CONVERGENCE COLLABORATIVE ON PATHWAYS TO BETTER JOBS

Blueprint for Action

CONVERGENCE

AUGUST 2023

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Acknowledgements

About Convergence

Convergence is the leading organization bridging divides to solve critical challenges through collaborative problem solving across ideological, political, and cultural lines. For more than a decade, Convergence has brought together leaders, doers, and experts to build trusting relationships, identify breakthrough solutions, and form unlikely alliances for constructive change on seemingly intractable issues. Our process is improving the lives of Americans and strengthening democracy for a more resilient and collaborative future.

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This report would not have been possible without the tireless work of Convergence project staff, Anita Chandramohan and Erica Loken.

Our Consensus

We support this set of solutions as individuals. Our organizations have not formally endorsed this report, and our organizational affiliations are listed for informational purposes. This consensus process resulted in the strongest support for our principles and framework. We urge leaders across sectors to act on these proposals. Individual outputs listed in the Appendix of this document have been created by subsets of the group's stakeholders. Please view these outputs to see stakeholder endorsements.

A note on Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity

As we advanced each of these areas of work, we remained highly conscious that some communities, especially people of color, continue to face unique barriers to economic security and mobility. And, because their perspectives are too often not included in key stakeholder discussions and the formulation of solutions, those solutions often do not meet their needs, and can sometimes even exacerbate the problem. This Collaborative addressed the potential challenge by:

- ensuring that the table of participants included sufficient diversity
- explicitly identifying where the needs of marginalized communities require special attention
- finding opportunities to hear directly from people with lived experience at the community level
- clarifying, in our final report, how the group's proposals will drive a workforce that is more fair, diverse, equitable, and inclusive.

Recommendations under the Worker Skill-building section are particularly valuable to communities facing the highest barriers as the related resources developed by the group are specifically focused on providing accessible content workers can directly utilize in their career advancement journey. Additionally, the proposals provided under the Employer-led Solutions and Work-based Learning sections aim to develop and scale systems that broaden talent pipelines, making them more inclusive, and provide opportunities for communities that may otherwise not have access to career pathways with upward economic mobility.

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We are participants in a year-long **Convergence Collaborative on Pathways to Better Jobs**, a cross-sector, cross-partisan group of stakeholders representing workers, employers, workforce trainers, policymakers, and post-secondary education providers of all types. We convened with the intention of addressing worker barriers to financial security, career transfers, and upward mobility, as well as obstacles to companies in cultivating their talent pipelines, challenges that predated – but were exacerbated by – the COVID-19 pandemic. Across our differing and often competing perspectives, we forged the mutual trust and understanding necessary to identify strategies and develop proposals to serve our common goals.

This report offers implementable solutions at three levels:

Identify needs and gaps within the existing workforce system.
Here we articulate the hurdles that impede full success for workers and employers, and potential changes at the public, private, and policy levels that could better match worker skills with employer needs in a rapidly evolving job market.

Connect workers
With a focus on low- and moderate-wage positions, we identify with opportunities in a rapidly changing job market to grow worker skills and qualifications, better match those skills to employer needs, and navigate the on- and off-ramps that build economic mobility and financial security for their future.

Empower Employers
Here we identify strategies for employers to differentiate themselves and boost the recruitment, retention, and productivity of employees by creating more sustainable pathways to develop and acquire job-ready talent.

The consensus proposals included in this **Blueprint for Action** would create public, private, and policy changes crucial to better support matching worker skills with employer needs, thereby improving both worker economic mobility and employer competitiveness. During the group's time of shared learning, important needs and opportunities emerged, including imperatives to:

- improve accountability and coordination within and between workforce systems, public-private partnerships, and employers

- shift the narrative and build advocacy for sustained, flexible, and systemic financial and legislative investment in adult education, skilling, and training programs

- scale to the state or national level those pilots that are already successfully bolstering communities through workforce development and employer partnerships

As the diverse participants explored and grappled with the challenges in the work and the differences in our perspectives, we developed a shared vision of the work before us that guided our focus on three core areas of work, and which carried through to our final consensus on recommendations.

The participants in the *Convergence Collaborative on Pathways to Better Jobs* invite you to review these proposals and to join us in the work ahead as we focus on implementing them, filling gaps, and improving our complex workforce system to create onramps to new, better jobs. We urge readers to act in their own sphere of influence on the recommendations outlined in this report. We also invite leaders from the worlds of advocacy and policy, philanthropy, community-based work, and other important sectors to explore how the collaborative problem-solving framework we leveraged here across our differences can achieve worthwhile, durable solutions to many of our most intractable issues.

"The Convergence Collaborative has been extraordinarily timely, relevant, and thought-provoking and **is already having a great impact on our workforce development work at the YWCA.** I have most appreciated our discussions about the future of work, upskilling residents to meet the demands of the economy, and ensuring a stable and consistent foundation of skills for all workers."

Mike Schwartz, Collaborative Participant

Blueprint Consensus Proposals

Worker Skill-Building Resources
Support workers in **growing their essential skills** and navigating their career advancement through new, accessible resources.

Employer-led Solutions
Identify key areas in which employers can **improve their competitiveness** by creating more sustainable and job-ready talent pipelines.

Work-Based Learning
Expand and scale work-based learning models to develop worker and employer opportunities.

How Convergence Successfully Bridges Divides and Forges Solutions in the Face of Gridlock

For nearly fifteen years, Convergence has brought together diverse leaders and doers across political, ideological, sectoral, and other divides as participants in Collaboratives that build trust, find common ground, forge consensus solutions to gridlocked challenges, and work as unlikely allies to advance their implementation. The approach is unique, evidence-based, and proven. Convergence's facilitated collaborations among diverse leaders in politics, business, and the non–profit sector succeed in building consensus after building trust.

Convergence's evidence-based approach to collaborative problem solving is informed by many years of practice and continued advances in contact theory, neuroscience, and psychology, as well as significant adaptation of best practices from the disciplines of facilitation, mediation, deliberative democracy, bridgebuilding and international peacebuilding. This approach has allowed Convergence to regularly succeed in forging trust among even the most improbable collaborators.

Continuing the Convergence Conversation: Economic Opportunity

This Convergence Collaborative builds on two previous Convergence efforts to increase economic mobility and security for unemployed and low- and moderate-income workers: the **Convergence Dialogue on Economic Mobility** (also known as Working Up, 2018) and their quickly stood-up project in response to the COVID-19 pandemic – **Economic Recovery for America's Workers** (2020).

The Convergence Dialogue on Economic Mobility Results

➤ Consensus recommendations for addressing key challenges facing low-income workers, including actions to change: the workforce system, job opportunities, incentives, and benefits, and supports for financial stability.

➤ Clear and significant increases of opportunities for millions of America's workers to upgrade skills, achieve additional credentials and degrees, strengthen career pathways and more, as major employer stakeholders at our table, like Walmart, invested meaningfully in key elements of the consensus recommendations.

➤ The Dialogue resulted in enduring relationships among the participants across ideological and sectoral lines. Groups and individuals previously alienated from each other continue to work together as unlikely allies to drive additional changes to public policy and private practice to strengthen economic mobility.

The Convergence Dialogue on Economic Recovery for America's Workers

The project on Economic Recovery for America's Workers had a short-term mandate to address the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic on low-income workers, including potential solutions in the public, private, and non-profit realms. This process highlighted several issues and needs, including expanding multiple onramps and pathways to better jobs and supporting workers to succeed and advance at work by building solutions to meet personal and work responsibilities.

The 2018 Convergence Dialogue, bolstered by the project on Economic Recovery for America's Workers in 2020, led directly to Convergence launching two new Convergence Collaboratives. These projects pushed deeper into the policies, resources, and scrutiny that respond to improving workers' economic mobility and strengthening workforce readiness and competitiveness for employers.

The Convergence Collaboration on Pathways to Better [1] Jobs

Launched in the spring of 2022, the *Convergence Collaborative on Pathways to Better Jobs* brings together a diverse and influential group of 30 participants representing workers, workforce trainers, policymakers, employers, and post-secondary education providers of all types. For just over a year, through the spring of 2023, the group met regularly to explore issues in workforce development and economic mobility. The focus was on identifying the needs and gaps within the existing system and public, private, and policy recommendations to better match worker skills with employer needs in a rapidly evolving job market.

Within our Collaborative there were differing priorities, which often cause tensions when considering various workforce solutions and challenges. Employer priorities and worker priorities often seem in conflict with each other, and it was critical to the project that both perspectives were represented. Another area of tension concerns funding many of the initiatives or supports that will create a more stable and sustainable talent pipeline and who should be responsible for investing in various skill-building and career advancement activities. These tensions are frequently exacerbated by the capacity that businesses have due to size or degree of assistance they may receive from state or federal resources.

The resounding benefit of the ***Convergence Collaborative on Pathways to Better Jobs*** was to bring representatives together from sectors that work past each other and have not had the opportunity to collaborate on solutions and to find comraderies and partnership on issues that previously seemed much more divisive. Worker voices communicated directly and openly with representatives from major national employers. Further, employers had a platform to discuss pragmatic and proactive initiatives that would create stronger talent pipelines, and help workers cement essential skills that can be transferred and translated into thoughtful career growth.

Lastly, Convergence engaged a professional facilitator and project team to support the group in building trust, developing a vision, finding areas of agreement, and formulating consensus recommendations set out in this report. In the next stage of work, the Pathways participants, who are listed below; will work with the Convergence team to implement our group's proposals.

A note on Grassroots Partnership

A supplemental facet of the Pathways Collaborative included original research conducted by Convergence staff with a large US-based international employer in the Fall of 2022. Convergence interviewed 125 frontline employees working across 25 stores in the Chicago and St. Louis metropolitan areas. These interviews informed the Collaborative by excavating the stories, perspectives, and challenges from workers with lived experience wrestling with career advancement and hurdles to economic mobility and financial security. The interview questions gauged worker interest and participation in upskilling and professional growth opportunities and explored the barriers workers experienced as limiting or preventing their engagement in such opportunities.

The interviews and listening sessions proved helpful as qualitative inputs to make the conversation among Collaborative participants more inclusive, complex, and comprehensive as we framed innovative solutions for strengthening economic mobility.

Key takeaways from the analysis of these interviews (see Appendix B for full Grassroots Engagement Report):

⟹ Employers can address many barriers that workers cite as preventing them from pursuing professional growth opportunities.

⟹ Workers want more and better communication about available professional opportunities and how they align with their individual career goals.

⟹ Workers desire easily accessible training, certifications, and other upskilling opportunities.

⟹ While degree programs remain popular, workers find them harder to access than other advancement opportunities.

⟹ Workers want to feel that they are growing professionally and learning at work — but this desire alone does not mean they will participate in growth opportunities that are not a good fit in their lives.

The COVID-19 pandemic created one of the worst economic crises in the last century (source). The public health crisis exposed and exacerbated the pre-existing challenges and barriers that low- and moderate-income workers face to achieve financial security and upward mobility. Many individuals returned to entry-level and middle-income jobs that they had prior to the pandemic and while wages have grown at a record rate, inflation has impacted real wage rates (source). Though some individuals used the time during the pandemic to upskill, many still face barriers to a clear route to a better job, alternative career pathways, or different benefits (source 1,2,3).

At the time of the Collaborative launch in May 2022, overall reported trends indicated that unemployment caused by the pandemic was decreasing (source); however there was economic strife, disillusionment, and an inability to find stable, quality jobs that afford upward mobility for millions of Americans. While unemployment is continuing to decrease, employers are grappling with talent pipeline cultivation and finding workers with the existing skills for the jobs they need to fill. Many individuals also continue to experience stagnant wages, have multiple jobs to meet basic needs, and face challenges in acquiring, navigating, or leveraging professional skills and certifications.

Women, Black, Indigenous, and people of color were disproportionately affected by the pandemic, only serving to worsen the significant employment hurdles faced by these communities and individuals prior to COVID-19 (source). Disparate impacts and systemic disenfranchisement are ever-present in low-income and rural communities, communities of color, and other social determinants that have historically inhibited access to employment, upskilling, or reskilling into new career pathways (source). Furthermore, millions of women shouldered more of the childcare, remote learning, and other familial and personal responsibilities before and during the pandemic, making it incredibly difficult to balance careers, scheduling, and responsive workplaces. Now, millions of women who want to reenter the workforce must also navigate large gaps in employment and skilling and continue to juggle the same limiting factors, most of which have not dissipated.

The ***Convergence Collaborative on Pathways to Better Jobs*** convened with the intention of addressing the many issues outlined above by working to build and share consensus-based recommendations to better connect workers — particularly those in low- and moderate-wage positions — with opportunities to grow their skills and qualifications, and to navigate the on- and off-ramps that build economic mobility and financial security for their future. The project also aimed to address how employers can and do benefit from investment in creating more sustainable and job-ready talent pipelines. Over the project, the focus narrowed as participants identified priorities and related gaps in our workforce system.

Collaborative stakeholders came together across political, ideological, sectoral, and other divides to advance solutions that meet the needs of both America's workers and employers. It was clear from the beginning that while much good work is being done in the space, we still need to find ways to better connect workers with opportunities to build their skills and qualifications, in ways that meet the needs of employers, and to navigate the on and off ramps that will build economic mobility and financial security for them and their families.

The group grappled with various questions to inform their work and thinking, such as:

➤ What are the employment, economic, and workforce trends that are here for the long term versus those that might end or reverse in the shorter term?

➤ Who is the target population for this work?

➤ What defines a "good job"?

Through shared learning, stakeholders arrived at a collective understanding of the current landscape, which serves as a foundation for our consensus recommendations. That understanding includes the following

Workers are Stuck on Unclear Paths
Many workers remain mired in roles with no clear path to upward economic mobility even if they recently moved into a job with a slightly higher wage.

"Basic Skills" and Career Navigation
There is a significant need for "basic skills" and career navigation for people who do not have access to or information on entry-points into the job market. This is amplified by limited connections among employers, training, education, and job seeker systems.

Normalizing Alternatives to 4-Year Degrees
A combination of academic, financial, and situational needs of students and workers has highlighted the need to normalize alternatives to the 4-year college experience as pathways to good jobs. Young adults and older workers from low-income backgrounds should be able to obtain a 4-year degree or avail themselves of shorter, more financially feasible, and more responsive routes. Many sector stakeholders are innovating and investing in alternatives to 4-year college degree education pathways, including certification, credentialing, work-based learning models and seeing greater student engagement, application, and retention.

AREAS OF CONSENSUS & OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPACT

Access to Skill-Building Programs

Many employers are innovating in reskilling and upskilling current workers and new hires, but it is unclear how accessible these practices are for small-to-medium businesses.

Lack of Collaborations

Many groups specialize in various aspects of employment and educational pathways, but there is need for alignment of these actors and opportunity to collaborate to address gaps, coordinate financial investments, and collaborate on local and federal legislative advocacy to improve efficiency and effectiveness and create systematized accountability and sustainability within the workforce ecosystem.

Disparities in Hiring

Screening by college degree hits minority workers, such as low-income, people of color, and other underserved communities, particularly hard. Although innovations in the space are growing, tensions remain — higher education degrees are the most widely accepted measure for hiring and practices have yet to uniformly transform to view non-degree credentials, certificates, and equivalents as acceptable alternatives to four-year degree requirements.

Strong Partnerships Are Critical

Industry and sector partnerships serve as important resources to assist employers, especially small-to-medium employers (SMEs), with identifying and cultivating a talent development strategy.

Pressure on Publicly Funded Programs

Publicly funded workforce programs, departments, and regional or local employers do not have structured partnerships that are consistently effective in upskilling and job placement. This system, which includes community colleges and publicly funded job training and placement centers and programs, is experiencing greater pressure than it was pre-pandemic.

Employer Engagement

Employers have a stake in ensuring work-based learning models succeed. Without employer engagement and buy-in these programs do not work.

Separate Career Advancement and Employee Development

In our current labor market and economy, disaggregating pieces of career advancement and employee development is critical for employers to be able to tailor support for employees along the talent pipeline.

Cultivating a Talent Development Strategy

Industry and sector partnerships serve as important resources to assist employers, especially small-to-medium employers (SMEs), with identifying and cultivating a talent development strategy.
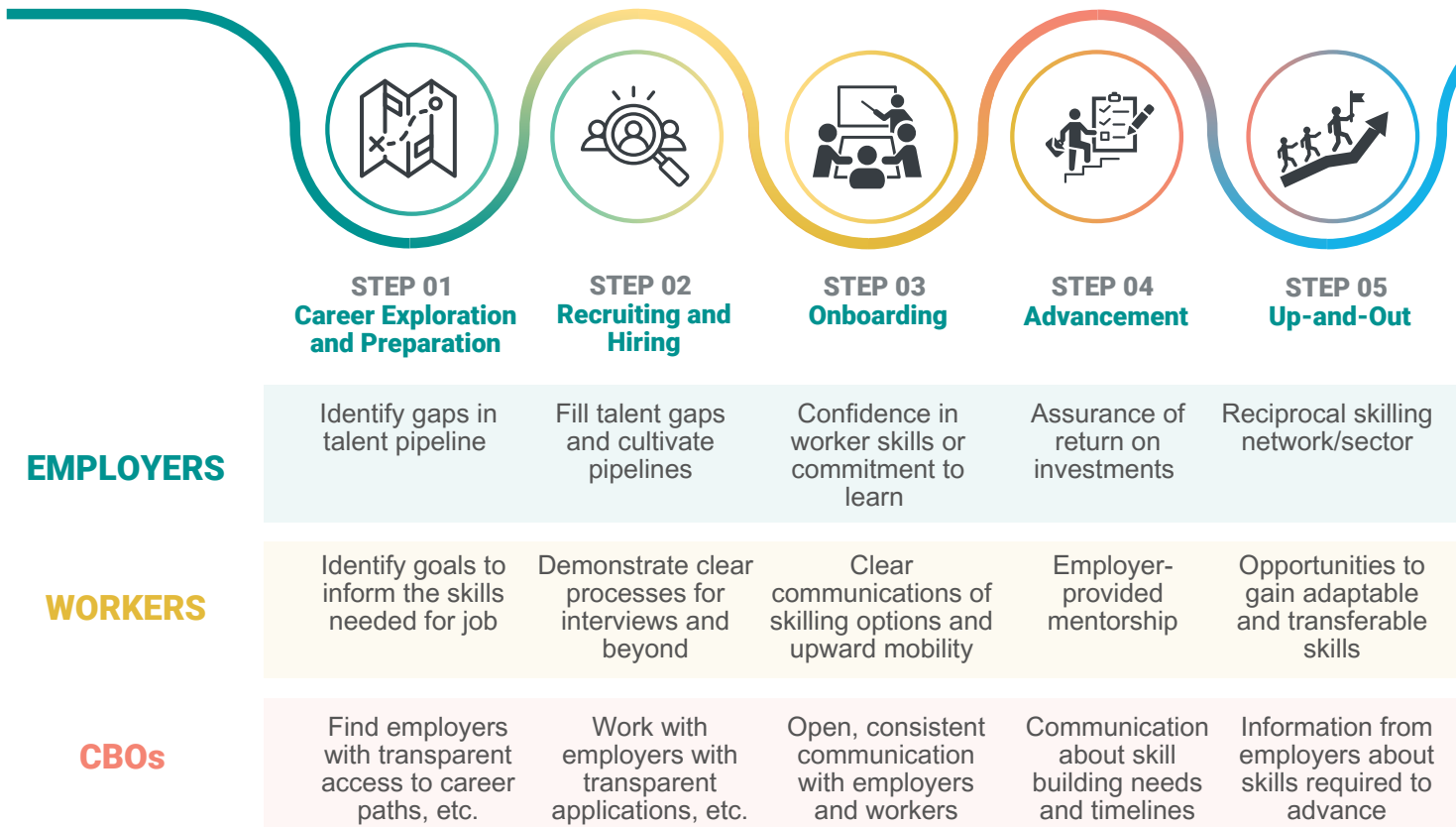
These observations point to three critical needs for solving the broader challenges:

→ Strengthen accountability and coordination within and between workforce systems, public-private partnerships, and employers

→ Shift the narrative and advocate for sustained, flexible, and systemic financial and legislative investment in adult education, skilling, and training programs

→ Drive scale around successful pilots that currently bolster specific local communities and industry partnerships to have impact at state or national level

As a means of structuring the work of this group, stakeholders developed an Employment Lifecycle Infographic (see Appendix C) identifying the unmet needs and gaps of workers, employers, and community-based organizations within the lifecycle of employment. Stakeholders encourage different audiences to use this as a starting place to dig deeper and get more specific on their programmatic initiatives. For example, employers and researchers could use it to understand intervention points during a worker's tenure and then develop studies to learn more about what is happening at those specific intervention points. For smaller companies without Human Resource departments, pairing this infographic with a document about which resources exist in each of the lifecycle stages could also be a valuable resource. This infographic could be adapted to include a "what's next" or recommendations for policymakers.

The Employment Lifecycle
Full Infographic in Appendix C

	STEP 01 Career Exploration and Preparation	STEP 02 Recruiting and Hiring	STEP 03 Onboarding	STEP 04 Advancement	STEP 05 Up-and-Out
EMPLOYERS	Identify gaps in talent pipeline	Fill talent gaps and cultivate pipelines	Confidence in worker skills or commitment to learn	Assurance of return on investments	Reciprocal skilling network/sector
WORKERS	Identify goals to inform the skills needed for job	Demonstrate clear processes for interviews and beyond	Clear communications of skilling options and upward mobility	Employer-provided mentorship	Opportunities to gain adaptable and transferable skills
CBOs	Find employers with transparent access to career paths, etc.	Work with employers with transparent applications, etc.	Open, consistent communication with employers and workers	Communication about skill building needs and timelines	Information from employers about skills required to advance

CONVERGENCE COLLABORATIVE ON PATHWAYS TO BETTER JOBS BLUEPRINT FOR ACTION

Worker Skill-Building

UNDERSTANDING THE LANDSCAPE

There is significant opportunity for employers and community-based organizations (CBOs) to break down the barriers to upward economic mobility faced by individuals earning low incomes, women, communities of color, and rural communities. These barriers include inaccessibility to clear information that defines essential skills,[3] challenges in attaining essential and technical skills, and a lack of guidance around career advancement pathways available to them. Employers can break down these barriers by clearly identifying routes for connecting job seekers with relevant skills to open jobs in their companies as well as articulating clear pathways for upward mobility from those jobs. CBOs need to support both the worker and employer to remove barriers, share and help interpret information that will facilitate the growth of the worker and the employer, and be equipped to provide services for the duration of a worker's employment arc.

Recommendation 1: Develop and advocate for a universal essential skills framework for workers

Many workers with low-to-medium incomes are missing a core set of essential skills, otherwise known as soft and hard skills, that are critical to their long-term success in the job market. As technical skill requirements evolve, one thing remains true: social, emotional, and cognitive skills will always be needed (source). Tremendous time and effort have been invested in creating skills frameworks; however, they are often geared towards communicating needed skills to employers and CBOs rather than directly to workers. Additionally, essential skills that workers need for success are present in some frameworks, but not others. To further compound the issue, they tend to utilize jargon and other language that is not accessible to many workers, and many are unintentionally riddled with implicit bias in the language used.

To fill this gap, our group has created a Universal Essential Skills Framework (see Appendix D) that is written with workers as the main audience, using clear, accessible language to define essential skills and provide examples of those skills. Therefore, the Framework is written so it can be directly administered as a resource to workers. There is, however, also great benefit in employers and CBOs using it with their constituencies. The broad nature of the Framework allows for greater scaling opportunity. For employers and CBOs, it should be viewed as a starting place that can be customized to fit their organization's needs by updating examples of essential skills to reflect on the job expectations for the sector or industry.

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[3] Our group opted to use the term 'Essential Skills' as a means of capturing both soft and hard skills needed for success in the workplace. There is often stigma associated with the term 'soft skills' despite the importance of these competencies in addition to hard skills.

Recommendation 2: Develop, bolster, and normalize practice use of career advancement plans and career navigators to support workers

Workers often face challenges such as access to clear information and guidance on the career advancement paths available to them within their current roles or in potential roles. Many individuals do not know what considerations they should be accounting for or questions they should be answering for themselves pertaining to what they want in a job or potential career path. They are also often unaware of what they should be asking of their employers at each stage of the employment lifecycle.

Career Advancement Plans are tremendously beneficial for short- and long-term planning, particularly as someone assesses their goals, skills, and professional trajectory. These plans can be used by both workers and employers. For workers, it can outline the questions they should be considering at each stage of the employment lifecycle, both for themselves and to ask of their employers. For employers, it can communicate worker perspective and what workers are thinking about at each of the stages.

Recognizing the gap that exists in worker resources for career advancement we have created a Career Advancement Guide (see Appendix E). This Guide was carefully crafted by stakeholders who have on-the-ground experience with workers and know the types of questions they need to be asking of themselves and their employers. The Guide provides a set of collated resources that workers can utilize as they work to answer questions. We envision the Career Advancement Guide being used by CBOs and human resource departments within companies to provide much-needed support to workers. Much like the Universal Essential Skills Framework, the Guide can, and should, be adapted to fit the needs of the constituency served.

Recommendation 3: Invest in career-advancement opportunities

One of the main barriers to upward mobility for low-wage workers is a lack of accessible guidance around career advancement pathways available to them. Although funding for career navigators is critical for workers to achieve long-term success, systems of navigators do not typically exist. While we have a system for case management, career navigation serves a more targeted purpose: career advancement.

Participants need support navigating systems including workforce, higher education, government resources, and potential places of employment to find the most ideal career pathways resulting in upward economic mobility.

One of the main barriers to upward mobility for low-wage workers is a lack of accessible guidance around career advancement pathways available to them. Although funding for career navigators is critical for workers to achieve long-term success, systems of navigators do not typically exist. While we have a system for case management, career navigation serves a more targeted purpose: career advancement. Participants need support navigating systems including workforce, higher education, government resources, and potential places of employment to find the most ideal career pathways resulting in upward economic mobility.

Public investment in career navigation is a high yield and scalable solution that simultaneously addresses employee and employer challenges. This includes addressing the huge skills gap among U.S. workers that are stuck in low wage positions with no pathways for upward mobility and whose skills do not match what is required for positions that employers are struggling to fill. States with remaining funds from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) can invest in providing accessible and affordable reskilling opportunities for workers and in employers who are willing to take a risk on hiring workers who may have less experience in the specific career they are currently hiring for but have exciting potential to learn the necessary skills for the role. Additionally, system investments in career navigation should use accessible language and meet workers where they are. This will have a positive return on investment overall, as proven in San Antonio by Project Quest's 25-year economic impact study (source). Project Quest yielded a return on investment of $19.82 for every dollar invested. The total economic impact of the project was $1.67 billion — this included the increase in incomes of graduates of the program, the economic impact of spending, and the welfare savings from participants being able to move off these programs. The benefits of these investments are threefold: workers can access opportunities that result in upward mobility, employers have increased revenue, and governments see increased tax revenue. [4]

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[4] Other strong examples of career navigation include SkyHive in New York City and EMPath in Boston, Massachusetts.

Workers need to be able to access affordable training opportunities while keeping wraparound services, such as government benefits, to ensure they can achieve upward economic mobility.[5] Many workers earning a low income cannot afford to lose earnings or government benefits while they obtain credentials and skills, however, they often do. When these individuals work to obtain additional credentials and skills that will support their upward economic trajectory, they lose benefits at a time when they most need support.[6] For workers to succeed in entry-level jobs while skilling up for the next step of their career, we must ensure that policy reflects the need for continued support during this time.

Employer-led Solutions

UNDERSTANDING THE LANDSCAPE

Lower-wage workers seeking to advance into higher-paying jobs often rely on employer-provided skill-building opportunities and training. However, small-to-medium employers (SMEs) usually do not have the financial or personnel resources to invest in these opportunities. They also may know little about partnership opportunities able to fill gaps in their own capacity for talent development. Many of these employers are unsure whether there is a significant enough return on investment, given worker turnover, retention, and the time it takes to develop employees at various levels. There are evidence-driven ways for employers to earn a high return on these investments in skill-building for workers. Those investments can increase worker productivity and retention, while also creating pathways for their career advancement.

For SMEs and other employers who may need additional support, partnerships with other employers in the same industry, worker organizations, outside training organizations, and public and private funders can help with strategy, bring down investment costs, and deliver better results. It is possible for SMEs to build more robust talent development systems that serve workers and employers alike, but they need help in doing so, which is where partnerships can play a key role. Local, state, and federal agencies and coalitions can also support building more creative, effective solutions that SMEs can participate in to make strong investments in worker skilling and advancement, for both regional and industry growth.

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[5]   A policy example of this approach is the Income Disregard Bill SBS6589A in New York State.

[6]   This is known as Benefits Cliffs. Benefits Cliffs is defined by the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta: "Some working families experience financial barriers to economic mobility. One significant barrier occurs when career advancement puts a family above the income eligibility threshold for public assistance programs. Due to the loss of these programs, career advancement opportunities can result in the family being financially worse off (a benefits cliff) or no better off (a benefits plateau) than before the wage increase." You can learn more about Benefits Cliffs here. Learn more about the systemic impact on people of color here.

[7]   Other strong examples of career navigation include SkyHive in New York City and EMPath in Boston, Massachusetts.

Recommendation 1: Use talent development roadmaps to build skills and raise productivity and retention across the employment lifecycle

Creating skills roadmaps for the entirety of a worker's career is crucial for key entry-level and higher-skilled positions. Focusing on the identification of demonstrable skills, not higher education degrees, in this mapping benefits both the employer and the worker. A focus on skills-based job descriptions and roadmaps broadens the talent pipeline for employers; helps current and prospective employees identify avenues for mobility throughout all phases of the lifecycle; and improves equity (source). Using skills-based recruiting and hiring to boost productivity from the beginning of a talent pipeline search and process reduces the risk of mismatches and builds a more diverse, qualified workforce (source).

Using talent roadmaps during the recruiting and onboarding phases shows which skillsets will create opportunities for employees to advance, and how employees can gain those skills. However, providing this information is not enough. Employers can make it easier for their current workforce to increase its productivity by providing the time and/or funding needed to get training — whether on the job or through[7] outside providers. Investing in workers improves retention for employers and provides opportunities for advancing workers who develop the skills employers need.[8] It is important to note that some employers may have limited pathways for upskilling beyond the entry level, in this case, they can partner with other businesses, training agencies, and funders to provide "up and out" skill-building opportunities for employees and reap the benefits of higher retention and commitment for the time they are employed with the company, as well as cultivating a positive reputation in the community.

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[8] IBM is a strong example of the benefits of shifting to skills-based hiring and providing training opportunities for internal advancement and up-and-out. Learn more about the training opportunities here and the benefits of IBM's approach here.

Recommendation 2: Use partnerships with businesses, training organizations, worker organizations, and funders to improve ROI on skilling strategies and investments

Many employers, especially SMEs, have limited human resource capacity, which limits their capacity to cultivate a robust talent development pipeline. Although some employers may have limited internal resources, there are external resources they can utilize for these purposes. To craft a talent and investment strategy, they can seek out help from industry and sector skills partnerships, pooled human resource and talent services, unions and other worker organizations, chambers of commerce, specialized training organizations, and community colleges. Identifying a talent pipeline is an important part of this overall talent strategy. To develop this pipeline, employers can work with training programs, schools, feeder businesses, community-based organizations, the military, and second chance hiring programs to provide them with the baseline of skills they need. Employers can build relationships with these partners so there is a mutual understanding of how to best work together to improve upward mobility for workers and create a stronger, healthier economy for employers.

There are established routes for many employers to join industry and sector-skilling partnerships. These partnerships can help reduce costs and provide external funding to improve ROI by providing resources for skill building that meet employers' needs within specific industries or sectors. Partnership examples include Employer Resource Networks and Next Gen Sector Partnerships. If employers prefer to subsidize skills-based hiring, work-based learning opportunities, and training programs by other means, they can seek public and philanthropic funds, though it is important to ensure use of external funds does not sway or influence the direction of the employers' focus on skills. An example of a framework that can be used by employers and employer-facing organizations to better align skills needs with what training programs offer is the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation's Talent Pipeline Management Program.[9]

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[9] The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation developed Talent Pipeline Management® (TPM) to advance authentic employer leadership in building high-performing talent pipelines. TPM leverages lessons learned from supply chain management, strategies, and tools to help employers and employer associations play the role of an end-customer in a talent supply chain. Supported by the TPM framework and delivered through the TPM Academy®, TPM facilitates change management and closes the gap between supply and demand, preparing students and workers for the most in-demand jobs and careers.

Public funding and support can incentivize SMEs and other employers to pool resources; collaborate with training and education providers and worker organizations; and, contribute to producing a better trained, more productive, better compensated, and more secure workforce. Well-designed sector- and industry-focused career programs that are developed jointly with employers, workers, and skill building organizations, attuned to local and regional labor markets and combined with matching funds, can be catalytic both to sustain and expand existing good jobs and to attract new industries that provide the jobs of the future. To transform our current system into one that is truly serving both workers and employers, we need to shift how we create and manage career programs, with employers having significantly more leadership in communicating their skills needs and support to build pipelines that evolve with a worker as they grow in their career.

Recommendation 3: Catalyze and support sector-focused skills partnerships with employers, worker organizations, skill builders, and community-based organizations

Ensuring employers have the resources and networks needed to grow their organizations and support the growth of their workers is vital. Many employers lack the resources to engage in strategic, long-term thinking. Therefore, funding that allows for industry-driven labor market analysis to identify employer demand, skills gaps, and skills providers, and creating programs that offer public matching funds for gap-filling partnerships is critical, especially for SMEs. This will also allow CBOs and skills providers with the information they need to help workers build the skills that are most in demand, and which will lead to upward economic mobility, especially for worker groups that employers may not be well connected to such as women, people of color, and immigrants. Opening talent pipelines is beneficial for both employers and workers and can be supported by the promotion of skills-based hiring.[10] Funding for tools for employers, worker organizations, and training organizations that can help them standardize skills terminology and make it easier for workers and employers to match skills with demand is a key option. Broadening talent pipelines can also be facilitated through publicly supported job fairs and hiring halls. These events provide opportunities to match employers and workers and raise awareness of the skills that can lead to good local and regional jobs.

Opportunity@Work is a strong example of public, private, and nonprofit partnership to build upward economic mobility for workers they define as STARs (Skilled Through Alternative Routes).

Recommendation 4: Invest in regional and sector skill building ecosystems that can pay off in the longer term

The current workforce ecosystem is quite fragmented, which can create challenges for both employers and workers. To create more cohesion within the system, especially as it relates to regional and sector skill-building, industry-driven labor market and economic development analysis can be used to identify up and coming industries and the associated skills. This will allow for funding to be targeted to education and training institutions to design training programs tailored to build these skills, which will allow them to attract and retain leading edge employers to partner with.

There are several ways to support partnerships that will benefit both employer and worker success. Incentivizing the creation of long-term partnerships between employers, skill-builders, and workers with matching funds offered over several years will help create more[10] cohesion within the system resulting in longer-term benefits than one-off, less systematized practices. Another means is to support regional

employer, worker, and skill-builder collaboratives that enable employers to offer "up and out" pathways for workers and ensure smooth transitions to adjacent industries and jobs. Monetary incentives provide the resources to make partnerships happen, but it is also important that employers and skill-builders be recognized and rewarded for their success with awards and honors for successful partnerships, which can include spotlighting employers who have made substantial investments, relative to their size, and produced both public and private benefits.

Work-based Learning

With the national and global conversation around economic competitiveness and the need for skilled talent truly hindering recruitment, hiring, and retention, we are poised to act and transform the workforce landscape in this country. Work-based learning (WBL) is an educational approach or instructional methodology that uses the workplace or real work to provide students with the knowledge and skills that will help them connect school experiences to real-life work activities and future career opportunities. Work-based learning models create an environment where the job seeker is truly connected to the employer and the system is inherently created to provide on-the-job skill-building.

Work-based learning programs are designed to prepare participants for full-time work and help them acquire the knowledge and skills they need to enter or advance in specific career fields. WBL can be a component of a continuum of lifelong learning and skill development for a range of workers and learners, including K-12 students, young adults, college students, adult job seekers, and workers with years of experience. When no workplace is available to host a WBL program, it may be possible to achieve many of the same objectives through simulated experiences and student-run enterprises.

WBL includes several types of earn-and-learn programs — an educational and training model that combines academic learning with practical, on-the-job work experiences. Employees in these programs are provided with opportunities to gain valuable on-the-job training that is both practical and theoretical in scope and relevant to their field of study. Key to an effective earn-and-learn model is the concept of earning money while undertaking the experience. Earn-and-learn programs are designed to enhance the employability and skill sets of participants, helping them make a smoother transition from education, whether secondary or baccalaureate, to the workforce. All earn-and-learn programs are work-based learning initiatives, but not all work-based learning initiatives are earn-and-learn programs.

Recommendation 1: Support and encourage more employers to adopt and expand WBL programs

Work-based learning is an effective way for employers to develop talent in more cost-effective ways, recognize a return on investment, and have access to technical assistance and incentives from both state and federal governments. Adopting these models and implementing them at scale can prove challenging for employers, resulting in registered apprenticeship programs or skill-based learning and hiring not being as widely practiced as it could be. Employers hesitate to participate because the Department of Labor (DOL), state regulations, or program requirements can be onerous, and program development, certification or registration, and administration can be very lengthy and costly.

These programs, however, can often remove barriers for workers who need income and a steady job quickly and federal dollars are often not flexible, equitable, and inclusive and lack uniformity and standards. No one institution or entity can overhaul the registered apprenticeship system, but a clearly coordinated paradigm can allow for information to flow efficiently and consistently, which promotes employer and job seeker goals, in addition to intermediaries being dialed into the circle of critical players that can support job creation, acquisition, onboarding, and advancement.

Work-based Learning Return on Investment

➡ Increased retention and reduced turnover.

➡ Improved recruitment - job seekers are attracted to employers that invest in workers, have career pathways.

➡ Funding available to help offset the cost.

➡ Reduced turnover costs.

➡ Employee engagement and loyalty.

➡ Enhanced talent development and employee pipeline.

➡ Stronger company culture and mentoring possibility.

Recommendation 2: Strengthen coordination of administration and reporting by public agencies

There are several opportunities to help more employees attain the skills they need to be ready to fill in-demand jobs. One option is to expand the federal Pell Grant program to support enrollment in high quality short-term programs that lead to employment. Employer incentives that are both simple and connected to the needs of communities, such as setting tax incentives that are tied to family-impacting wage standards through hourly-wage incentives and employer-tax incentives, can be offered. Additionally, the Department of Labor (or another type of intermediary) can become a national clearing house for the national OJT/RTI standards.

Additional and specific flexibility applied to work-based learning funding and supplemental resources would also be beneficial, such as using Pell Grants for RTI (Related Technical Instruction) coursework and expanded programs. Reporting requirements should also be standardized across agencies that provide funding support. For example, the Department of Labor's standard is simultaneously different but largely duplicative compared to Veterans Affairs, which can create administrative burdens for practitioners, employers, and intermediaries. Lastly, it is vital that funding is inclusive of wage supports and wrap-around service supports to account for cost-of-living adjustments and recognition of the multitude of needs facing different workers and learners.

A more coordinated effort at the state level would also be beneficial, where the state-approving agency for registered apprenticeship is directly connected to human resource associations, labor unions, SMEs, C-suite professionals, education, and workforce and training providers. This can be done through fostering more industry-driven curriculum development and strengthening the role government has in organizing industry associations, chambers of commerce, and SMEs to drive curricula development. This strategy aims to facilitate closer collaboration between educational institutions and employers to provide a structured, coordinated approach to training, with variability as to whether it should be broad or narrow.

Finally, creating collaborative standardized occupational profiles is critical. There is a lack of clear profiles that outline the exact skills, knowledge, and competencies required for specific occupations in an easily accessible, consistently available, web portal. Such standardization would strengthen a platform such as O*Net, a free online career exploration database, and would develop similar, but localized and standardized, national profiles and would provide better clarity and consistency in designing training programs overall. A robust quality assurance and certification system that creates and elevates more established, reputable, organizations and independent bodies would help ensure that training pathways are relevant, pragmatic, and of value. This can be done via monitoring communal standards, conducting, and facilitating examinations, and fostering innovation. It is critical however to ensure that these additional checkpoints and evolutions do not create barriers to entry for low-income and marginalized groups.

There are many players within the workforce ecosystem and there are both important supports for each actor as well as important roles for each to play in strengthening and growing our workforce. Workers need more and better opportunities to meet them where they are. Adoption of a universal essential skills framework that clearly communicates the skills critical for success and related skill-building opportunities to help workers gain those skills is key for career advancement, especially within the most vulnerable populations. Greater utilization, and funding, of career advancement planning and career navigators will also lead to system improvements benefitting both workers and employers. Improved and increased opportunity and access for workers will help them to achieve upward economic mobility for themselves and their families and will expand talent pipelines for employers.

Employers can help develop workers' skills in several ways including the creation of talent development roadmaps, adoption of various work-based learning programs, advocating for increased funding allotted to support adult worker learners, and creating and/or expanding skill-building and training programs for workers. These investments on the part of employers can lead to positive returns, but they can't do it on their own. Employers need more opportunities to build partnerships with businesses, community-based training organizations, labor unions and worker organizations, and funders to improve ROI on skilling strategies and investments.

Additionally, CBOs are a critical pillar in bridging the gaps and connecting workers with valuable resources within the workforce ecosystem. CBOs serve as key intermediaries between workers and employers, facilitating access to workforce support services and providing targeted assistance to individuals seeking new or improved employment opportunities. By increasing funding and flexibility in collaborating with CBOs, policymakers can amplify their impact in reaching a broader range of adults and effectively address the needs of vulnerable populations and people furthest from opportunity. Investment in skill building and workers through the creation of new public and private partnerships will be instrumental in paving the way to expanding and extending our workforce.

Policymakers also have an important role to play in supporting workers, employers, and CBOs. Many sectors want to learn more to adopt, scale, and reimagine work-based learning programs, but do not know where to begin. Policymakers can support and encourage more employers to adopt and expand WBL programs by creating more transparency and understanding around quality, value, and outcomes of the various work-based learning models. They can also improve the WBL system by creating coordinated efforts between public

agencies to streamline eligibility, reporting, and funding requirements for work-based learning programs. Flexible program eligibility criteria are another vital way to allow more workers to take advantage of workforce support services and develop their advancement and professional skillsets. This investment in more flexible eligibility criteria will allow more workers to take advantage of workforce support services. It is important however to not will ensure existing funding is being used efficiently and effectively, in addition to increasing funding that allows CBOs to work with a greater breadth of adults who are looking for new or better employment opportunities.

There is a tremendous opportunity for critical players within the workforce ecosystem to understand their role and importance in connecting more workers with highly sought-after skill sets and job opportunities that are stable, sustainable, and transferable. While there is still more work to do, we have outlined critical stepping stones for improving the system that is pragmatic and achievable.

Start Building Pathways to Better Jobs

The following pages contain resources you can start using today to build toward a healthier workforce ecosystem, as well as more detailed information on the findings listed in this Blueprint for Action.

Keep up-to-date with this project's future impact and Convergence's continued work on economic mobility by signing up for updates at convergencepolicy.org/subscribe.

For more project information and free career-building resources, visit: convergencepolicy.org/pathways-better-jobs

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A: TARGET JOBS SEEKER POPULATION PROFILE

To build empathy and a collective understanding of the different voices that typify the workers facing the greatest barriers, we have developed a worker profile for dialogue stakeholders to drive discussion.

- **Age:** Individuals who are 18+.

- **Economic Situation:** Low to moderate income earners. Given that economies vary greatly from locality to locality and region to region, we have chosen to use the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's definition of these terms based off the Area Median Income.

- **Educational Background:** Individuals who have a variety of educational backgrounds, including:
    - No high school diploma or GED equivalent
    - High school diploma or GED equivalent
    - Non-credential training or certificates
    - Associates degrees
    - 4-year degrees or more

- **Gender:** All individuals but with a special focus on women.

- **Geography:** Individuals in rural, suburban, and urban areas will all be considered.

- **Race/Ethnicity:** Individuals of all races and ethnicities but with a special focus on individuals with the most barriers –Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.

- **Workforce Participation:** Currently employed, under-employed, or long-term unemployed individuals.

APPENDIX B: GRASSROOTS ENGAGEMENT: FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS WITH FRONTLINE WORKERS AT A LARGE NATIONAL RETAILER

BACKGROUND

Between September 29 and October 7, 2022, Convergence staff members interviewed 125 frontline employees at a large national retailer working across 25 stores in the Chicago and St. Louis metropolitan areas. The purpose of these interviews was to gather feedback from workers that could inform the Convergence Collaborative on Pathways to Better Jobs, working to find ways to better connect workers with opportunities to grow their skills and qualifications that will build economic mobility and financial security for their future. The interview questions were designed to gauge worker interest and participation in upskilling and professional growth opportunities and identify barriers that may limit or prevent their engagement in such opportunities. The interviews and listening sessions served as qualitative inputs to bolster intel to support a more inclusive, comprehensive conversation for Dialogue participants as they think through innovative solutions toward creating opportunities for economic mobility. As such, Convergence did not employ a rigorous methodology in designing and conducting these interviews which limits the results' generalizability and should not be applied to all employees at this retailer or other retail workers.

Despite these limitations, the interviews offer a unique, inside look at the challenges and opportunities facing workers at a large private employer. These interviews will inform and guide the Convergence Dialogue on Pathways to Better Jobs as the group begins shaping recommendations for employers, policymakers, educators, and other workforce development partners. In addition, we expect these insights will be useful for our retail partner as well as other employers working to assess the opportunities and barriers in skill-building. Our retail partner has implemented a range of career opportunities and investments in recent years, and other employers assessing the degree to which employees are aware of and utilizing skilling opportunities as well as the barriers constraining such efforts.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1

Employers can address many barriers that workers cite as preventing them from pursuing professional growth opportunities.

Employees, especially those with family commitments, cited that employers should consider integrating upskilling opportunities into the workday and creating more predictable schedules for all positions. Worker complaints about favoritism by supervisors also highlight how important experienced, skilled managers are to job-quality and the continued need for employer investment in developing strong managers. Those with engaged, supportive supervisors were quick to cite them as a key motivator and benefit.

2

Workers need more and better communication about available professional opportunities and how they align with their individual career goals.

One-third of the workers in our sample who expressed interest in professional growth opportunities said that they were not aware of what options were open to them or what career benefits these opportunities would create. To put these workers on productive career pathways, employers, community partners, and skilling providers need to determine how best to communicate with them about available opportunities and their benefits. Most workers were interested in professional growth opportunities but wanted to know if the investment of their time, effort, and possibly money would be worthwhile.

3

Easily accessible training, certifications, and other upskilling opportunities are needed for participation.

Unsurprisingly, workers most frequently participate in professional growth opportunities that are logistically uncomplicated and free or low-cost for them with clear applicability. In some cases, workers suggested that ease of access was a larger contributor to their participation than their level of interest in the program itself.

4

While degree programs remain popular, they frequently are harder to access workers than other advancement opportunities.

Cost as a barrier to career advancement arose in the context of higher education but was seldom mentioned in relation to other certificate or training programs. Workers shared they had not completed their degrees because it was impossible to balance school with family and work commitments. While some workers shared they did not sign up for training opportunities due to work-life balance concerns, nobody told us they were unable to complete a training program because of those commitments. This dynamic suggests that these workers may benefit from earn-and-learn models or other measures to lower the burden of pursuing higher education as a working professional. Workers most likely to engage in higher education, who in some cases had older children requiring less attention, had researched options and were aware of the significant tuition support provided by their employer, which was a testament to the power of these investments. However, most employees were only vaguely aware of the opportunities available, noting opportunities to share and communicate about these resources so that everyone knows they are available.

5

Workers like to feel that they are growing professionally and learning at work — but this desire alone is not enough for them to participate in growth opportunities that are not a good fit in their lives.

Workers repeatedly expressed that they valued engaging work environments that promoted learning and growth and yet simply knowing about a professional opportunity for growth was not always enough for them to take it on. Workers tended to participate in opportunities when they a) understood how it connected to their career goals, b) could financially afford to do so, and c) did not have to disrupt other aspects of their life to participate. It also helped when clear models existed of others, perhaps in a similar life phase, accessing the programs and realizing benefits.

Many of the gaps identified by Pathways to Better Jobs project members around upskilling and other advancement opportunities were reflected in our interviews with frontline retail workers. Dialogue participants have noted that offering training or other advancement opportunities alone is often not enough to move employees up the economic ladder. Advancement opportunities need to be relevant, affordable, and compatible with workers' lives outside of work. Project participants have also pointed to the weak information ecosystem around upskilling programs: Workers need clear communication not only about the existence of such opportunities, but also about the skills, wages, and career trajectories they will gain by participating. Employers likewise need the assurance and knowledge that making investments in worker advancement will pay off for them.

For successful worker advancement, employers and employees alike often need the support of outside workforce development organizations, educational institutions, and other skilling providers, as well as policymakers and political leaders. As our Dialogue participants move forward with our work, the group is eager to develop compelling practices that help all these actors collaborate efficiently and productively to address many of the pain points raised in this report.

RESULTS
Close-ended questions
Each interviewee was asked to share how many years they had been in the workforce overall (not just time at their current employer) and how many miles they travel one-way from home to work. Responses were sorted according to the ranges listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Years in Workforce and Distance from Home to Work					
How long have you been in the workforce? (n=125)			How many miles do you travel one way from your home to your place of work? (n=125)		
Response	Count	Percent	Response	Count	Percent
0-6 months	1	1%	Less than a mile	7	6%
6 months-2 years	9	7%	1-5 miles	51	41%
2-5 years	14	11%	5-10 miles	29	23%
5-10 years	25	20%	10-15 miles	19	15%
10+ years	76	61%	15+ miles	19	15%

Open-ended questions.

Question 1: Are there any professional opportunities, such as training offered by your workplace, that you would like to participate in to achieve your short- and long-term career goals?

Respondents were split on this question. About two-fifths said they were not interested in pursuing any professional opportunities to further their career goals, while about half said they were interested (the remainder were not definitive either way). Of those not interested in pursuing professional opportunities, two-thirds did not elaborate further to explain why. The remaining third said that they were content in their current role and were not looking to pursue any changes.

Respondents who were interested in taking on new professional opportunities provided varying levels of detail about what they would like to pursue. Two-thirds of these respondents identified specific opportunities of interest, with the vast majority pointing to particular positions and/or programs. Those who identified a specific program largely said they would like to take on training opportunities provided through their employer or enroll in a degree program (associate's or bachelor's) with some mentioning interest in classes or certifications that might equip them for technical roles or industry-specific roles like cosmetology or health care.

Of those who shared specific positions they would like to move into, three-quarters were interested in staying at and growing with their employer. The remaining quarter were interested in switching fields and pursing jobs outside of their current employer. Included in this group were a hopeful dentist, hairdresser, nail technician, and surgical technician. Others said they were interested in learning about business, management, and marketing. Some referred to work they had done prior to their current employer that they might want to revisit with improved skills/more experience allowing them to tackle it again at a higher level.

Interestingly, of the respondents interested in taking on professional growth opportunities, one-third either did not know what they wanted to pursue or did not offer any specifics about opportunities of interest. Some were aware of trainings they could participate in but were either unsure which programs made the most sense for their goals or did not think any of the available options were a match. Other interviewees were unaware of or unsure of the options available to them at their current employer and beyond. Nearly all respondents in this category expressed that if the right opportunity presented itself, they would take it on — but that this had not happened yet. For some, the engagement and guidance of a supervisor were a critical piece in their level of awareness of new opportunities.

Question 2: Do you feel there are barriers preventing you from progressing towards your career goals? If so, what are they?

Respondents were evenly split on whether barriers prevented them from progressing towards their career goals: half indicated that they did face barriers of some sort, and half said they did not.

Of those who said they faced barriers in progressing their careers, one-third cited reasons related to children, family, or other personal life matters. Nearly all respondents in this category said that either a lack of time or work scheduling issues prevent them from simultaneously fulfilling family commitments and pursuing professional opportunities. Those who cited a lack of time said that their responsibilities to children or other family members are their priority. According to these respondents, there is no additional room in their schedule for trainings or classes on top of the hours they already work and their family duties.

Respondents who cited scheduling concerns noted that they currently work consistent hours, but that if they were to be promoted, they would have to accept an inconsistent work schedule. For these respondents, an inconsistent schedule would be incompatible with their childcare setup or would adversely impact their family life. As one respondent explained, "Right now I start at 5 am and get out at 2 pm and have enough time to pick up my kids. If, in the future, I [were to] look into a supervisor or lead position, I wouldn't have that [ability to pick up my kids] … once I get promoted, I lose that control."

About one-fifth of those who faced barriers said that issues in the workplace were hindering their upward progress (note: this category did not include the work schedule issue explained above). Respondents in this category cited interpersonal dynamics among colleagues, favoritism by managers, overwhelming workloads (especially during the holiday season), and understaffing. "It feels like no matter how hard you work it's not acknowledged [by your manager]," one person commented regarding favoritism at their store. Others felt comfortable in their current, familiar role and indicated a potential lack of confidence to take on greater responsibility or a need for some encouragement or guidance to make the leap.

Beyond these two most frequently cited barriers — workplace issues and family/personal life commitments — responses were mixed. Some respondents said money was a barrier. Nearly everyone in this category specifically referred to the cost of college programs. Another handful of interviewees said that while they had a goal in mind, they did not know what steps to take to achieve it or did not see a pathway to reaching their goal.

Usually, interviewees who said they faced no barriers had also indicated that they were not interested in pursuing any professional opportunities. In these cases, we asked interviewees to discuss what, if anything, satisfied them about their current role. A few common themes emerged from their responses — namely, that their current position allows them to learn and grow while also providing the flexibility they need. These respondents said that they learn every day at work, which they like because it keeps them engaged. Many also said they enjoy serving customers and getting to work on a variety of tasks in any given shift. Others mentioned their colleagues -- many spoke of appreciating their collaborative, supportive work environment and the ability to learn from (and/or teach) their peers and supervisors. Others cited the flexibility of their schedule, the ease of transferring between positions, and the ability to learn new skills.

Question 3: Have you participated in a skilling opportunity, like a credentialling certificate, degree, and/or a non-degree program, to further your career aspirations?

In the final question, respondents were asked if they had, at any point in their careers, participated in a skilling opportunity to further their career aspirations. Responses were again evenly split, with about half of respondents saying they had and the other half indicating that they had not.

Of those who had participated in some sort of skilling opportunity, two-thirds said that the opportunity they took part in was available to them via their work, whether that was their current employer or a previous employer. The most frequently cited employer-provided programs were digital app-based modules, and in-person classes for certificates, GED, trade school, or college degree programs. Those who had attended classes spoke quite positively about the experience. Some employees acknowledged that they would like to attend but were not yet eligible and did not speak as highly of the self-directed modules available as those who attended these programs. A small number of interviewees indicated access to these programs was a minor point of division among employees as it was viewed as a useful tool some of them could not access. Some employees newer to the employer did not seem aware of the learning opportunities the company provides.

Among workers who had taken part in a skilling opportunity, nearly every person had either 1) received training or certification of some variety (about two-thirds) or 2) taken college-level classes (about two-fifths), with some having done both. Respondents who said they had received training or a certification shared experiences ranging from forklift and project management certifications to food safety and customer service trainings.

Workers were included in the second category if they had previously taken college-level classes or if they had earned a degree (associate's or bachelor's). We also included individuals currently enrolled in classes or degree programs. Workers' fields of study included child development, nursing, dentistry, business management, nutrition, and computer programming. Enrollment status also varied among interviewees: while some had already completed their degrees, others were actively working toward a degree or were taking a break from their studies. Some had a definitive plan to return, while others did not. Another subset had participated in a non-degree program or taken a few classes as part of a training program but had not received a degree.

Half of all respondents said they had never pursued a skilling opportunity. Reasons for not doing so varied among these interviewees, though half of them did not provide any explanation. Of the half that did, responses fell into one of three categories: the individual faced some barrier(s), the individual lacked interest in skilling opportunities, or the individual was considering or planning to participate in the future but had not done so yet. The barriers cited included many of the same issues discussed in the previous section: family responsibilities, cost, time, or lack of information about available opportunities.

INTERVIEW LOGISTICS & METHODOLOGY

Convergence arranged interviews via three Operations Leads, who each liaised with store managers to schedule individual employees for interviews. Store managers either asked for volunteers interested in being interviewed or reached out to specific staff members to request their participation. Participation was voluntary.

Interviews usually lasted around five minutes and were conducted via Zoom. Interviewees dialed in from their respective stores, with many sitting in the same room as colleagues and/or supervisors during their interviews, which may have influenced their responses. While most interviews were conducted with just one interviewee, the Convergence team sometimes interviewed two individuals at once. In most cases, two Convergence staff members attended each interview: one asked the questions and the other recorded responses. While close to 150 interviews were initially scheduled, only 125 occurred due to scheduling issues.

The questions posed to employees were approved by the employer's legal department in advance of the interviews.

The Employment Lifecycle

Stakeholders from the **Convergence Dialogue on Pathways to Better Jobs**, an alliance of employers, community-based organizations, workers, policy professionals, and training providers of all types, seek to address the needs of millions in the low- to moderate-income workforce. Our goal is to find ways to better connect workers with opportunities to grow their skills and qualifications and to navigate the on- and off-ramps that will build economic mobility and financial security for their future.

What unmet needs and gaps do workers, employers, & community-based organizations have within the employment lifecycle?

EMPLOYERS	WORKERS	CBOs
STEP 01 **Career Exploration and Preparation** Identify gaps in talent pipeline	**STEP 01** **Career Exploration and Preparation** Identify short-, medium-, and long-term goals to inform the skills they should acquire for the job they desire	**STEP 01** **Career Exploration and Preparation** Trusted relationships with employers who provide transparent access to career paths or are willing to work to develop those paths in partnership with CBOs so providers can effectively to support workers
STEP 02 **Recruiting and Hiring** Fill talent gaps and cultivate reliable talent pipelines	**STEP 02** **Recruiting and Hiring** Develop and demonstrate essential skills, wage transparency, equitable and clear interview and training processes, and potential for growth	**STEP 02** **Recruiting and Hiring** Foster trusted relationships with employers who provide transparent and equitable applications, interviews, and job descriptions that effectively allow providers to support workers
STEP 03 **Onboarding** Confidence in a worker's requisite skills, or commitment to learn skills on the job and longevity with the company	**STEP 03** **Onboarding** Clear communication about both employer-provided skilling opportunities and the potential for upward mobility, in addition to detailing what success looks like at various points of a position	**STEP 03** **Onboarding** Open and consistent communication with employers and workers to ensure smooth and swift transition into employment
STEP 04 **Advancement** Assurance of return on their investments in workers' upskilling and career advancement	**STEP 04** **Advancement** Employer-provided mentorship, coaching, time, and training that supports advancement	**STEP 04** **Advancement** Clear communication and transparency about skill building needs and timelines in different sectors/industries to help workers achieve upward mobility
STEP 05 **Up-and-Out** Reciprocal skilling network/sector that will allow an employer to benefit from skills gained by workers at other institutions if/when employees shift jobs	**STEP 05** **Up-and-Out** Opportunities to gain adaptable and transferable skills for higher paid and more advanced positions leading to upward mobility	**STEP 05** **Up-and-Out** Information from employers about skills required to advance in the workplace and/or sector and from workers about their evolving career goals and interests

CONVERGENCE

Universal Essential Skills Framework

This document combines essential skills identified across several skills frameworks including the Competency Model Clearinghouse's Building Blocks Model and McKinsey's Defining the skill citizens will need in the future world of work, supplemented with definitions from various other sources. The essential skills listed are critical for worker success. This Framework is intended to be shared directly with stakeholder constituencies who can utilize this Framework, especially those in the low-to-moderate income workforce. The Framework aims to eliminate biases that may be inherent in the language of other models.

Endorsements

We support this guide as individuals. Our organizations have not formally endorsed this guide; affiliations are listed for informational purposes.

Stuart Andreason, *The Burning Glass Institute*

Rose-Margaret Ekeng-Itua, *Ohlone College*

Scott Fast, *Innovate+ Educate*

Jaimie Francis, *U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation*

Ellen Frank-Miller, *Workforce & Educational Research Center*

Jane Graupman, *International Institute of Minnesota*

Roman Jackson, *JobsFirstNYC*

Beila Leboeuf, *Walmart*

Deeneaus Polk, *3LEVATE*

Priya Ramanathan, *General Assembly*

Eddie Santiago, *Bowery Residents Committee*

Lisa Schumacher, *McDonald's Corporation*

Mike Schwartz, *YWCA of Seattle King Snohomish County*

Jenna Shrove*, U.S. Chamber of Commerce*

PERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS SKILLS *Sometimes referred to as 'soft skills', these are critical for all aspects of life, including on the job.*		
Skill	*Definition*	*Examples of the Skill*
Active Listening	Be present, remember what is being said, and acknowledge it in following conversations and decisions.	→ Building trust and establishing rapport. → Demonstrating concern. → Asking specific questions and using brief verbal affirmations like: "I see," "I know," "Sure," "Thank you," or "I understand" or "I think this is what you said, and repeating what you think they said for clarification.

Adaptability & Flexibility	Adapt to new, different, or changing requirements, be open to new ideas, and dealing with change.	→ Incorporating a new piece of technology into your work for example, Zoom video conferencing. → Adapting to "hybrid" workplaces. → Being open to learning and considering new ways of doing things. → Embracing new approaches when appropriate and discarding approaches that are no longer working.
Collaboration	Strive for collective goals and coordinate effectively to achieve them. Ensure all voices are heard.	→ Openly receiving feedback from and giving feedback to coworkers and supervisors. → Collaborating on team projects. → Knowledge sharing.
Verbal Communication	Deliver constructive criticism and voice objections to others' ideas and opinions in a supportive, non-accusatory manner, and respond appropriately to positive and negative feedback.	→ The ability to ask good questions and give critical feedback. The ability to solicit feedback. → The ability to be proactive in requesting information from co-workers. Participating in brainstorming sessions. → Listening to a customer's concern and summarizing it to them so that they feel heard.
Written Communication	Express relevant information appropriately to individuals or groups taking into account the audience and the nature of the information. Proofreading skills.	→ Drafting clear and effective emails and other written communication. Summarizing your thoughts in precise language and in a logically organized and coherent manner.
Conflict Resolution	Identify, surface, and solve a conflict in a way that is conducive to both progress and good team dynamics. Individuals consider disagreement to be normal	→ Assertiveness, addressing issues in a timely manner. → Mediation, empathy, facilitation, creative problem solving and[with] accountability.

	and tend to identify and address potential conflicts.	
Critical Thinking in Workplace	Use logical thought processes based on facts, statements, or arguments to analyze information and draw conclusions.	→ Problem-solving: Identifying causes of a problem and evaluating various solutions. → Decision making: Considering possible outcomes and risks. → Identify inconsistent or missing information. → Drawing conclusions from relevant information.
Dependability & Reliability	Display responsible behaviors at work by fulfilling obligations, attendance and punctuality, attending to details, and following directions.	→ Being of your words; others know they can count on you or your guidance for successful completion or best satisfying option per desired and shared wants/needs. → Behaving consistently, predictably, and reliably. → Fulfilling obligations, completing assignments, and meeting deadlines.
Empathy	Understand and share the feelings of another. Understand how different personalities feel and react in various circumstances and make others feel better through appropriate actions and behaviors.	→ Ability to put oneself in others place without judging, and treating others as you want to be treated. → Demonstrating respect for the opinions, perspectives, customs, and individual differences of others. → Providing equal access to opportunities and resources for all people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized.
Initiative	Demonstrate a commitment to effective job performance by taking action on one's own and following through to get the job done. Persisting, taking initiative, setting challenging goals, working independently, and achievement motivation.	→ Voluntarily taking on a project that is not part of your usual workflow in order to help the team or company. → Seeking out new responsibilities and work challenges, increasing the variety and scope of your work.

		→ Pursuing work with energy, drive, and effort to accomplish tasks. → Going "above and beyond". → Offering to serve and not waiting to be asked for needed help.
Integrity	Being honest, ethical, and trustworthy in interactions with others.	→ Accepting responsibility for one's decisions and actions. → Demonstrating respect for company's time and property → Compliance of agreed upon rules at all times [project duration]
Negotiation	Communicating and bargaining with others. Finding common ground, understanding the needs of all parties involved, and working collaboratively to reach a solution that benefits everyone.	→ Request and receive pay rate with benefits per your experience and skill set when accepting a job offer.
Ownership & Decisiveness	Be responsible for achieving outcomes, taking decisions and actions that drive progress without delays. Individuals feel responsible for achieving outcomes, understand how their work fits into the work of others, taking responsibility for your actions and not blaming others, and making decisions to move things forward.	→ Working independently and effectively at work → Being proactive, accountable, and transparent. → Working to continuously improve. With the ability for work to identify as your brand.
Relationship Building	Develop constructive and cooperative working relationships with others.	→ Respecting others, one needs to communicate effectively for successful relationships.

Self-Control & Regulation	Be rational and calm in emotionally charged moments. Understand what may make you upset at work and manage those feelings as best as you can or talk with your supervisor if they persist. Understand how emotions affect decisions.	→ Staying calm and clear-headed in stressful situations. → Problem solving effectively with coworkers; with the understanding rules and boundaries are for safety and wellbeing of/for everyone.
Self-Advocacy	Speaking up for oneself and taking an active role in communicating and advocating for one's needs, rights, and goals, in a respectful, assertive, and effective manner.	→ Identifying needs and goals. → Communicating assertively. → Seeking support. → Taking a stand for your values without intentionally harming or hurting others.
Lifelong Learning	Demonstrate a commitment to self-development and improvement of knowledge and skills by participating in learning activities, using change as a learning opportunity, identifying career interests, and integrating and applying learning.	→ Providing examples of how you are self teaching. → Embracing emerging technologies. → Explaining how your ideas have helped the bottom line. → Asking questions and showing rather than telling.

ACADEMIC KNOWLEDGE
Critical skills usually learned in a school setting, but which can be learned at any point throughout life.

Skill	*Definition*	*Examples of the Skill*
Reading	Understand written sentences, paragraphs, and figures in work-related documents on paper, on computers, or adaptive devices. This includes understanding meaning, paying attention to detail, critically analyzing information, and integrating new information with existing knowledge and applying what is learned.	→ Following directions, instructions and communication on the job → Reviewing written materials and directions, understanding them, and

		be able to apply what is learned to work situations
Writing	Use standard English to compile information and prepare written documents on paper, on computers, or adaptive devices.	→ Writing effective emails and other communication at work. → Using correct grammar, spelling, punctuation and capitalization in writing. → Writing in a factual manner in a tone appropriate for the target audience.
Math	Use mathematics to solve problems. Computation, measurement and estimation, and application of basic math skills.	→ Adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing whole numbers, fractions, decimals and percents. → Taking measurement of time, temperature, distance, length, width, height, and weight.

DIGITAL SKILLS
A range of abilities to use digital devices, communication applications, and networks to access and manage information.

Skill	*Definition*	*Examples of the Skill*
Digital Access	Knowing how and where to access technology if you do not have a computer at home.	→ Finding your local library, obtaining a library card, and accessing library computers.
Digital Foundation	The basic skills needed to engage in work with digital devices.	→ Turning on a device. → Using the available controls on the device. → Making use of accessibility tools on the device to make it easier to use. → Interacting with the home screen on the device.

		→ Understanding that the internet allows the individual to access information and content and that one can connect to it through Wi-Fi. → Connecting the device to a safe and secure Wi-Fi network. → Connecting to the internet and opening a browser to find and use websites. → Understanding that passwords and personal information need to be kept safely as they have value to others. → Updating and changing password when prompted to do so.
Digital Collaboration	Collaborate effectively through digital channels, including email, videoconference, file-sharing platforms, and other messaging applications.	→ Participating in online meetings, webinars, and team chat rooms. → Using social media. → Co-authoring documents.

Digital Literacy	Digital literacy is the ability to navigate, evaluate and communicate information online or in digital format.	→ Things you can accomplish with basic digital literacy skills:
		
		  o Sending email
		  o Utilizing social media for networking and finding and applying for jobs
		  o Academic uses
		  o Online banking
		  o Looking for answers to questions
		  o Researching local government
		  o Telehealth
		  o Arranging transportation
		  o Housing search
		  o Applying for benefits

WORKPLACE SKILLS
Skills that are generally applicable to a large number of occupations and industries.

Skill	*Definition*	*Examples of the Skill*
Professionalism	Maintain a professional presence. Demonstrate self-control and social responsibility, take responsibility for actions, have a professional appearance, maintain a positive attitude, and the ability to receive feedback and adjust performance going forward.	→ Demonstrating self-control by maintaining composure and keeping emotions in check even in difficult situations. → Dressing appropriately for the job and maintaining personal hygiene. → Using professional language when speaking with others.
Teamwork	Work cooperatively with others to complete work assignments. Know when to show leadership, when to delegate, and value other's contributions.	→ Actively looking for additional tasks when work is done. → Actively looking for ways to help other people. → Developing constructive and trusting working relationships. → Interacting respectfully with team members.

Planning & Organizing	Plan and prioritize work to manage time effectively and accomplish assigned tasks.	→ Scheduling tasks so that work is completed on time.
		→ Allocating time and resources effectively.
		→ Setting S.M.A.R.T. goals:
		   ○ **Specific**: Be specific. Clearly state what your goal is. What do you want to achieve?
		   ○ **Measurable**: How will you track your progress? How will you know you're on your way to achieving your goal?)
		   ○ **Achievable**: Is this goal attainable? Do you have the skills and tools you

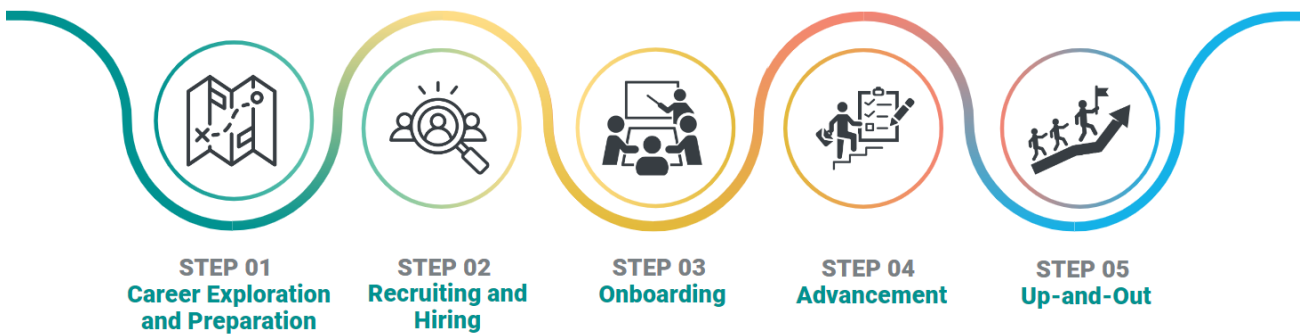|		
		need? If not, how can you gain them? ○ **Realistic**: Is your goal too ambitious? Is your aim practical? Is it pie in the sky? ○ **Timed**: When do you want to achieve your aim by? When's the deadline?
Problem-Solving & Decision-Making	Generate, evaluate, and implement solutions to problems. Identify the problem, locate, gather, and organize relevant information, break the problem down into smaller pieces if necessary, generate alternatives, choose a solution, and implement the solution.	→ Working with a frustrated customer to identify the source of their frustration and then making decisions about the best way to address their dissatisfaction. → Identifying and defining the problem, generating possible solutions, and choosing a solution.
Checking, Examining, & Recording	Enter, record, store, or maintain information in written or electronic/digital format.	→ Completing and reviewing timesheets. → Recording notes from a meeting.
Time Management & Prioritization	Identify urgent and important activities, prioritize them appropriately, choose the most efficient way to complete them, meet deadlines, and respect other people's time.	→ Using to-do lists and checklists. → Stress management. → Setting short and long term goals.
Work Plan Development	Identify and group the tasks needed to achieve a certain goal and assign deadlines and responsibilities.	→ Input and follow-up with decision-maker and/or immediate supervisor of resource, data and/or appropriate tools needed in a timely manner for achieving win/win goals. → Performance measure and/or productivity evaluation/review fairly apply for timely adjustments.

		→ Prioritize multiple expected goals delivery from/with decision-maker and/or immediate supervisor's order of urgencies, and reaffirm order as challenge/issues encountered shared at scheduled check-ins.
		→ Have expected merit, reward, recognition and/or promotion agreed upon per company and/or dept. head clearly stated and sign-off on
Customer Service	Actively looking for ways to identify market demands and meet the customer or client need.	→ Listening to customers intently, summarizing what they have said, and making them feel valued. This could include discussing products or solutions to any needs they identified.

Career Advancement Guide

Stakeholders from the *Convergence Collaborative on Pathways to Better Jobs,* an alliance of employers, community-based organizations, workers, policy professionals, and training providers of all types, sought to address the needs of millions in the low- to moderate-income workforce. Our goal was to find ways to better connect workers with opportunities to grow their skills and qualifications and to navigate the on- and off-ramps that will build economic mobility and financial security for their future. This guide is intended to be shared with those that engage directly with workers such as career navigators to provide guidance and resources to help workers maximize each stage of the worker lifecycle.

Worker Lifecycle

STEP 01
Career Exploration and Preparation

STEP 02
Recruiting and Hiring

STEP 03
Onboarding

STEP 04
Advancement

STEP 05
Up-and-Out

Who Is This Guide For?
Career navigators, talent development professionals, etc. Anyone who engages directly with workers.

Endorsements
We support this guide as individuals. Our organizations have not formally endorsed this guide; affiliations are listed for informational purposes.

Stuart Andreason *The Burning Glass Institute*	**Jane Graupman** *International Institute of Minnesota*	**Eddie Santiago** *Bowery Residents Committee*
Rose-Margaret Ekeng-Itua *Ohlone College*	**Roman Jackson** *JobsFirstNYC*	**Lisa Schumacher** *McDonald's Corporation*
Scott Fast *Innovate+ Educate*	**Beila Leboeuf** *Walmart*	**Mike Schwartz** *YWCA of Seattle King Snohomish County*
Jaimie Francis *U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation*	**Deeneaus Polk** *3LEVATE*	**Jenna Shrove** *U.S. Chamber of Commerce*
Ellen Frank-Miller *Workforce & Educational Research Center*	**Priya Ramanathan** *General Assembly*	**Marie Victor-Wiggins** *Restaurant Opportunities Centers United*

Questions for Jobs Seekers to Consider	Associated Resources & Advice

Goals
 	
1. What are my short-, medium-, and long-term goals?
 	
   a. What are my immediate job search goals?
   b. How do I set my goals and measure my progress towards achieving them?
   c. What kind of educational training do I need to achieve my goals?
      i. Do I have the skills and resources needed to research and explore different training programs related to my interests and the skills needed to advance?
   d. Where can I get that training and how can I complete that training?
      i. Can I identify if these programs are available locally and in what format (online courses, vocational training, apprenticeship etc.)?
	These resources vary by location. For example, in Colorado you can use My Colorado Journey, which includes outcomes, goals and steps for these goals and connects to tools to explore interests as it relates to careers all the way to how to fund this (workforce centers and higher ed scholarships/grants) and actual job postings.
	
	You can also use SMART goals to help guide job seeker goal-setting.

Skills 2. Do I have the essential skills needed for success in my next job? 3. Do I have the knowledge and access to the tools to analyze which essential skills are most important for the job I seek, and do I know how to communicate that I have these in an interview? If I don't, which organization can help me do that? a. Have I explored resources such as job descriptions, industry associations, companies with internal training programs, whether the position is union supported etc.? 4. What are my existing skills and experience and which career paths are they well suited for? Do I have an interest in those careers? Are there any barriers or something in my background that could keep me from getting the job? If so, what organizations can I contact to help me overcome those barriers?	Once you know what industry you are interested in, you can view the appropriate industry model in the Competency Model Clearinghouse. Please note that this site is related to Career One Stop which has many of the same tools that workforce centers use, which is one of the organizations that can help job seekers to explore jobs. Another option is to search the job on O*NET Online by using the "Occupation Keyword Search" option. The job details are collected from employers and have a lot of valuable information such as the knowledge, skills, abilities, and expected education related to each job. You can help job seekers to search the internet for both "[job name] competencies" and "[job name] job postings" in your area for the job name they wish to obtain. By looking at the job postings they will get a better understanding of the skills, credentials, and education valued for

those jobs, as well as confirm if many of those jobs exist in their location and how much the job pays.

Career Path

5. What are the jobs that I'm most interested in and what do the career paths look like in those fields?

6. What are the skills/experience/education needed for those career paths?

7. What kind of compensation and benefits can I expect on that career path? Does that compensation allow me to meet my goals for my family?

02

What do you do?

What's your main profession?	
How many years have you been in this line of work?	
What are your top five skills?	
What makes you proud of your profession?	

03

Where are you now?

What are your main responsibilities in your current role?	
What is a typical day or week like?	
What are your biggest achievements?	
What are your main challenges?	

Why are you here?

What role are you applying for?	
Why are you applying for that role?	
What do you look forward to about being a part of our company?	
How did you learn about this opportunity?	

THANK YOU!

That should be all for now. We're excited to get to know you more during your first interview.

See you soon and good luck!

Career Navigation Funding Coalition Letter

Dear [RECIPIENT NAME],

Over the last 12 months the ***Convergence Collaborative on Pathways to Better Jobs*** has facilitated a distinct consensus-driven process to bring together stakeholders representing workers, workforce trainers, policymakers, employers, and post-secondary education providers of all types to identify scalable solutions to help low wage workers surmount barriers to upward mobility. Convergence's problem-solving methodology is aimed at building trust and identifying areas of common ground to foster innovations that balance worker needs with those of employers.

Through this cross-sector, cross-partisan, and cross-stakeholder collaboration we found shared support for public investment in career navigation as a high yield and scalable solution that simultaneously addresses employee and employer challenges. This includes addressing the huge skills gap among U.S. workers that are stuck in low wage positions with no pathways for upward mobility and whose skills do not match what is required for positions that employers are struggling to fill.

To address this need, we recommend the following:

→ States with remaining funds from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) should invest these funds into providing accessible and affordable reskilling opportunities for workers and invest in employers who are willing to take a risk on hiring workers who may have less experience in the specific career they are currently hiring for but have great potential to learn the necessary skills for the role.

→ System investments in career navigation should utilize accessible language and meet workers where they are, this will have a positive return on investment in the long run, as proven in San Antonio by Project Quest's 25-year economic impact study.

  o Project Quest yielded a return of investment of $19.82 for every dollar invested.

  o The total economic impact of the project was $1.67 billion.

  o The benefits of these investments are threefold - workers are able to access opportunities that result in upward mobility, employers have increased revenue, and governments see increased tax revenue.

  o Other strong examples of career navigation include SkyHive in New York City, and EMPath in Boston, Massachusetts.

Although funding for career navigators is critical for workers to achieve long-term success, these systems do not typically exist. While we have a system for case management, career navigation serves a more targeted purpose: career advancement. Participants need support navigating systems including workforce, higher education, government resources, and potential places of employment to find the most ideal career pathways resulting in upward economic mobility.

Additionally, workers need to be able to access affordable skill opportunities while keeping wraparound services – such as government benefits – as reflected in New York State's Income

CONVERGENCE

[Disregard Bill (SBS6589A)](#). Our diverse group of ***Convergence Collaborative on Pathways to Better Jobs*** stakeholders stands ready to assist and share additional resources as you consider how to ensure a vital economy by addressing worker advancement and support at every level while filling employer skill gaps at the same time.

Sincerely,

Stuart Andreason
The Burning Glass Institute

Rose-Margaret Ekeng-Itua
Ohlone College

Scott Fast
Innovate+ Educate

Jaimie Francis
U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation

Ellen Frank-Miller
Workforce & Educational Research Center

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Mike Schwartz
YWCA of Seattle King Snohomish County

Jenna Shrove
U.S. Chamber of Commerce

Marie Victor-Wiggins
Restaurant Opportunities Centers United

We support this statement as individuals. Our organizations have not formally endorsed this statement, and our organizational affiliations are listed for informational purposes.

Work-based Learning Taxonomy

Endorsements

We support this taxonomy as individuals. Our organizations have not formally endorsed this taxonomy, and our organizational affiliations are listed for informational purposes.

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Beila Leboeuf
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Marie Victor-Wiggins
*Restaurant Opportunities
Centers United*

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Work-based Learning

Work-based Learning (WBL) is an approach to training in which a student or worker completes meaningful tasks in a workplace. Such programs are designed to prepare participants for full-time work and help them acquire the knowledge and skills they need to enter or advance in particular career fields. WBL can be a component of a continuum of lifelong learning and skill development for a range of workers and learners, including K-12 students, young adults, college students, adult jobseekers, and workers with years of experience. When no workplace is available to host a WBL program, it may be possible to achieve many of the same objectives through simulated experiences and student-run enterprises. WBL is also an effective way for employers to develop talent in more cost-effective ways, recognize a return on investment, and have access to technical assistance and incentives from both state and federal government. WBL includes several types of earn-and-learn programs — an educational and training model that combines academic learning with practical, on-the-job work experiences. Employees in these programs are provided with opportunities to gain valuable on-the-job training that is both practical and theoretical in scope and relevant to their field of study. Key to an effective earn-and-learn model is the concept of earning money while undertaking the experience. Earn-and-learn programs are designed to enhance the employability and skill sets of participants, helping them make a smoother transition from education, whether secondary or baccalaureate, to the workforce. All earn-and-learn programs are work-based learning initiatives, but not all work-based learning initiatives are earn-and-learn programs.

Work-based Learning Return on Investment

→ Increased retention and reduced turnover.

→ Improved recruitment — job seekers are attracted to employers that invest in workers and have career pathways.

→ Funding available to help offset the cost.

→ Reduced turnover costs.

→ Employee engagement and loyalty.

→ Enhanced talent development and employee pipeline.

→ Stronger company culture and mentoring possibility.

Work-based Learning in Practice

→ Jobs for the Future: Earn-and-learn means work-based learning strategies designed to ensure that learners are paid for their work experiences. This can apply to a range of work-based learning models, particularly those that provide career engagement or career experience.

→ Brookings: Earn-and-learn strategies combine work experience and education while simultaneously providing income.

→ California Department of Consumer Affairs: Earn-and-learn programs combine applied learning in a workplace setting with paid wages, which in turn allow workers or students to gain work experience and develop skills and competencies directly relevant to the occupation or career for which they are preparing. These programs can also combine classroom instruction with paid on-the-job training.

→ There are also programs like this work-based course model for manufacturing workers that don't fall squarely into either category of on-the-job training or apprenticeships but is also an example of earn-and-learn programs.

→ Siemens offers a Dual Vocational Program that combines theoretical coursework with practical on-the-job training in various technical and commercial disciplines. This program aims to equip students with the necessary skills and knowledge to excel in their chosen careers while addressing the company's need for a highly skilled workforce.

→ Project on Workforce at Harvard: Work-based learning opportunities in the college ecosystem improve economic outcomes for students.

Types of Work-based Learning

Registered Apprenticeship Program

Apprenticeship programs provide long-term paid work-based learning opportunities and structured educational curricula that ensure the learner gains education and hands-on experience in an occupation, similar to how we train medical doctors, with a mix of classroom training and residency experience. Registered apprenticeship programs are formally registered with the United States Department of Labor (USDOL).

USDOL registered apprenticeship training is distinguished from other types of workplace training by several factors:

1. Apprenticeships are jobs. Apprentices earn wages from their employers during training;

2. Apprenticeship programs provide structured on-the-job learning and job-related classroom training;

3. On-the-job learning is conducted in the work setting under the direction of a mentor(s); and

4. Training results in an industry-recognized and portable credential.

On-the-Job Training

The term "on-the-job training" (OJT), also known as on-the-job-learning, means training by an employer that is provided to a paid participant while that participant is engaged in productive work in a job that: A) provides knowledge or skills essential to the full and adequate performance of the job; B) provides reimbursement to the employer for the extraordinary costs of training and the additional supervision related to the training, which are usually calculated at half the pay rate for the agreed-upon training period; and C) is limited in duration, taking into account the type of job, the participant's prior related work and education, and the participant's individual training plan or strategy.

Examples:
WIOA OJT state-level programs

→ Alabama

→ Mississippi

→ DC

→ Massachusetts

→ Missouri

→ Ohio

→ Boeing OJT Project

- o [Making On-the-Job Training Work Lessons from the Boeing Manufacturing On-the-Job Training Project](#) (JFF / National Fund for Workforce Solutions)
- o [Boeing OJT 2.0](#) (National Fund for Workforce Solutions)

There are three types of on-the-job learning (OJL), which is an interchangeable term with OJT, under a registered apprenticeship program:

Time-based Apprenticeship
After a certain number of hours on-the-job the apprentice is determined qualified or competent.

Competency-based Apprenticeship
Instead of tying the qualifications to a set of hours, apprentices must demonstrate competency in specific skills.

Hybrid Apprenticeship
A combination of time-based and competency-based, where the apprentice is given blocks of time to develop their competencies.

Classroom Training
There are three types of classroom training (also known as Related Technical Instruction (RTI)) models under a registered apprenticeship program:

Traditional
RTI is conducted in congruence with on-the-job learning in a "just in time" model. The program length varies and is driven by industry needs where talent pipelines are created in "just in time", as each need becomes apparent to the employer.

Front-loaded Apprenticeship
Front-loaded apprenticeship programs may require the apprentice to complete all RTI in a classroom setting before starting on-the-job training or complete a majority of classroom training up front, with diminishing time spent in related classroom instruction over the length of the program. This allows the worker learner to acquire skills critical for the role before their first day.

Segmented
RTI is segmented between periods of on-the-job training.

> Resource for OJT and RTI: *A quick start toolkit to Building a Registered Apprenticeship program*

Other Registered Apprenticeship Program Models
Pre-apprenticeship
Pre-apprenticeship is a program or set of services designed to prepare individuals to enter and succeed in a Registered Apprenticeship program. A pre-apprenticeship program, by definition, has a documented partnership with at least one Registered Apprenticeship program. Quality pre-apprenticeship programs are a starting point toward a successful career path for under-represented job seekers (such as disadvantaged women and men, individuals with disabilities, and others) who may not be aware of this

approach to obtain good jobs with opportunities for advancement. These programs can be delivered by a range of entities, including community-based organizations, high schools, labor organizations, workforce agencies, and community colleges. At educational institutions, the programs can and should be integrated directly into the existing curriculum and structure.

Youth Apprenticeship

A Youth Apprenticeship (YA) program is an apprenticeship specifically designed for and serving youth—whether in or out of school—between the ages of 16 and 24. It provides opportunities for students to experience and gain skills in a real work environment and gives businesses a chance to inspire and develop a new generation of talent. Unlike an internship, which is often a short-term opportunity to learn more broadly about a field, a youth apprenticeship is an industry-driven education and career training program based on recognized industry standards. Youth apprenticeships are also paid, and classroom training is connected to the apprenticeship's on-the-job training. Youth apprenticeship is not simply a job; it is a postsecondary strategy intended to teach a wide range of industry-specific knowledge and skills and help young people earn valuable credentials they can use to advance into successful careers. Additionally, youth apprenticeships can serve as a pipeline of skilled young workers that can help meet employer needs for new, diverse, and young talent.

Segmented

RTI is segmented between periods of on-the-job training.

Examples of Registered Apprenticeships

→ The North Carolina Triangle Apprenticeship Program (NCTAP) aims to develop technology and engineering talent in the Research Triangle area through a four-year program starting in the 11th grade. (*This is a registered apprenticeship.*)

→ CareerWise Colorado works with educators and employers in a variety of industries to create and operate modern youth apprenticeships. *(CareerWise works with both registered and non-registered apprenticeships.)*

→ The Chicago Apprenticeship Network, founded by Aon, Accenture, and Zurich North America, has now expanded to include upward of 40 companies across various industries, as well as several education and nonprofit partners. (*Chicago Apprenticeship Network works with both registered and non-registered apprenticeships.*)

→ The Industrial Manufacturing Technician Apprenticeship helps entry-level workers in manufacturing quickly enhance their skills and advance with their current employer. Because of changing manufacturing technologies, entry-level work requires higher skills than ever, and employers struggle to recruit and retain highly skilled entry-level workers. (*This is a registered apprenticeship.*)

→ Blue Cross Blue Shield South Carolina has utilized apprenticeships for over 20 years to strengthen company culture, lower attrition, and fulfill other workforce needs. (*This is a registered apprenticeship.*)

→ The Hospitality Management apprenticeship program is a two-year program; apprentices usually spend one day per week in class on campus and four days on site at the employer's location engaging in on-the-job training in a range of hospitality occupations. (*This is a registered apprenticeship.*)

→ The yearlong Care Navigator apprenticeship program has concurrent classroom training and on-the-job training. Mentors participate in a half-day training to prepare them for the mentoring role. (*This is a registered apprenticeship.*)

→ Apprenti helps employers address mid-level tech talent needs through 22 different IT apprenticeship programs. (*This is a registered apprenticeship.*)

Co-op Model

Co-op models of skill-building include a partnership between an employer, student, and university classroom study. This model is otherwise known as work-integrated learning (WIL), which combines theory with the practice of work. Co-op models allow for students to take time off school to fully immerse in their industry of choice or to split their time between work and school.

Internship

Internships are an opportunity for students and new graduates to gain work experience in a professional setting. Interns work under the supervision of a mentor and are paid except in very specific situations. The placements take place for a set period of time with an understanding by the employer and intern that there's no guarantee of employment at the end of the program.

Micro-internship

Short-term, paid, professional assignments that are similar to those given to new hires or interns. These projects enable learners to demonstrate skills, explore career paths, and build their networks as they seek the right major and/or full-time career path. Unlike traditional internships, micro-Internships can take place year-round, are not bound by an academic calendar, typically range from 10 to 40 hours of work, and assignments are due between one to six weeks after kickoff (e.g., Parker Dewey).

Project-based Learning

Project-based Learning (PBL) involves students designing, developing, and constructing hands-on solutions to a problem. The educational value of PBL is that it aims to build students' creative capacity to work through difficult or ill-structured problems, commonly in small teams.

Incumbent Worker Training

Training that employers provide to existing workers to keep their skills updated, sometimes with government subsidy or tax incentives. Incumbent worker training must satisfy the requirements in WIOA sec. 134(d)(4) and increase the competitiveness of the employee or employer. For purposes of WIOA sec. 134(d)(4)(B), incumbent worker training is training:

a. Designed to meet the special requirements of an employer (including a group of employers) to retain a skilled workforce or avert the need to lay off employees by assisting the workers in obtaining the skills necessary to retain employment.

b. Conducted with a commitment by the employer to retain or avert the layoffs of the incumbent worker(s) trained.

Customized Training

Training designed for new hires on specific employer requirements, often with subsidy from the employer.

Transitional Jobs

Time limited work experiences that are subsidized for individuals with barriers to employment, such as people with conviction records, to de-risk hiring.

Military Training

The United States has training and education command units in each branch of the military that provide Hands-On training and have centers of excellence, applied universities, and management schools.

Practicums, Residencies, and Fellowships

Health Professions such as nurses and medical doctors require learners to complete practical experience hours under the close supervision of a more experienced professional.

Best Practices for Employers & Partners to Support Work-based Learning Programs

Skills-based Hiring

Skills-based hiring, also known as competency-based hiring, is the practice of making a strategic decision to refocus hiring requirements to screen candidates based on their relevant skills and experience to fill open roles with high-quality talent instead of focusing solely on academic credentials. Skills-based hiring requires scrutinizing college degree requirements, removing those that are unnecessary, and evaluating candidates on the basis of their skills, rather than pedigree.

Workforce Intermediary

Workforce intermediaries and collaboratives are organizations that bring together partners in the workforce system to identify workforce needs; plan, develop, and implement strategies; and raise funds to support these strategies. Workforce intermediaries can be any organization functioning as a broker between employers and job seekers to more successfully place job seekers in available jobs. A more comprehensive intermediary may bring together multiple partners across a local labor market to create a coordinated and strategic approach to effectively meet employers' and job seekers' needs. Local workforce development boards may serve in this role, but partners across a local workforce system may create a new organization to serve as its intermediary.

Wrap-Around Services

A philosophy of care and service provision is characterized by a planning process involving a focal person, concerned family members, and service providers. It results in a highly individualized set of closely coordinated community services and natural supports for the person and his or her family, which achieves a variety of intervention outcomes. These services are often provided by workforce intermediaries such as community-based organizations, language centers, and career programs and/or are referred to connect with workforce stakeholders.

Work-based Learning Coalition Letter

Dear [RECIPIENT NAME],

Over the last 12 months the ***Convergence Collaborative on Pathways to Better Jobs*** used a unique consensus-driven process to bring together stakeholders representing workers, workforce trainers, policymakers, employers, and post-secondary education providers of all types to identify scalable solutions to help low-wage workers surmount barriers to upward mobility. Convergence's problem-solving methodology is aimed at building trust and identifying areas of common ground to foster innovations that balance worker needs with those of employers.

Work-based learning (WBL) is one such solution that we, the undersigned cross-sector, cross-partisan Convergence Dialogue stakeholders, agree upon. WBL is a cost-effective workforce investment model that increases retention and improves recruitment. For example, the average employer experiences more than $17,800 in net benefits per apprentice. And of individuals who participate in registered apprenticeships, 90% retain employment, with an average annual salary of $80,000.

We offer the below for your consideration to elevate and enhance WBL to effectively address talent gaps for employers and to improve skills and advancement for workers:

FEDERAL

→ Expand federal grant programs to support enrollment in high quality, short-term skilling opportunities across industries and sectors.

→ Establish a national clearinghouse for the national standards for on-the-job training (OJT)/ Related Technical Instruction (RTI), housed within the Department of Labor (or an intermediary).

→ Improve reporting processes and standardize reporting requirements for Registered Apprenticeships.

→ Establish funding opportunities that are inclusive of wage and wrap-around service supports to account for the multitude of needs facing different workers and learners.[1]

STATE

→ Incentivize employers to participate in Registered Apprenticeship by offering hourly-wage tax incentives.

→ Strengthen the role of government in partnering with industry associations, chambers of commerce, and small and medium employers to ensure industry-driven curricula development and strong relationships between educational institutions and employers to provide a structured, coordinated approach to training.

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[1] The lack of integrated wrap-around services in job training programs is a major barrier to participation. The Center for Working Families and Courses to Employment offer examples of how to integrate wrap-around services.

CONVERGENCE

OTHER PARTNERS

→ Establish a robust quality assurance and certification system across the work-based learning spectrum that creates and elevates tenured and reputable organizations and independent bodies to ensure that training pathways are relevant, pragmatic, and of value.

→ Strengthen platforms like O*Net by creating standardized occupational profiles that outline the exact skills, knowledge, and competencies required for specific occupations in an easily accessible and consistently available web portal. This will also provide clarity and consistency in designing training programs overall.

Our diverse group of *Convergence Collaborative on Pathways to Better Jobs* stakeholders stands ready to assist and share additional resources as you consider how to ensure a vital economy.

Sincerely,

Stuart Andreason

The Burning Glass Institute

Rose-Margaret Ekeng-Itua

Ohlone College

Scott Fast

Innovate+ Educate

Jaimie Francis

U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation

Ellen Frank-Miller

Workforce & Educational Research Center

Jane Graupman

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West Michigan Works!

Kerry McKittrick

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Deeneaus Polk

3LEVATE

Priya Ramanathan

General Assembly

Jenna Shrove

U.S. Chamber of Commerce

Marie Victor-Wiggins

Restaurant Opportunities Centers United

We support this statement as individuals. Our organizations have not formally endorsed this statement, and our organizational affiliations are listed for informational purposes.

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