

# WHAT WE LEARNED: REGIONAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT, JOB SEEKERS, AND EMPLOYERS REPORT

THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION FOR GREATER NEW HAVEN AND  
VALLEY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION  
JUNE 2023

## WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT ECOSYSTEM IN CONNECTICUT

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Connecticut's long history of innovation in medicine, device manufacturing, and medical technology has placed the state in a competitive position. Today, Connecticut considers itself a top destination for the bioscience/biomedical industries, a title long held by San Francisco, Boston, and New York (BioCT, n.d., Work section). In addition, Governor Ned Lamont has committed to "coordinating the state's workforce ecosystem around a common strategy and set of goals." The combination of expanding industries, a history of innovation, and commitment from its leader to improve the ecosystem can set a pathway to meeting employers' demands while offering job seekers the opportunity to learn the skills necessary to earn a livable wage.

## WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARDS

Workforce concerns in the United States date back to the late 1800s. The rise of the industrial revolution gave way to terrible working conditions and unfair treatment of workers. In 1913 the Department of Labor was established to "foster, promote and develop the welfare of working people, to improve their working conditions, and to enhance their opportunities for profitable employment" (cited in MacLaury, n.d.). However, despite improving working conditions and employment opportunities, the country's labor force issues have never dissipated.

During the 1990s, the country was trying to balance a rising economy and a boom in technology jobs with a growing number of individuals receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits. In response, the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998 was passed. The act led to the development of Workforce Investment Boards tasked with training job seekers on work-related skills that would improve their earnings, increase the quality of the workforce, and reduce dependency on benefit programs. In 2014, the Workforce Investment Act was reauthorized as the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). The new legislation strengthened four key areas:

- increasing its focus on the most vulnerable workers
- expanding options for education and training

- providing employment-based activities that allow individuals to earn money while being trained
- increasing accountability across programs

In Connecticut, WIOA funds are distributed to five Workforce Development Boards through the State's Department of Labor. The Workforce Alliance comprises the South Central towns in the State, including the Greater New Haven area. In contrast, The WorkPlace oversees workforce training in the Southwestern cities and towns in Connecticut, including the Valley. The Boards allocate funds to organizations that help the un- and under-employed through skill building, education, job search assistance, and matching employers with workers. They also create an annual employment and training plan based on their assessment of local employment priorities and training needs.

American Job Centers, also known as One Stop Offices in Connecticut, provide various services for businesses and job seekers within the Workforce Development Boards. Services include job search and career workshops, business seminars, fully equipped computer labs and resource libraries, copying, mailing, and faxing services. In addition, job seekers can receive labor market information, career counseling, skills assessment, job development, placement assistance, job training, tuition assistance programs, and supportive services such as childcare and transportation for qualified individuals.

## NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS OFFERING TRAINING

In addition to Workforce Development Boards, nonprofit organizations offer workforce development training. The organizations below were interviewed for this report but do not represent an exhaustive list of training programs.

**ConnCAT** provides job training in the health sciences, culinary, and bioscience.

**ReadyCT** offers employability skills workshops, internships, and career research support services to high school students interested in college or a career path.

**New Haven Hiring Initiative** connects qualified New Haven residents with jobs at Yale University and its union partners.

**DAE** offers software engineering programs to high school students and a four-month training for adults to prepare them for a technology job.

**DCI Resources** offers IT training in Microsoft Office Specialist, Computing Technology Industry Association, Microsoft Technology Associate, Internet Core Competency Certification, and Customer Service & Sales certification. (*note: although DCI is a privately owned business, their training program is included in this report given that it receives funding so that it is free for students*).

**New Haven Job Corps Center** supports individuals in gaining skills and employment within ten high-growth industries. Job Corps offers various services, including housing on campus, medical care, meals, school supplies, childcare, a living allowance, and a supportive community. Students can be in the program for between eight months and three years.

Services that help job seekers with "soft skills" complement workforce training programs. These skills are often associated with getting or keeping employment. Many programs named in this report offer programs designed to coach applicants on interviewing skills (through mock interviews), resume

writing, job search, and interview attire. In addition, several nonprofit organizations also focus on developing soft skills.

## SCHOOLS

### TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOLS ARE BUILDING THE FUTURE WORKFORCE

There are 20 high schools that offer technical education to prepare students for future employment. Schools within the Greater New Haven and Valley regions include:

- Eli Whitney Technical High School (Hamden)
- Emmett O'Brien Technical High School (Ansonia)
- Platt Technical High School (Milford)

These schools offer academic classes, career programs, and technical education programs. Students initially engage in an exploratory year where they participate in all of the technical programs offered at the school. Then during grades 10 – 12, students focus on the industry of their choice. Students receive work-based learning (mostly during their senior year), earning academic credit, an apprenticeship salary, and real-world experience.

Industries included across technical high schools include:

- Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources (which includes Bioscience)
- Information Technology
- Manufacturing
- Health Science
- Arts, Audio/Video Technology, and Communications
- Human Services
- Architecture and Construction
- Law, Public Safety, Corrections, and Security
- Hospitality and Tourism
- Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics
- Marketing, Sales, and Services

Technical high schools serve several functions, including offering school-to-career options for non-college-bound students, developing the future workforce, and offering employers opportunities to connect with individuals through apprenticeships or workplace projects, which can lead to employment. Technical schools often have a community liaison where relationships with employers are strengthened to serve as conduits for apprenticeships. The connections between the school and

employers are essential for the program's success. Technical high schools are aware of the disconnect between young people who want to work and employers looking for help and look to bridge that gap.

One technical high school reported that 80% of eligible students have remained employed by a company after their internship. When asked how high school students can get to their job sites, the school reported that many already have cars, others use UBER for transportation, and when either is not an option, students will use the bus system to get to and from their work-based placement. Students can earn between \$15 - \$18 per hour during their apprenticeship and go on to make \$21 - \$22 per hour after graduating.

While schools prepare the future workforce, manufacturing companies are not ignoring the younger generation: middle schoolers. Currently, manufacturing companies visit schools and present the advanced manufacturing industry to students in middle school. The goal is to inform students of the range of careers they can have as they consider which high school to attend and potential career pathways.

## COLLEGES

Two- and four-year colleges also offer programs that prepare students for jobs in the four focal areas for this report (healthcare, bioscience, manufacturing, and IT).

Given the increase in the bioscience industry, Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU), in partnership with The City of New Haven, developed the BioPath program "to help sustain the Greater New Haven region as a leader in bioscience" (BioPath, n.d.).

In addition to BS and MS programs, SCSU offers boot camps (non-credit bearing), internships, research experiences (through a competitive process), and community and networking events. These programs are provided at no cost to the student.

## CONNECTICUT IS WORKING HARD TO EXPAND AND IMPROVE THE ECOSYSTEM

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In 2019, Connecticut's Governor, Ned Lamont, signed an Executive Order establishing the Governor's Workforce Council (GWC). The council's main role is to advise the Governor on workforce development issues and "coordinate the efforts of all state agencies and other entities in promoting workforce development throughout the State (Office of the Governor, 2019)." Today, the Office of Workforce Strategy, led by Kelli-Marie Vallieres, Ph.D., is an executive branch that serves as the administrative staff to the GWC.

In 2020, the GWC finalized a strategic plan focused on four main areas:

- **Business leadership** aimed at building a dynamic workforce through regional sector partnerships that integrate business needs with supporting parties.
- **Workforce participation:** Equity and access aimed at reducing the barriers that have limited access to training, sustainable work, and high-quality career opportunities.
- **Career building** aimed at helping students explore and enter educational programs aligned with in-demand career pathways.

- **Accountability and data-driven management** aimed to design and implement innovative workforce solutions focused on delivering a comprehensive, intuitive customer experience.

All of the work that has been done thus far has expanded the workforce development ecosystem. Today, Connecticut has Regional Sector Partnerships that meet regularly, fund innovative training programs like MATCH (Manufacturing and Technical Community Hub) in New Haven and create a strategic and thoughtful school-to-career pipeline.

The efforts put forth by the Office of Workforce Strategy and the Governor's commitment are showing promise. They have many elements needed to create a viable workforce and address the needs of growth industries. Many initiatives are still in their infancy, and outcome data is not yet available; however, stakeholders can correct what is not working as data becomes available.

This report includes several organizations that have received funding through this initiative. In addition, this report contains feedback from employers and job seekers. Below are a few themes that surfaced through interviews and listening sessions:

### WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT & TRAINING PROGRAMS

- Some training programs are not at full capacity since the pandemic. This could be due to potential workers who have moved into the gig economy, which offers flexibility and autonomy. Other training programs have wait lists but do not have enough funding to meet demand.
- Few job seekers we spoke with mentioned any training programs offered by the Workforce Investment Boards, nonprofit organizations, or the new opportunities the Governor and the Office of Workforce Strategy set forth. There continues to be a disconnect between job seekers, training programs, and employers. On-the-ground marketing will be essential.
- Transportation continues to be a challenge in many ways (discussed in greater detail in the section on job seekers). If not addressed, Connecticut may continue to face issues in meeting its workforce strategy.

### COMMUNITY-BASED NONPROFITS OFFERING TRAINING PROGRAMS

- Individuals who receive services and training through a nonprofit organization often need additional support. Nonprofits are tasked with helping individuals who have language, childcare, transportation, and mental health needs. These organizations may have insufficient funds to provide the comprehensive services that they need.
- Cultural differences impact individuals' ability to obtain and retain employment. Nonprofits help with those differences and offer services to prepare individuals to work and be successful by understanding and meeting workplace standards.
- Even when an individual has completed training, gained the necessary skills, has received support in identifying jobs, and has practiced interviewing, discrimination serves as a barrier to getting hired.

### JOB SEEKERS

- Fear of the benefits cliff and the need for flexibility make it challenging for job seekers to join the workforce. See our report on the Benefits Cliff.

- Many still use Indeed to learn about job openings but have limited success. There is little knowledge about the other portals listing open positions in Connecticut.
- Individuals are looking for growth opportunities in companies and are even willing to start at a lower wage if pathways are clear and attainable.
- Having mental health issues can be challenging for some individuals. Some who have gone through a training program that has also provided them with wraparound services or case management enter the workforce without that support and can feel overwhelmed and distrustful of the system.
- Discrimination is the leading belief as to why individuals struggle to get employment, especially at a livable wage.
- Job seekers also noted that they depend on "for hire" signs to learn about open positions. When the topic of networks arose, some job seekers reported successfully obtaining employment through the help of a friend. However, it is more challenging to get a job through networking when it comes to companies with few or no people of color in executive positions.
- There is a sense that employers are looking to hire someone with all the skills needed to do that job. Although this saves the employer from investing in training, it leaves out many potential candidates.

## WHAT WE LEARNED: WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

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Individuals whose role is to advance the workforce within the Greater New Haven and Valley regions (and some throughout the State) shared their successes and challenges,

### WRAPAROUND SERVICES ARE CRITICAL.

- One program discussed that they continue to support the 80%-85% of participants that obtain employment after completing the program. During the training program, there is great emphasis on workplace standards/behaviors, which sets up the participant for success. This support continues throughout their first year of being employed.
- Under-employed or unemployed individuals often need support such as childcare, transportation, and navigating systems. Case management can serve as supplemental support while individuals focus on gaining skills for future employment.
- Another program offers support around getting a driver's license to combat the transportation barrier. They also provide support around mental health to prepare the job seeker for the workplace.

### COMMUNICATION & MARKETING

- One noted barrier is the need to make the connection between a job and a job seeker's skills. Some jobs have titles that feel out of reach for individuals (e.g., Photovoltaic Installer) because what they are called or referred to doesn't resonate with individuals who don't know

the industry. There is a suspicion that it's not that individuals lack interest in these roles, but job seekers may not be familiar with them.

- The State of Connecticut has invested a lot in training programs. Today we have Workforce Investment Boards monitoring growth industries to ensure that Connecticut holds a competitive position when attracting companies. Training programs are not at capacity, however, and when job seekers were asked where they look for jobs, very few mentioned using the training programs mentioned in this report.
- There continues to be a disconnect between those seeking employment, knowledge about where to build skills, and employers seeking employees.
- Several organizations interviewed reported participating in job or career fairs and conducting outreach efforts in community spaces such as libraries and community events, while others reported hosting webinars. Currently, there are no mechanisms for tracking the number of people who contact an organization and follow through to enrollment and graduation. This limitation makes it difficult to assess vulnerabilities. One interesting learning was how few job seekers we met mentioned training programs.

## INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT) TRAINING PROGRAMS HAVE CHALLENGES

- Individuals noted that one of the challenges with the IT industry is the wide range of skills and credentials one can obtain. IT is a rapidly changing industry with different skills or credentials constantly surfacing. Because of this, some programs have been challenged when it comes to preparing individuals for employment that pays a living wage.
- IT training programs offering specific and current credentials ("specific tech stacks") can teach individuals the skills needed for today's IT industry needs and for employment that pays a livable wage. The challenge these programs face is that they require longer training, which means individuals have to be able to commit a significant amount of time to learn. If the program does not offer a stipend to offset living expenses, these programs may not be a good choice for those under- or unemployed.

## INDIVIDUALS ARE MOVING INTO THE GIG ECONOMY

- Many training programs shared how they are not at full capacity, yet before the pandemic, training programs were at capacity; some even had a waiting list. One speculation is that individuals are choosing to work in the gig economy and have moved on to jobs like UBER, DoorDash, and InstaCart. This hypothesis was validated when meeting with individuals with a former criminal history. Given the discrimination they face and the limited types of opportunities available to them, almost all of them talked about starting their own business. Given this trend, training programs may continue to have challenges filling programs.

## TRANSPORTATION & HOUSING

- Many employers have moved to the suburbs, where public transportation is inconsistent or lacking. This makes it difficult for individuals who live in urban areas and do not have a car. Other transportation issues include riding multiple buses, which can be tricky during the winter. If someone misses a bus or the bus is delayed, it can impact their ability to get to work



on time. The third shift is also challenging, given that buses run inconsistently during off-peak hours, hindering one's ability to get to and from work.

- Workforce housing can be another solution to offset the rise in housing costs and transportation challenges. One program is addressing workforce housing as a potential solution. When asked about a livable wage, many job seekers reported that the increase in housing costs and food makes it very challenging to obtain employment that will sustain them and their dependents.



# WHAT WE LEARNED: NONPROFITS OFFERING TRAINING PROGRAMS

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## EDUCATING JOB SEEKERS IS CRITICAL

- One program helps job seekers by teaching them how to find open positions and determine their qualifications. They have learned that job seekers apply (or want to apply) for jobs they don't qualify for, as they tend to focus on the title and pay. This program guides them in reviewing the tasks and duties of the position and then assessing which skills they possess.
- Outreach is critical, given that job seekers do not know where to go. Traditionally, employers have depended on individuals finding their posted positions and applying; however, today, many individuals may have limited access to technology or are not comfortable navigating internet research. This digital divide could leave many potential and willing individuals searching for employment. During our listening sessions with job seekers, we learned that many depend on "for hire" signs posted outside an establishment to hear about job opportunities.
- Some job seekers may end up in a position they do not enjoy because they tend to have limited employment history and do not know the type of work they want. Employers can help these individuals by offering different positions and seeing if the employee finds alignment in another role within the organization.

## WRAPAROUND SERVICES ARE IMPORTANT

- Mental health is an issue that needs addressing. One program addresses mental health among its participants through group work. They also work to destigmatize mental health.
- Programs that do not offer a stipend during training reported that this was a barrier for some participants.
- Another challenge identified was staying employed. Due to the consequences of missing work or pay, individuals with chronic health issues may ignore them, especially if they do not have paid sick time. Health neglect becomes a cyclical issue, where individuals become ill to a point where they cannot ignore their symptoms and seek medical treatment, but then miss work and get fired for absences.

## LANGUAGE BARRIERS

- Some organizations do not have bi-lingual staff and cannot conduct outreach efforts or offer training to non-English speaking individuals.
- Individuals who cannot communicate in English tend not to be hired because communicating with the supervisor or manager is challenging.
- Those individuals who go on to advanced work and can speak conversational English are often challenged with written and reading capabilities. This can limit how far they can go in a company.

- Individuals attempting to learn English mentioned how long it takes to complete a course; coupled with working full-time and family duties, the time investment can be too much.

## CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

- Individuals from different countries also expressed cultural barriers. For example, in some countries, the concept of childcare (in that a stranger takes care of your child) is uncommon or nonexistent.
- Other cultural differences are needing a resume, being interviewed, or providing references. Job searching and obtaining employment are more informal in different countries and is often done through networks. In addition to learning English, cultural learning also needs to occur.
- Individuals do better in trusting environments. The process of getting employment is perceived as distrustful. Even when individuals get employment, trust is a critical factor. "Employers must consider that the models that work for White individuals do not necessarily work for people of color/traditionally underserved individuals."
- Often, training programs replicate classroom learning. The classroom learning environment may not work for many underserved individuals and those who did not attend college or finish high school. "It is hard to learn in a space where you have already failed."

## NOT EVERYONE GETS A JOB AFTER TRAINING.

- People of color continue to experience discrimination because of their race or appearance (e.g., being overweight). One organization invests enormous resources in supporting its clientele in obtaining employment. Even after creating an excellent resume, practicing through mock interviews, and learning to talk about their skills, individuals still do not get hired.
- Reentering citizens are less likely to get a job in a big company as they tend not to hire individuals with criminal histories.
- Individuals are being discriminated against for various reasons besides race, including living in a shelter or transitional house or having a past criminal conviction.
- Many of the programs require the participant to self-direct their job search. One program believes that teaching self-advocacy puts the individual in a better position. Given that finding employment post-graduation is where we found a lot of vulnerability, training programs may want to focus on partnering with employers with jobs available for graduates.
- "Connecticut is one of the hardest places to get a driver's license." Usually, there are issues around taxes or unpaid tickets. If too much time has lapsed, an individual may need to retake the driver's exam. Transportation is a commonly reported barrier, especially shifts outside regular bus hours.

## ADDITIONAL LEARNINGS

- Many individuals want to work, but the fear of losing benefits due to employment and the inability to support a family may keep them from working. Those who are forced to work because they lost their benefits find themselves struggling.

- Employers need to learn to "value individuals deeper." This means helping individuals feel good about their work and develop trusting environments.
- Many workforce development programs have come and gone because of funding. This challenge limits the opportunity to learn what works and leaves an entire group of individuals unserved.
- While some training programs reported not being at capacity, others have limitations because of funding. In other words, they could serve more individuals with more funding. Others noted that funding streams create bottlenecks due to eligibility requirements.
- There is a need (from employers) for administrative personnel, but there are few training opportunities for such roles.

## WHAT WE LEARNED: JOB SEEKERS

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### REFUGEES

Two listening sessions were conducted with refugees. While they offered insight into the various challenges they face, there were two clear themes: college-educated professional refugees are not able to transfer their education or licenses and obtain the same jobs they had back home, and female refugees tend to have no work experience given that they were able to stay home and care for children and family and did not have to work. Both of these circumstances came with a host of challenges.

### CHALLENGES

- Language and the inability to communicate. The lack of writing and reading in English becomes another barrier when offered a more advanced position.
- Many refugees already have a post-secondary degree, but their educational credentials are not recognized in the U.S. This results in them returning to school or getting a job outside their profession.
- Employers appear to lack trust in individuals from middle eastern countries.
- Some refugees are unfamiliar with technology, especially women who tend to stay home and care for their families in their home country.
- Having a limited network (or no network at all) makes it difficult to learn about job openings. It also is challenging for isolated individuals to learn about U.S. culture.
- Refugees must learn all of our systems, including transportation, obtaining employment, healthcare, and our educational system.
- Refugees with larger families require a caretaker at home.
- The rapid rise in the cost of food and housing has made refugees afraid of losing their benefits if they find employment and risk being unable to support themselves.

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR EMPLOYERS

- Flexibility to go to appointments
- Offer work schedules between 9 – 3
- Part-time work so they can focus on school and ESL classes
- Teach capacity building around finding jobs and going through the interview process.
- Mentorship can be more useful than just training.
- Working in a safe neighborhood is important, especially for late shifts.
- Childcare is important.
- Teach technology
- Recognize past jobs, skills, and education.

### IT TRAINEES

Two listening sessions were held with individuals participating in an IT training program. Participants were diverse in age, race, and work experience.

### CHALLENGES

- Sending a resume does not always yield a response. Many reported sending resumes for open positions, only never to hear back from the employer.
- Job requirements are numerous for some roles, discouraging job searches.
- Employment gaps can be challenging. Employers always want to know why there is a gap in someone's resume.
- There may be IT jobs, but many are far from home.
- "Almost impossible to get a job without experience."
- There aren't many jobs in the technology field (lately).

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR EMPLOYERS

- Growth opportunities are essential in a job, even if it means starting at a lower salary.
- Continued training for additional certifications.
- Offer IT internships for hands-on experience.

### YOUTH

Youth between the ages of 16 – 24 participated in a listening session. Those who spoke with us also noted the challenges we heard from adults.

## CHALLENGES

- Experiencing racism and age discrimination.
- There are a lot of low-wage jobs.
- Location/transportation
- Not being qualified for jobs that pay more.
- Experiencing stress, anxiety, or depression.
- Not knowing how to advocate for oneself.
- Not feeling mature enough.

## REENTERING CITIZENS

### CHALLENGES

- Employers tend not to hire individuals with a criminal history and make that decision based on the person's record without considering all they have done since then to improve their life.
- The best way to get a job is to know someone that works at the company so that person can vouch for them.
- Given inflation and the cost of rent, there is often a need for workers to have second jobs.
- Depending on how long someone has been away, they most likely lack skills.
- Older individuals, who have been away for a long time, are not eligible for social security benefits because of the lack of employment. This results in elderly individuals having to work and being unable to retire.
- Food and rent costs are growing faster than salaries. Everyone should be eligible for food benefits.
- Mental health needs addressing.

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR EMPLOYERS

- Transportation is a huge barrier, especially when employees work second and third shifts. The responsibility for transportation should rest with the employer.
- Values such as "each one, teach one" can go a long way to creating a positive culture (feel like a family).
- Reentering citizens are also people with hearts. Consider everything about the person, what they did before they were incarcerated, and what they have done since their incarceration. Their incarceration is only one part of the story.

## WOMEN

### CHALLENGES

- Mental health can make it challenging to pursue and retain employment.
- Medical cannabis is still frowned upon. When employers who require drug testing learn about the use of cannabis, they do not get the job.
- To make a livable wage, individuals have to work multiple jobs.
- When the company's values do not align with yours, it gets hard to work there.
- Discrimination around race, weight, tattoos, eyelashes. "if you do not look like them, they don't like you."
- Often told, "You are overqualified," as a reason not to hire them.
- Getting into training at the Workforce Investment Board can take a long time (up to 30 days + 90 days of training), but you need money now.
- Applying for jobs is difficult; people do not return calls, and you never get the same person when you call. Email does not yield a response either.
- Complicated processes, such as needing specific paperwork and not being able to get it, often mean that's the end of the process.

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR EMPLOYERS

- Shifts should end in the early afternoon so caretakers can be with their families.
- Not everyone has the training to overcome things emotionally; people live with trauma.
- Employers should consider investing in training rather than trying to find someone that has all of the skills they want in a person. For example, train people to speak another language if you can't find bilingual staff.
- Employers should look for people "where they are" – out in the community. Let people know you are hiring.



## WHAT WE LEARNED: EMPLOYERS

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Employers were interviewed in an effort to learn of the challenges they face regarding the workforce and the opportunities they offer to job seekers.

### RETENTION IS A CONCERN

- Employers investing in training and career pathing, which is the process of aligning opportunities for employee career growth with organizational talent priorities, run the risk of employees moving on, which is a cost to the company.
- Some companies cannot offer every employee a career path, which can be difficult for a company and for managing employee expectations.
- Employee expectations are different today and create challenges for employers.
- Living costs detract individuals from moving to CT and have encouraged residents to move to different states.
- One employer noted that transportation is not an issue for their employees.
- One employer noted that issues around turnover are often due to the job being a mismatch regarding expectations, structure, and physical demands.

### THERE IS A DIFFERENCE IN WORKFORCE ATTITUDES

- Employers are witnessing their workforce deal with mental health issues.
- Employees are "naming their price," making it a challenge to afford to pay what individuals want to earn.
- Current employees struggle with the structure and physical demands of manufacturing.

### APPRENTICESHIP IS A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

- Some employers use the State's funding for apprenticeships to leverage attracting talent.
- For some employers, an apprenticeship can be a double-edged sword if the apprentice earns more than the current workers.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

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This section offers recommendations for the workforce development ecosystem and employers. Potential action steps are also provided.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT ECOSYSTEM

#### 1. DEVELOP A ROBUST COMMUNICATION/MARKETING STRATEGY THAT REACHES EVERYONE.

**BACKGROUND:** Training programs reported not being at full capacity since the pandemic. Job seekers reported two main pathways to learning about work opportunities: searching on Indeed and asking friends. Few job seekers we spoke with mentioned any training programs offered by the Workforce Investment Boards, nonprofit organizations, or the new opportunities the Governor and the Office of Workforce Strategy set forth.

##### POTENTIAL ACTIONS

- Develop recruitment strategies that reach job seekers "where they are" – in the community, places they frequent, and grassroots canvassing, so that the gap between training programs, job seekers, and employers is closed.
- Strengthen marketing about CT-specific job search portals such as Career ConneCT or CT Hires. These portals also offer skills assessments, training programs, and other support.
- Ensure that titles and positions use terminology that the general public understands. Some titles are not commonly used and can deter applicants.

#### 2. STRENGTHEN COLLABORATIONS BETWEEN EMPLOYERS AND TRAINING ORGANIZATIONS.

**BACKGROUND:** Job seekers, training programs, and employers all reported that there are no guaranteed jobs once an individual has completed training. This has left training graduates discouraged and takes training programs and employers "off the hook."

##### POTENTIAL ACTIONS

- Improve/strengthen partnerships between training programs and employers so that there are direct pipelines to employment for training graduates.

#### 3. DEVELOP NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES

**BACKGROUND:** Many job seekers go to friends to learn about job opportunities; however, others reported not having a formal network they can go to. Job seekers expressed how difficult networking can be when you do not have a relationship with executive-level individuals.

#### POTENTIAL ACTIONS

- Develop "informal events" where job seekers and employers can meet. For many job seekers, the traditional resume-interview model is not effective. Creating space for informal networking opportunities can help those challenged by the conventional job search process.
- Create alternative pathways for job seekers to learn about employment opportunities, such as through social media

#### 4. SUPPORT JOB SEEKERS THROUGHOUT THEIR FIRST YEAR OF EMPLOYMENT

**BACKGROUND:** Training programs tend to offer supportive or wraparound services during training and less support during the individual's employment. The decrease in support can be challenging. Programs extending support past the training period had greater outcomes.

#### POTENTIAL ACTIONS

- Offer support around navigating workplace standards, company cultures, and self-advocacy so that individuals are more successful in the new environments.
- Develop training that offers stacked credentialing so individuals can continuously improve their skills.
- Invest in creative solutions against transportation barriers, such as shuttles to work.

#### 5. EVALUATE THE RELEVANCE AND QUALITY OF TRAINING PROGRAMS

**BACKGROUND:** Our interviews exposed a mismatch between industry needs and training programs. While efforts ensure training programs meet employers' current needs, job seekers and employers highlighted that more work must be done.

#### POTENTIAL ACTIONS

- Strengthen the assessment of training programs meeting industry needs by increasing the frequency or strengthening key performance measures so that course correction can occur in a timely manner.
- Assess additional employers' workforce needs and develop a strategy to meet those needs; for example, there is a need (from employers) for administrative personnel, but there are not many training opportunities for administrative roles. In addition, employers need IT professionals to have specific skills beyond the basics currently available.

#### 6. INVEST IN QUALITY TRAINING PROGRAMS THAT LEAD TO EMPLOYMENT

**BACKGROUND:** Community-based organizations struggle with tracking the ratio between outreach and enrollment. This presents a vulnerability in understanding where the problems are regarding enrollment. Furthermore, some programs are not at capacity, while others could train more individuals if they had funding. A tracking mechanism can address some of these vulnerabilities.

#### POTENTIAL ACTIONS

- Track outreach activity to assess performance on outreach efforts. Track the process from outreach to participation, graduation, and obtaining employment.
- All training programs should provide a stipend during training to offset living expenses. Advocacy efforts should focus on this.

- Research programs that have the capacity to train more individuals but lack funding. Assess their quality and employment rate (post-graduation) and fund.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EMPLOYERS

### 1. RECONSIDER THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

**BACKGROUND:** All of the job seekers we met reported discrimination as a barrier. Employers can use this information to examine their processes and ensure equitable practices.

#### POTENTIAL ACTIONS

- Create outreach efforts that reach job seekers where they are. Listing openings on websites may not reach some groups given the digital divide and the lack of technology skills individuals may experience.
- Redesign the application process so that it takes into consideration different cultural norms. Hiring processes tend to be based on interviews; consider skill assessment or competency for training.
- Assess your current recruitment process. Is it too complicated? Does it bias one group over another? Consider a less complex and simpler process.
- Make career pathways explicit to attract job seekers. Ensure your company has processes for equitable career growth by assessing the opportunities and processes for growth.
- Recognize past jobs, skills, and education by assessing or connecting with past international employers.

### 2. OFFER BENEFITS NEEDED BY TODAY'S WORKFORCE

**BACKGROUND:** Today's workforce is different compared to past generations. Changes in the economy, way of life, and our complex environment affect how individuals show up for work. To attract and retain candidates, create innovative practices that will increase trust, engagement, and loyalty.

#### POTENTIAL ACTIONS

- Ensure your medical healthcare plan includes mental health and dental benefits. Allow employees to attend medical (including therapy) appointments during working hours with no penalty.
- Hire a translator or offer onsite English as a Second Language (ESL) classes so that individuals do not have to go from the workplace to evening classes.
- Offer transportation benefits such as rideshare stipends.
- Offer work schedules that allow caretakers to be home after school, attend medical appointments, or enroll in training or ESL classes.

### 3. TAP INTO YOUR ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AS A RETENTION STRATEGY

**BACKGROUND:** Job seekers are searching for organizations that value them and whose values align with theirs. Employers reported challenges with retention. Creating a values-driven organizational culture can help with employee citizenship, thus reducing turnover.

#### POTENTIAL ACTIONS

- Offer informal opportunities for individuals to network among colleagues and executives. Develop a robust training and mentorship program for individuals who do not meet all the job requirements.
- Embrace a culture of values that includes trust and making employees feel valued.

### 4. EVALUATE AND ADDRESS DISCRIMINATORY PRACTICES

**BACKGROUND:** Every group of job seekers cited discrimination as a barrier to obtaining employment.

#### POTENTIAL ACTIONS

- Develop a task committee, including Human Resources (HR) or a designated leader, to review, audit, and address discriminatory practices. Make changes based on recommendations.
- Review your employment practices (the committee could do this) and highlight where changes can improve inclusion. Make recommendations. Initiate changes.
- Audit your personnel demographics, such as race/ethnicity, gender, mode of transportation, and compensation. Continue to track these numbers. Create goals for diversity and address gaps and vulnerabilities.
- Develop a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) committee that is staff led and includes HR personnel. Task the committee with assessing practices and providing recommendations for inclusive and equitable practices and policies.

Celebrate different cultures through company events.

- Develop clear policies around reentering citizens and medical cannabis to ensure consistent practice across all applicants.

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