	18
Bootcamp	5	2	6	5
Never Participated	32	51	56	46

N=117 full-time survey respondents; 49 part-time respondents; 134 unemployed respondents; Survey respondents could select up to 3 types of trainings, so percentages reflect the percent of a given demographic that participated in a type of training (i.e. 16% of all female respondents had participated in a technical training program). This data excludes full-time students and retired survey respondents.

Participation in Training Programs : Comparison by Gender

Have you participated in any of the following types of training programs?

	Female Respondents	Male Respondents	Other or Prefer Not to Answer	% of All Survey Respondents
Technical Training	16%	32%	73%	22%
General Workforce Training	18%	25%	36%	21%
On-the-job Certification	20%	26%	55%	23%
Internships or Apprenticeships	15%	24%	36%	18%
Community College Course	15%	18%	55%	18%
Bootcamp	4%	7%	18%	5%
Never Participated	50%	37%	27%	46%

N=213 female survey respondents; 76 male respondents; 11 respondents of other or unknown gender identity; Survey respondents could select up to 3 types of trainings, so percentages reflect the percent of a given demographic that participated in a type of training (i.e. 16% of all female respondents had participated in a technical training program). This data excludes full-time students and retired survey respondents.

7.2 Barriers to Program Participation

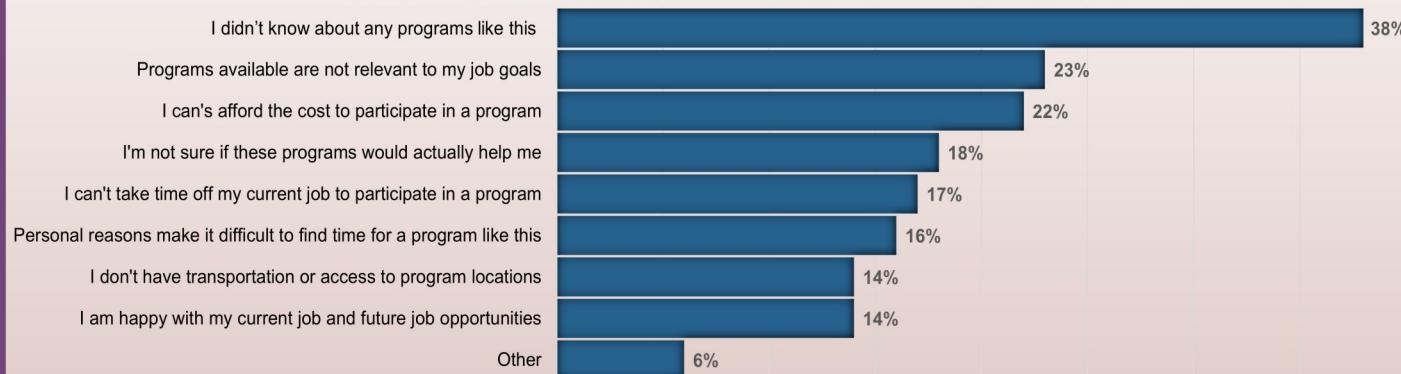
Across survey responses and focus group insights, there are a number of real barriers to accessing workforce training including awareness of such resources, a lack of social services such as transportation and childcare, and financial constraints. Unsurprisingly, the challenges to finding a good job are aligned with the perceived and experienced barriers to accessing training opportunities.

48% all survey respondents feel they have the education and/or training necessary for their career goals.

A Lack of Awareness or Perceived Need

Of those who had never participated in training, **38% said they were unaware of such opportunities**; followed by **available programs being irrelevant to job goals (22%)**. **Eighteen percent of respondents question if these programs will help them**. It is possible these three factors work together, suggesting an overall need for more effective outreach of available opportunities, especially those with skill and/or industry-specific training. Other data points, including those in *Training Needs of the Unemployed* (Section 5.2), suggest that individuals are seeking specialized support tailored to their unique needs, such as industry certifications or technology training.

Participation in Training Programs: Comparison by Employment Status
Have you participated in any of the following types of Training Programs?



N=146 survey respondents who had never participated in job training program; survey respondents could select up to 3 reasons.

Those who were unaware of such programs were more likely to be non-white (44% non-white vs. 21% white), below the ALICE Threshold (46% below vs. 13% above) and female (39% female vs. 33% male).

Of the 13% who cited “other reasons” for never participating in a training program, many write-in responses align with workers’ perceptions that they do not need additional training. Examples of “other reasons” for not enrolling in a training program:

- “I am college educated and well skilled.”
- “I'm well skilled in all areas.”
- “I have experience, I'm already ready to work.”

Financial Constraints

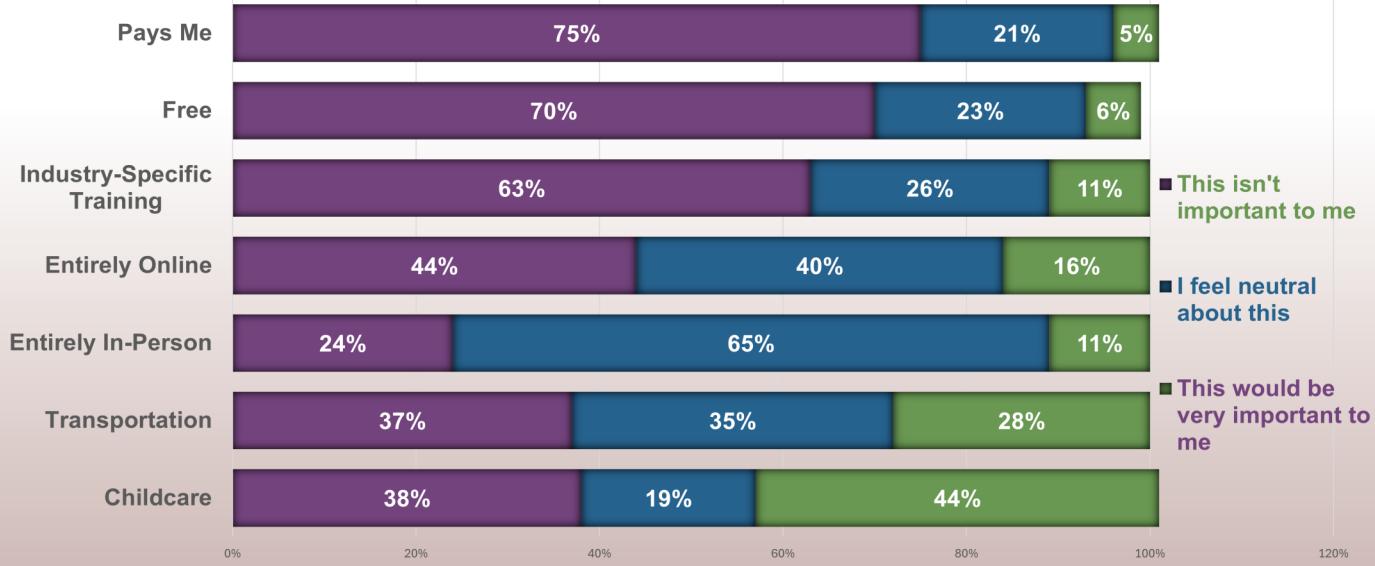
Financial challenges are another leading barrier to accessing training programs. Twenty percent of respondents who have never participated in a training program cite “not being able to afford the cost” as a barrier. Focus group discussions suggest there is a perceived opportunity cost as well; if workers can earn money in the short-term, investing time into their professional growth may mean losing necessary income they need at the present time to survive, despite the potential of higher income over the long term.

For employed respondents who have never participated in a training, not being able to take off work is a barrier (27%). One respondent shares they cannot access job advancement opportunities due to the short-term need for income, “I am happy with my current job but need more income, which means I can't lose money by taking off.” For part-time workers, we know that childcare or personal obligations often necessitate their part-time status, meaning time and resource constraints are barriers to professional growth for them as well.

7.3 Factors in Program Interest and Completion

“While I did not experience barriers, I have tried to get more people in my community to complete doula and interpreter trainings, but financial limitations are significant, especially if you would need to take off work and pay for childcare to complete the training.”

Which of the following factors would increase your interest or ability to participate in a job training program?

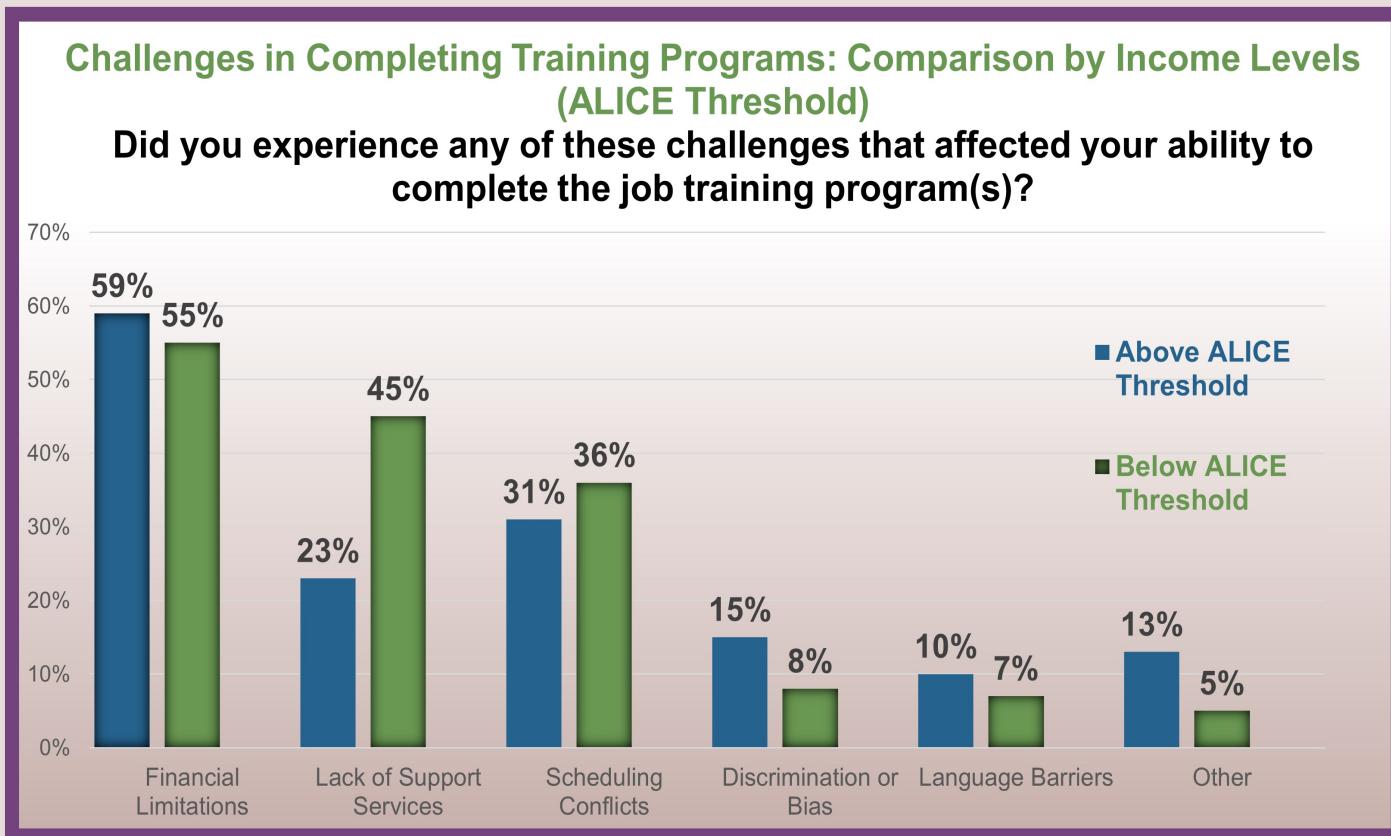


N=157 survey respondents who had never participated in job training program; number of responses to each factor vary between 151 and 155.

Free, paid, and industry-specific programs are likely to have the highest demand and enrollment rates, according to survey responses on factors that would increase participation. Transportation, childcare, and virtual/online access are also valued. When broken down by race, Black/African American respondents are most likely to need transportation support; Latino respondents were more likely to prefer in-person programs.

Challenges According to Training Participants

Survey respondents who have completed some type of job training program **also cite financial constraints as the biggest challenge** to their participation. This challenge is experienced both by those with incomes below the ALICE threshold and those with incomes above the threshold. The need for social services, such as childcare and/or transportation, is significantly more of a challenge for those below the ALICE threshold; **45% of ALICE respondents cite lack of support services as a challenge** compared to only 23% of those above the ALICE threshold. For **employed respondents below the ALICE threshold, this challenge around social services increases to 53%**. This further supports the idea that low-income, employed workers may need additional support to advance, but constraints of their current employment add an additional challenge to completing job training.



N=119 survey respondents who have participated in a job training program and who provided income and dependent information for ALICE threshold classification; not all survey respondents provided income or number of developments. Note: this chart includes both employed and unemployed respondents.

7.4 Perceptions on Workforce Training Programs

Despite positive satisfaction from training program participants, negative perceptions of the programs' impact persists and many program graduates remain unemployed. Of those who had participated in programs, there is broadly reported satisfaction with their experiences. Eighty-two percent of respondents were "Very Satisfied" or "Satisfied" with their experience, with 48% being "Very Satisfied." Additionally, over 70% of program participant respondents felt that the program had adequately prepared them for their jobs.

<i>Many programs are seen as a major time investment, which can be risky for the resource-constrained.</i>	<i>Some feel that job training programs have little relevance for the realities of their prospective job.</i>	<i>Others experience discrimination or prejudice that dissuades them from further participation.</i>
<i>"It took me 6 months to complete the certification thinking there are jobs waiting to be filled. Yet I've applied for positions before, during, and after completion and still have not even obtained 1 interview."</i>	<i>I haven't participated in a program because "you're often expected to learn on the job."</i> <i>"These programs are not taken seriously by employers."</i>	<i>7% of program participants cited discrimination as a barrier to completion; additional open-ended responses cited discrimination as well, "Students attending job training often felt discriminated against."</i> <i>"Class bias; couldn't go to "networking events" when I was working 3 part time jobs"</i>

"Honestly, I feel like [the training organization] failed me. They wanted me to be a face in the program...but I want something more. And I haven't gotten any of the support that I need. There is a [full-time position] available, but they didn't consider me because they want to see a bachelor's degree. When it all boils down, I may have gained something during that time but where I am now, I feel like I wasted my time. They have never reached out, they didn't think about me after the program ended - I need a job and I need help getting one."

7.5 Experiences of Program Graduates

Although reported satisfaction from program graduates is high, many experience continued challenges and barriers either in finding employment or succeeding in their new job. For example, although 75% of unemployed program graduates reported satisfaction with their training program, with 48% having reported being “very satisfied,” they remain without work.

Anecdotal evidence from our research participants suggests the need for continued support after completion of a job training program. One respondent shared, “the training was to help find jobs; once a job was found the training ended.” This can be particularly challenging if participants leveraged social services during the training program, but are suddenly without these necessary resources. “After training completed, some prospective employers were not willing to adjust scheduling [to accommodate my] transportation and extended distance.”

Of respondents who felt “unsure” if their job training program had adequately prepared them for their job, the theme around a need for continued support continues to emerge. One respondent shared, “I’m not sure that without a mentor that I would have succeeded.” Other respondents felt that the training program had some value, but were not completely sufficient for the needs of their position, “I still needed on-the-job experience to get better at my job.” These responses suggest that both program providers and employers need to focus on continued mentorship, social services, and/or training to ensure long-term success.

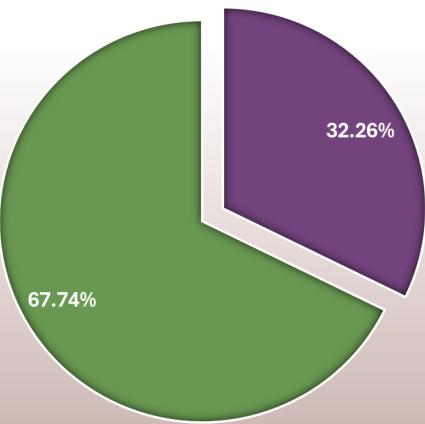


SECTION 8

A Brief Look at Youth Perceptions

In response to partner requests to assess youth's perceptions on their workforce prospects, the WATW GNO survey included unique questions for high school students and those enrolled in a local Bridge Year program.

How do you feel about finding and keeping employment once you complete your current education?



N=31 survey respondents who are in high school or a bridge year program

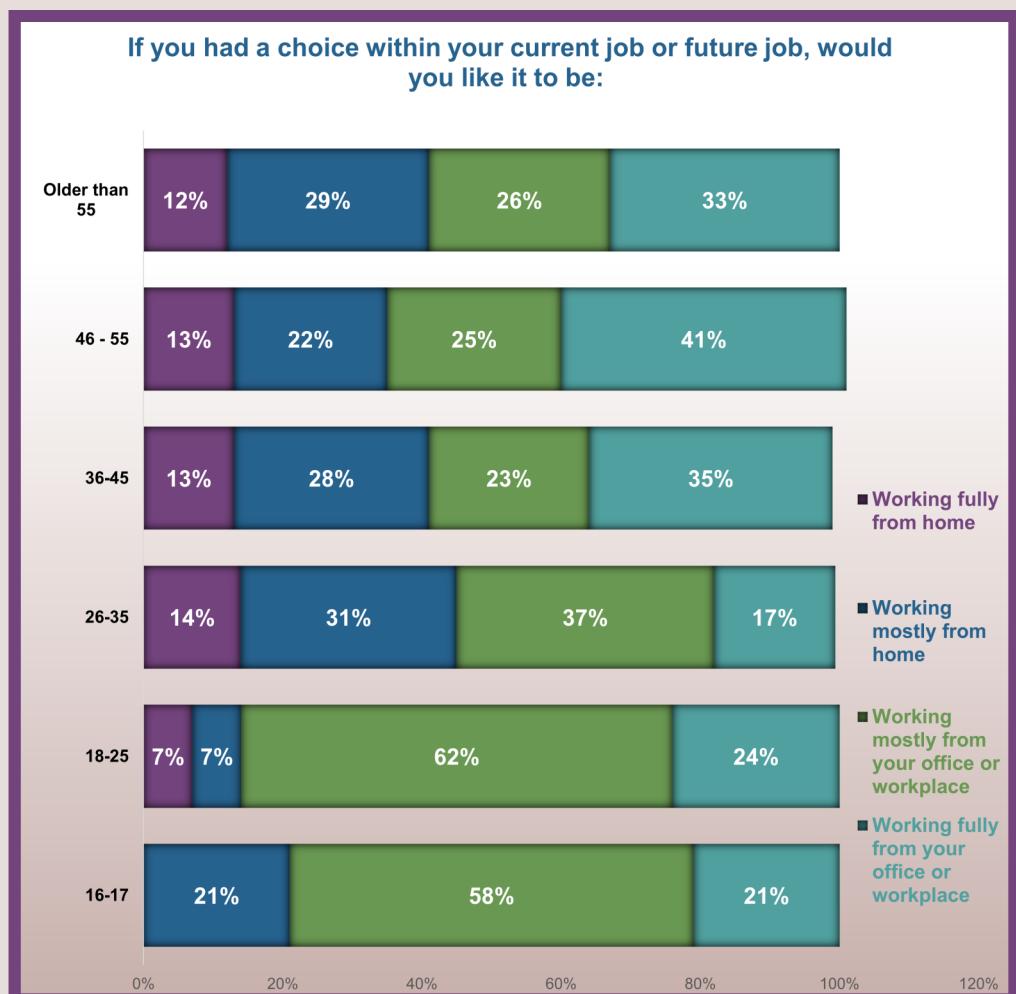
- I am unsure about their chances of finding and keeping a good job
- I feel confident I will be able to find and keep a well-paying job

Of the 31 high school and Bridge Year student respondents, the majority of respondents felt confident about their ability to gain employment after their education, with zero respondents selecting they were not confident at all. Yet, 32% were "unsure" about their chances of finding and keeping a good job. Write-in responses indicate that most youth respondents feel optimistic about the training they have received and being prepared for the workforce. It is important to note that some

youth participants were recruited through our partners at the New Orleans Career Center and may be receiving support that informs their readiness for the workforce, although the survey was open to everyone 16 years of age and older and promoted through various channels to attract a variety of respondents. Of the write-in responses that were less optimistic about job prospects, most aligned with adult perspectives on the challenges of the market, including sentiments such as *“There aren’t a lot of well-paying jobs in my area.”* and *“The economy is too rocky.”* Youth also cited transportation challenges, *“it’s hard to commute to a job due to the buses running late,”* and discrimination, *“some employers take one look at people of color and come up with assumptions, and automatically think that we don’t qualify for the job”* as additional challenges to finding good jobs.

“I feel unsure about my future career when I complete high school because I will be a certified patient care tech, but I won’t have any experience which would make employers unlikely to hire me.”

Youth respondents were much more likely to prefer a hybrid work environment. As this survey was conducted in 2023, it is likely that youth respondents have a high school experience significantly shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic, including hybrid education models. When we compare workplace preferences across age groups, none of the 16-17 year olds hope for a fully-remote job. Of respondents 25 years old and younger, they were most likely to prefer their next job take place ***mostly from the office or workplace.*** With this in mind, digital divides unfortunately still exist. Only 61% of student respondents have a desktop computer or laptop; only 77% have access to the internet.



N=362 survey respondents

Conversely, youth respondents overall feel comfortable with their digital skills including using a computer and navigating the internet. Computer software, described in the survey as *“Microsoft Office, Word, and Excel,”* was the digital skill area youth felt least confident in, although 30% still claimed feeling *“very comfortable”* in this area.



SECTION 9

Literature Review - Workforce Development Best Practices

Beyond the insights gleaned from our survey, focus groups, and workforce development partners, national studies on job training programs provide valuable perspectives for strengthening approaches locally. Across our research from leading institutions such as Harvard, McKinsey, and the Brookings Institute, there is general consensus that traditional workforce development models are failing and innovative, system-wide approaches are necessary to truly solve the American labor shortage and to broadly advance economic mobility. What follows are the key themes distilled from our literature review on contemporary workforce development programs, some of which mirror our local findings and others that shed new light on practices to be considered for the Greater New Orleans region.

First, it is important to acknowledge that **rigorous evaluations of workforce development programs are scarce**, making it difficult to draw concise conclusions on best practices. This lack of data collection and reporting likely contributes to low engagement levels; “few programs follow a range of metrics to show potential participants that their investment in time and effort will pay off with personal and financial well-being.”²⁴ This includes the obvious metrics, such as job attainment, but also long-term outcomes such as income growth, retention and advancement, and

reliance on public benefits. With pressure to maintain funding, partnerships, and program participation, hesitation to report on failures is understandable. However, this reluctance is perpetuating ineffective program models rather than supporting development of innovative approaches; one researcher states that the “extraordinary resistance from tech companies, nonprofits, colleges, and state agencies to publicly evaluate their own programs” caused them to repeat many avoidable mistakes when designing new programs.²⁵

A recognition of the systemic barriers that impede job access and advancement for many community members is critical to designing effective interventions. As our data has shown, constraints such as finances, childcare and transportation are barriers to both jobs and the training programs that may lead to sustainable employment. As a result, workforce development cannot exist in a silo. “In addition to community colleges and occupational training programs, fully functional workforce systems must include organizations like drug rehab, re-entry and other entities that help participants ‘build the muscle’ to show up for education and training.”²⁶ Similarly, national surveys continue to validate that aspiring workers struggle to maintain personal and family obligations while enrolled in training programs, which further emphasizes the need for “both direct supports like transportation vouchers, stipends, tuition reimbursement, as well as personal, career, and financial coaching.”²⁶ Service providers must continually build and maintain their network of referrals for a variety of human needs, including mental health services, childcare, housing, and healthcare.

Systems coordination is key to creating transformational economic change. Despite numerous dedicated organizations in workforce development, most efforts remain fragmented and disconnected, failing to adequately address the systemic nature of workforce challenges. The most effective case studies center around multi-sector partnerships organized around a trusted intermediary or “backbone organization.”²⁶ This organization should be tasked with managing a common data platform and facilitating information exchange across employers, nonprofits, and educators, ensuring that all stakeholders are aligned on regional labor needs, critical wraparound services, and how to collaborate for effective training outcomes. Facilitating this effective collaboration is dependent on “committed sponsors, well-defined initial agreements, a clear outcome agenda, shared accountability systems, and a common skills taxonomy facilitate collaboration.”²⁶ Upskill Houston and the San Diego Workforce Partnership are just two examples of such backbone organizations. “Powered by machine learning, they translate job and résumé postings into regional skill clusters and gaps. This allows local officials to determine what trainings, educational offerings, and certifications are needed to better align the supply of labor to employer demand.”²⁶ Regional partnerships such as these effectively align training with employer demand and empower individuals to overcome barriers to career success. Unfortunately, such cohesive structures are scarce, necessitating wider adoption of these impactful methods to maximize the effectiveness of workforce development efforts nationwide.

Broad sector-based coordination has also proven effective in employer-led initiatives. In addition to the regional workforce coordination already mentioned, there is evidence that employer collaboratives within particular sectors or industries can drive strong outcomes for workers and businesses alike. These alliances can take many forms, working across supply chains, functional professions that are in-demand by various industries within the same location, or by sectors, “with competitors collaborating because they all face the same talent problem.”²⁴ Collaborations minimize training costs, reduce poaching risks, and create a unified approach to skills development, ultimately benefiting both employers and employees. Examples include the industry-specific Manufacturing Technical Education Collaborative, which includes 19 automotive companies and 26 community colleges across 13 states²⁴ and the profession-focused Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership (WRTP), which includes nearly 100 employers across several industries who receive technical assistance on technology and workplace practices, incumbent worker training, and new worker recruitment and training.²⁷ “In a rigorous experimental study of three sectoral programs including WRTP, participants in sector-focused training earned more, worked more, had higher hourly wages, and were more likely to work in jobs with benefits.”²⁷ Although these employer-focused coalitions have some of the strongest outcomes, it is possible this evidence is skewed due to highly-selective worker selection that recruits candidates already well-positioned to succeed.²⁵

Employers must assess their hiring, promotion, and general workplace practices to support regional workforce mobility. First, employers must move beyond relying solely on degrees as a hiring and promotion metric. This practice creates unnecessary barriers for skilled individuals and perpetuates existing biases. Instead, employers should shift their focus to skill-based evaluation, opening doors for diverse talent and recognizing the potential within their existing workforce. Upskilling and reskilling current employees not only benefits individual careers but also fosters a more engaged and adaptable workforce, boosting long-term organizational success.²⁶ According to one study, “20 percent to 80 percent of job postings ask for candidates with bachelor’s degrees, depending on the occupation, but a lot of those positions don’t actually require college experience. In other words, employers use college degrees as a proxy for a range of skills that can in fact be attained without a college degree.”²⁸

However, we must acknowledge that skill development alone cannot solve the workforce equation. Employers must introspectively examine their own practices and consider how they contribute to talent gaps. The declining loyalty and investment in employee development observed in recent years necessitates a shift towards prioritizing good working conditions. “For example, companies in the 1970s reinvested the majority of their profits into research and development, retraining their workers, and raising salaries. But now, of the nearly 500 large companies in the S&P 500 index, half of their profits were spent on buybacks and roughly 40 percent were spent on dividends, instead of on workers.”⁵ Addressing concerns around job security, wages, and workplace wellness will attract and retain skilled individuals, making training initiatives more impactful and meaningful. One economist argues there is a “misguided conviction that people don’t have jobs simply because they don’t have the skills. These programs won’t



work, he emphasized, until they acknowledge the possibility that job vacancies are also, perhaps primarily, caused by employers that are disloyal and inadvertently create poor working conditions for their workers.”⁵

Pre-program assessment and expectations-setting is critical and often overlooked. Many programs, motivated by job attainment, are focused “less on mobility and even less on the pre-employment skills that are a necessary first step for those who, for reasons of bias, exposure to trauma, lack of access, or structural barriers are poorly prepared by the K-12 pipeline.”⁵ This means checks to ensure workers are ready to train for the related professions, such as having the appropriate literacy or numeracy levels, licensing requirements, or ability to pass background checks or drug tests. Equally important is transparency about the realities of the job and discussing both the positive and challenging aspects of the profession, this “might include things such as showing videos, hosting discussions of a ‘day in the life’ with workers, and spending time at the job site.”²⁴ From our discussions with New Orleans-based workforce development partners, many shared that pre-program alignment is one of the more critical factors to driving completion and positive outcomes.

Aside from expectation-setting on the aspired job, reality checks must be in place for the training itself. “Job training in America fails so often because both students and the government have radically underestimated how long it takes the average person to transition into a high-skill career.”²⁵ Mastering high-skill careers can often take years, not months. Of the success stories of training graduates who obtain jobs within months, one researcher found that “the people landing jobs quickly were often able to fully dedicate their time to school, self-study, and internships,” which is a luxury that few can afford.²⁵ Underestimating the time and commitment needed sets both students and governments up for disappointment. By prioritizing readiness, realistic expectations, and acknowledging the true timeline for career transformation, we can build a foundation for successful training and a thriving workforce.

Impactful workforce training programs hinge on delivering practical skills that matter most, not just theoretical knowledge. This means identifying the key technical, behavioral, and mind-set skills that differentiate top performers, which requires employers to observe workers to pinpoint the attributes and skills necessary for inclusion in their program design.²⁴ Intensive boot camps with regular competency assessments and real-world simulations like in-person apprenticeships and virtual simulations provide the practice necessary to prepare for job demands. Technology complements this by tracking learner progress and offering digital workplace simulations, enhancing efficiency and effectiveness. To bridge the gap to sustainable employment, ‘earn and learn’ models like internships and apprenticeships offer income and access to employers while still in training. As with wrap-around support services, these earn and learn models require strong partnerships across sectors and agencies. While apprenticeship models are relatively common in industries such as construction, one source estimates that it is possible to develop them in nearly 50 additional occupations.²⁸ By focusing on practical skills, utilizing immersive learning methods, and building bridges to employment, we can design impactful training programs that truly empower individuals and strengthen the workforce.



SECTION 10

Key Findings and Recommendations

10.1 Key Findings

The following are the top conclusions drawn from the WATW GNO online survey and focus groups:

Many unemployed and employed workers feel disillusioned with their opportunities for employment and/or advancement due to unique constraints within the Greater New Orleans job landscape.

In particular, **perceptions about nepotism are prevalent**, with a belief that job access and advancement is tied to “who you know.” This is potentially a unique challenge to New Orleans, as nepotism is a concept markedly missing from national research and research from other job markets.

Discrimination, specifically age discrimination, is seen as another major challenge to obtaining employment. This is particularly acute in the post-COVID 19 landscape, with older workers struggling to find employment after experiencing pandemic-related layoffs.

The **average wages for jobs in the GNO area fall significantly below the national averages** and many New Orleanians are struggling to make ends meet, even if working full-time. Many unemployed workers feel negatively about their earning potential; a lack of well-paying jobs is the top-cited challenge for finding a good job.

Negative perceptions of job prospects may be compounded by a lack of employer communication and feedback with candidates. Many unemployed research participants shared though they are consistently applying for jobs they rarely receive responses from prospective employers and are left unsure of how or what they need to improve in the interview process.

These perceptions around nepotism, discrimination, and earning potential undermine interest in continued job training. Many workers feel skeptical that additional training or skill development will have a significant impact on their livelihoods. Understanding, acknowledging and addressing these perceptions will be central to individual and ecosystem-wide recruitment and engagement in programs.

Beyond negative perceptions of job opportunities, there remains a significant awareness gap among workers about available workforce programs.

Many workers shared they have not participated in any workforce development programs because they were unaware of these available resources. These individuals are more likely to be female, non-white, and below the ALICE threshold, suggesting the need for more targeted outreach and promotion of the available programs. **Those below the ALICE threshold are more than 3x as likely to be unaware of programs compared to workers above the ALICE threshold.**

Unemployed workers are skeptical they will see returns on their investment of time into job or workforce training programs.

Most unemployed workers feel they have the skills or training they need for their desired job; in fact, many surveyed unemployed workers have some college education or hold a 4-year degree. This drives skepticism that additional training is a value to their employment prospects, causing low enrollment in local programs.

As many programs last 6 months or longer, **some research participants, remaining unemployed, shared a belief that their time was not well spent.** This is compounded by a common experience that support ends after a program is completed, leaving program graduates to feel that their participation was transactional in nature. Some participants shared a belief that local providers are more interested in numbers and less interested in the long-term success of their participants.

Overall, those who participate in programs report high levels of satisfaction. However, positive experiences in programs is not the same as securing sustainable employment.

Of those who complete some kind of job training program, **most report high levels of satisfaction with their experiences in programs**, a testament to the hard work and dedication of programmatic staff at training and support organizations. However, many of those who reported being satisfied were unemployed at the time of the survey. Program graduates highlighted that work needs to be done, not just to connect workers with programs that are most relevant to their skill gaps, goals, and interests, but to related jobs following program completion. **The bridge from employment programs to securing and maintaining employment** is an area of opportunity - particularly around job placements, sustained mentorship, and plans to address drop-offs in program-related support. Of note, national workforce training research struggles to effectively capture data around this theme of continued support.

Systemic inequities, including access to transportation and affordable childcare, are significant challenges to both program participation and to sustained employment.

Experiences with job training, job searches, and maintaining employment is fundamentally different for those living below the ALICE threshold. While all survey respondents cite financial constraints, personal obligations, and/or inability to take time off work as challenges to program participation, **those below the ALICE threshold are significantly more likely to name access to transportation as a barrier.** Those above the ALICE threshold are more likely to hold negative perceptions about the value or relevance of programs to their job goals.

Females of color are significantly more likely to leave the workforce or remain underemployed due to childcare obligations.

Several of the “Access Partners” that collaborated on this effort are providing transportation and/or childcare services, a major step in minimizing barriers to training participation. However, **these challenges remain for program graduates once they obtain employment and no longer receive these wraparound services.**

The pandemic accelerated a trend towards remote and hybrid work, creating opportunities but increasing the importance of closing the digital divide.

Survey responses show a significant demand for hybrid work, where workers have the flexibility to work both remotely and on-site. This is especially true for respondents under 35, **suggesting employers will need to be responsive to a growing segment of the workforce demanding flexible work environments.**

Despite interest in remote and hybrid work, **there remains a digital skills gap which is most prevalent among unemployed workers.** Overall, skills specifically with software such as Microsoft Office is where workers report the least comfort (in comparison to using the internet, smartphones, computers, or email communication).

10.2 Recommendations

Grounded in national and regional landscape context and drawing from both our unique data collection findings and a broad literature review, the following are the top conclusions that inform key recommendations for GNO leaders in the workforce development ecosystem.

The workforce ecosystem of providers should increase its focus on pre-program recruitment, needs assessment, program matching, and expectation-setting.

The GNO workforce ecosystem is made up of a variety of resources and supports, with some programs focused on general skill development and others guaranteeing job placement. In order to address workers’ negative perceptions, increase enrollment, and drive real long-term outcomes, intentional coordination amongst trainers, nonprofit organizations, and employers must begin before participants ever enroll in a program.

Enhance general awareness through intentional coordination

Although many local organizations already have referral partnerships in place, there remains a significant gap in awareness of available resources. Collaboration with public sector entities, such as the LA Workforce Commission and Unemployment Offices, may address this gap. The WATW survey was completed by hundreds of workers in the GNO area; promotion of the survey was done through a multitude of channels including email communications directly to those receiving unemployment. Replication of this coordination may bring new audiences into the fold of the partner ecosystem, increasing the effectiveness of pre-existing referral networks.

Investigate approaches to effectively match workers to relevant programs, including a digital or organizational exchange platform

Our findings suggest that more work needs to be done in matching workers to the programs that best suit their needs, interests, and goals. This may include a pre-program needs assessment to understand an individual's pre-existing skills and gaps to be addressed through targeted referrals. The ecosystem of providers may consider a standardized intake or needs assessment tool that may be leveraged by both partner organizations and workers themselves.

The ecosystem should explore methods to centralize the matching of jobseekers and job training programs, including digital tools and potentially an organizational intermediary who can bridge the gap between jobseekers, training providers and employers.

Ensure workers understand the realities of prospective jobs *before* enrolling in a program

Workers, especially those who are unemployed, are eager to take opportunities that provide job placement, which may lead to participation in programs that do not align with the needs, skills, or goals of the worker. It is critical that program providers level set on the demands of the particular industry or position and confirm that the prospective job aligns with the needs and goals of the worker. This should include reviewing the job description, discussing the associated hours, and clarifying the details of the skills to be built during the job placement program.

Workforce program funders should invest in the social services that minimize barriers to participation...

Our findings show that financial constraints are a leading barrier to program participation, that workers are more likely to participate if the program pays, and that workers perceive an opportunity cost of their time in a program. This means that **providing living wages during program participation is critical**, not only for increasing interest, but for overcoming real barriers to advancement.

Those below the ALICE threshold and Black workers were both more likely to cite access to transportation as a barrier to program participation, meaning **covering the cost of transportation is necessary**.

Depending on the training site location, public transportation passes may suffice or it may be



necessary to cover the cost of car transit (such as cabs or Ubers). **Childcare is another critical social service** to provide to program participants, especially to increase the enrollment and engagement of Black females.

To support increased program enrollment and completion for our most vulnerable community members, **funders should explore investments that allow program providers the flexibility to respond to these needs.**

...and the workforce ecosystem should explore how to continue these social services.

Our findings demonstrate that many program graduates who successfully obtain employment struggle with the loss of social services they had while in training. Partners within the workforce ecosystem, including local government, program providers, and employers should **collectively explore how to provide continued social services to workers.**

It is possible that employer-driven social services may be the most effective solution to ensure employees can effectively perform their jobs. **Employers may consider these services as part of their employee benefit packages**, which may help address negative perceptions around the availability of good jobs.

Increase industry and skill-specific training...

Workers are eager for targeted support in building specific skills that will give them an edge on the job market, such as project management certifications. Those already offering industry-specific training may need to increase their outreach efforts.

...but don't neglect the importance of interpersonal and transferable skills.

Many workers also report the need for increased social and interpersonal skills, such as teamwork, conflict resolution, and communication. Many also see the need for more fundamental technology skills such as Google Suite and Microsoft Excel. Balancing industry-specific training with foundational skills will increase program participants' long-term prospects.

Employer collaboratives should be explored to share the costs and benefits of job training across sectors.

Programs from regional entities such as GNO Inc. and LED have brought employer-facing training programs to the GNO area, but there may be an opportunity to scale these approaches into new sectors and professions, creating broader coalitions of employers and training providers. Employers in such coalitions commit to receiving support in improving their workplace practices while benefiting from incumbent and new worker trainings.



Program providers and employers should work together to provide continued support and ensure long-term outcomes.

Beyond the need for continued social services, **program graduates often cite the need for mentorship and continued guidance once a job has begun**. It may be most effective for program providers and employers to work together in this continued support; providing on-the-job training, mentorship, and case management services that are responsive to the needs of the worker.

Training providers must prioritize rigorous evaluation and impact assessments, including collecting and reporting information on their failures.

Although resource-constrained training providers might struggle to effectively manage the work required for program evaluation, both our national literature review and our experience with local program providers demonstrated the need for more reliable long-term data on what is working and what is not. Hesitation to track and report outcomes is causing many providers to repeat mistakes, slows innovation, and further promotes skepticism from workers and employers alike.

Employers should increase transparency and communication throughout their hiring processes.

Wherever possible, employers should increase their attention on running transparent and equitable hiring processes, including clear communication to candidates. **Transparency in hiring processes is critical for addressing concerns of nepotism. Communication and feedback to candidates also supports general workforce development ecosystem goals**, ensuring both workers and program providers have the information they need to respond to employers' needs and demands.



SECTION 11

Questions for Continued Investigation

The process of assessing the regional workforce landscape in a post-pandemic world raised additional questions that fell outside of the scope of our research. The following are inquiries for exploration by other researchers and practitioners who wish to build on the work that has commenced within this report.

What role can remote work play in contributing to high-wage jobs, especially for those who experience challenges in accessing family care or transportation required for traditional workplaces? This question is particularly pertinent to case managers and nonprofit program providers who work with ALICE populations or other resource-constrained workers. We hope to see additional exploration of how digital literacy and access to technology may contribute to economic mobility in the Work-From-Home age. Beyond computer and digital skill training, additional research is needed to understand the availability of remote jobs and how to best connect New Orleanians to potential employment opportunities that exist outside of their geographic location.

How might the workforce development ecosystem work together to overcome (the perception of) nepotism in the workplace? Either real or perceived, nepotism was commonly cited as a barrier to both employment and advancement in the GNO area. Many felt that social connections were not just helpful, but necessary to success in the local job market. Additional research is needed to better understand the role that nepotism plays in hiring and promotion practices before we can assess how to regulate or diminish this barrier.

Can gig and freelance work be a pathway for increased income and/or career advancement? As our research demonstrated, not everyone can commit to regular or full-time work hours. Although many workforce development programs focus heavily on obtaining traditional employment, there may be an opportunity to support workers who need part-time and flexible work by further investigating the role and potential of independent contracting and freelance income. Aside from short-term income, could freelance work drive career advancement? For those who cannot participate in full-time job training programs, how could they build career-aligned skills through intermittent freelancing?



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WATW-GNO Access Partners

City of New Orleans Office of Workforce Development

The New Orleans Workforce Development Board & The Office of Workforce Development are the official convenors, collaborators, and navigators of the workforce development ecosystem.

NOWDB & OWD are committed to building a strong and collaborative workforce development system that meets the needs of New Orleans' businesses and job seekers through local and regional priorities with the goal of reducing poverty, increasing wealth, strengthening families, improving the quality of life for all people and enhancing the competitiveness of businesses by leveraging resources thus creating a healthy and sustainable economy.

Learn more at: nola.gov

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Clover Connections

Clover, formerly Kingsley House, is dedicated to proving holistic and inclusive programs and services to the whole family at every stage of life—from early childhood education and summer youth camp programs to workforce development and adult day services for seniors, veterans, and the medically fragile.



Clover Connections, the agency's workforce development program, assists individuals in preparing for careers in today's top industries. Our team of professionals uses an individualized approach to assist adults in navigating career pathways and overcoming barriers to employment. The Career Connections team of Career Coaches, Family Advocates, and Community Health Navigators work together to help families thrive.

Learn more at: clovernola.org.

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Crescent City Family Services

Crescent City Family Services is a community-based non-profit founded in 2008, located on the West Bank of Jefferson Parish. We are dedicated to providing health and nutrition services, referrals and education to women, babies and families. By 2014 The WIC Program became the Foundation which has successfully integrated a Healthy Start Grant Initiative to address the Infant Mortality rates within Jefferson Parish. We are committed to providing quality services to families within Greater New Orleans and the surrounding Parishes.

Learn more at: <https://www.ccfamilyservices.info/>

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Louisiana Workforce Commission

The Louisiana Workforce Commission coordinates the delivery of business workforce solutions to address the State's workforce and economic development needs. The Office of Workforce Development focuses on the unique needs of specific companies, industry sectors and occupations and provides job placement and training services to adults, dislocated workers and youth.

Learn more at: laworks.net

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New Orleans Career Center

The New Orleans Career Center (NOCC) prepares Orleans Parish public school students and local adults for high-demand careers with clear sightlines to future growth and prosperity. Our trainees explore, prepare for, and enter career pipelines – through industry-informed technical training, industry-valued certifications, and hands-on and work-based learning. We train for the following industries in the Greater New Orleans Region: Healthcare, Building Trades, Engineering and Manufacturing, Culinary Arts and Hospitality Management, and Digital Media.

Learn more at: <https://www.nolacc.org/>

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Total Community Action, Inc.

TCA is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization in New Orleans whose mission is to reduce poverty in our community through collaboration with other agencies by providing human services, experiences and opportunities that move persons from poverty to self-sufficiency. Our organization was established in 1964 and is the city's designated anti-poverty agency. The TCA



Theory of Change is rooted in whole family empowerment; the agency service menu includes services beginning at birth through transition (Early Head Start to Senior Services). Each client is empowered to develop an Individual Self-Sufficiency Plan (ISSP) design to support their goal attainment. Total Community Action, Inc. services include, but not be limited to, Low Income home energy assistance program, job readiness foundational skills training, workforce development services, financial literacy training, reentry services, homeless and rapid re-housing assistance, emergency food assistance and head start and early head start. TCA is a member of the city of New Orleans, Opportunity Center network, utilizing an evidenced based employment curriculum and employment services.

Learn more at: www.tca-nola.org

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United Way of Southeast Louisiana

For 100 years, United Way of Southeast Louisiana (UWSEL) has been a leader and trusted partner in improving lives and making a lasting difference. We are on a mission to eradicate poverty by preparing people for quality jobs, growing incomes, and affording better health and education opportunities throughout Jefferson, Orleans, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, St. Tammany, Tangipahoa, and Washington parishes. Our Blueprint for Prosperity guides all strategic investments in programs, initiatives, collaborations, volunteerism, and advocacy aimed at tackling poverty.

Learn more at: UnitedWaySELA.org.

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Urban League of Louisiana

Since 1938, the *Urban League of Louisiana* has continued its mission to assist African Americans and other communities seeking equity in securing economic self-reliance, parity, power, and civil rights. Through the Center for Education and Youth Development, the Center for Workforce and Economic Development and the Center for Policy and Social Justice, the Urban League takes a holistic approach to addressing the concerns of low to moderate income families to ensure quality education and access to information, early childhood supports, college and career readiness, employment, entrepreneurial and economic inclusion opportunities, and shared dignity under the law.

The Urban League's Center for Workforce Development provides career seekers with comprehensive case management, paid work-simulated job readiness training, access to apprenticeships with technical skills training leading to high-wage careers in Energy, Healthcare, Automotive, Technology, Advanced Manufacturing, and Construction, direct employment placement, career and resource expos, digital literacy training, and reentry services.

Learn more at: <https://urbanleaguel.org/>

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Additional Resources

Greater New Orleans Career Guide

A resource from GNO Inc. and Where We Go, this website provides information on New Orleans careers, training opportunities, and resources for your unique goals.



WATW-GNO Funders

Lead Sponsor

Greater New Orleans Foundation

With roots extending 100 years, the Greater New Orleans Foundation connects generous people to the causes that spark their passion. As one of the most trusted philanthropic organizations in the region, we work every day to drive positive impact by championing charitable giving, strengthening nonprofits, and leading civic projects in our thirteen-parish region. In addition to grantmaking, we convene people, resources, and ideas to create intelligent strategies and solutions to meet our region's greatest challenges. We are proud to serve as a vocal civic leader with our partners to ensure an economically and culturally vibrant, sustainable, and just region for all.

Learn more at www.gnof.org.

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Additional Sponsors

Agenda for Children

Agenda for Children is a New Orleans-based nonprofit dedicated to making Louisiana a state where all children can thrive and has provided parish- and state-level data on child well-being in Louisiana through its KIDS COUNT project for over 30 years. Agenda also strengthens the early care and education sector in Southeast Louisiana by offering professional development to early childhood educators, making grants to centers and family child care homes, and connecting parents to child care that meets their needs.

As the co-lead agency for the New Orleans Early Education Network, Agenda coordinates quality and accountability efforts among over 160 early learning providers in Orleans Parish and administers city and state funding to provide free early care and education to over 2,000 low-income infants and toddlers, improve the capacity and quality of the New Orleans early care and education sector and provide wage enhancements for teachers in publicly funded centers.

Learn more at: www.agendaforchildren.org

Agenda for Children | info@agendaforchildren.org

Clover New Orleans (formerly Kingsley House)

Clover is dedicated to proving holistic and inclusive programs and services to the whole family at every stage of life—from early childhood education and summer youth camp programs to workforce development and adult day services for seniors, veterans, and the medically fragile.

Founded in 1896 with a mission to educate children, strengthen families, and build community, Clover envisions a city and region where all young children are ready to succeed, and all citizens are healthy and economically stable. Recognizing that under-served families are at risk of being caught in an intractable cycle of poverty, the organization is committed to ensuring that individuals and families have the supports necessary to be successful at all stages of life.

Learn more at: clovernola.org.

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Appendix

- Focus group agendas
- A note on online survey collection—*Lessons learned and recommendations for other researchers*



Focus Group Agenda | Nov '23

Participants: Looking for Work

Introduction (15 minutes)

- What is *Where Are the Workers GNO*?
- Trepwise introduction
- Goal of today's session:
 - Hear about your experiences in the GNO workforce
 - Your stories and perspectives will help shape key recommendations for local resource providers and employers
- Briefly introduce yourself:
 - Name, industry/type of work you are searching for

Your Job Search Experience (20 minutes)

- Using the worksheet, describe the phases of your experience searching for work. This could include the event that led to unemployment, online job searches, attending job fairs, interviewing...**there are no wrong answers here.**
- At each event or phase of your journey, mark your emotions somewhere between high (positive), neutral, and low (negative).
- Feel free to add notes, descriptions, or anything else that tells us about your experience on the local job market.

Career Goals (10 minutes)

- Beyond the challenges you may face in finding work, what are your goals or hopes for your work or career? This may include type of work, pay level, advancement goals, or anything!

Ideal Support (15 minutes)

- Reflecting on your experience searching for work, what kind of support can you imagine would help you land your next job?
 - Job skill training? Application/interview help? Something else entirely? What would be the most valuable resource or support you would need right now?
- If you have participated in a workforce or job training program in the past, has that training been valuable to you during this job search?



Participants: Employed

Introduction (15 minutes)

- What is *Where Are the Workers GNO*?
- Trepwise introduction
- Goal of today's session:
 - Hear about your experiences in the GNO workforce
 - Your stories and perspectives will help shape key recommendations for local resource providers and employers
- Briefly introduce yourself:
 - Name, type of employment

Your Job Search Experience (20 minutes)

- Using the worksheet, describe the phases of your experience leading up to your current employment. This could include the event that led to unemployment, online job searches, attending job fairs, interviewing...**there are no wrong answers here.**
 - If you participated in any type of job training or workforce development program that helped you secure your current job, please include that in your worksheet.
- At each event or phase of your journey, mark your emotions somewhere between high (positive), neutral, and low (negative).
- Feel free to add notes, descriptions, or anything else that tells us about your experience on the local job market.

Career Goals (10 minutes)

Beyond the challenges you may face, what are your goals or hopes for your work or career? This may include type of work, pay level, advancement goals, or anything!

Ideal Support (15 minutes)

- What kind of support would you like to see your current employer provide to help you advance in your career?
 - PT workers - what kind of training or resource may support you in securing full-time employment?
- Are there any other resources or support you can imagine that would be valuable in your experience as a GNO worker?

A note on online survey collection

Lessons learned and recommendations for other researchers

For the Where Are The Workers - Greater New Orleans research, we used Survey Monkey to build and collect online survey responses. The survey was promoted via Access Partner networks, including on social media. Due to offering an incentive for survey participation, we experienced an influx of spam survey responses. Despite having a control question in our survey to screen for bots, the spam we encountered appeared to be most prominently from coordinated efforts by international human users.

We conducted extensive review to control for quality and ensure the responses we used were from New Orleans area workers. This included removing surveys that were identical (bulk responses coming in with the same time stamp and same answers), that demonstrated inconsistent responses (identifying as retired but also in high school, for example), or that contained incoherent open-ended responses. After our vetting, we identified 305 complete responses that were deemed spam.

Through this experience, we have learned additional strategies for the future that we have shared below. Offering incentives for survey participation does indeed increase engagement and also ensures your community is being compensated for their time. When collecting online data that is incentivized, consider the following:

- Ensure IP addresses are collected via your survey instrument. This isn't foolproof, but can help weed out responses that come from outside of your geographic focus area as well as multiple survey responses submitted from the same computer.
 - Additional metadata, such as submission time and length of time to complete, can also support quality control review.
- Ask the same question at two separate points of the survey and review for consistency. Example questions could include age or gender.
- Incorporate a CAPTCHA or reCAPTCHA to screen for bots. In our experience, the spam we received seemed to come from human users and not bots, so this should not be the only control you have in place.
- Include at least 2 open-ended responses. If our research had not included write-in responses throughout, identifying spam would have been nearly impossible.
- If feasible, conduct additional verification before dispersing incentives. This could include requesting phone numbers for a phone call verification or confirming a select survey response (such as age) via email.

Collaborative Effort By:



United Way of
Southeast Louisiana



Urban League of
Louisiana

