



BLUEPRINT FOR ACTION

IPP Solution Design Cohort on Quality Jobs for People with Low Incomes

May 2026

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DESIGNING THE BLUEPRINT FOR ACTION: A MESSAGE FROM THE QUALITY JOBS CHAMPIONS

As the Quality Jobs Champions for the Inclusive Prosperity Partnership, we are honored to share with you the **Blueprint for Action**. This report represents months of dedicated work by the Solution Design Cohort and demonstrates what is possible when leaders across sectors come together around a shared commitment to advancing quality jobs in the St. Louis region.

Each of us stepped into this role from a different place in the region, representing distinct communities and sectors. We bring with us the priorities, realities, and responsibilities of those spaces. From the outset, we knew that meaningful progress would require a solution designed not for any single stakeholder, but for all.

Working in alignment rather than in silos may sound simple, but intentional collaboration requires dedication — a willingness to listen deeply to lived experience, grapple with rigorous data, and remain open to new ways of working. These commitments proved essential to producing meaningful outcomes. **The Blueprint for Action reflects not only what we propose to do, but how we did the work together.**

We are deeply grateful to the members of the Solution Design Cohort. Your engagement, passion, vulnerability, courage, and dedication shaped every aspect of this effort. You showed up consistently, wrestled with hard questions, and remained focused on impact. The resulting Blueprint for Action is stronger because of each member's care, commitment, and unique vantage point brought to this process.

We also extend our sincere thanks to both the Facilitation and Design to Deployment teams — Emerging Wisdom, Convergence Center for Policy Resolution, and New Origin Studios — for guiding this work with such skill. Your expertise created the conditions for productive collaboration across sectors and perspectives.

This work would not have been possible without the IPP's Knowledge Infrastructure Team, including Key Strategic Group, Civic Insight, the East-West Gateway Council of Governments, and United for ALICE. Thank you for translating complex data into actionable insights throughout this process and for grounding our decisions in evidence. The Enhanced Labor Market Analysis, in particular, provided critical guidance to ensure that the solutions outlined here are realistic, targeted, and responsive to regional needs.

DESIGNING THE BLUEPRINT FOR ACTION: A MESSAGE FROM THE QUALITY JOBS CHAMPIONS

We are deeply grateful to the James S. McDonnell Foundation team for helping originate this collaborative effort and for providing the start-up funding that made this intentional, inclusive process possible. Their early support allowed the work to unfold with the depth and care it required. We are also thankful to the other funders who have contributed to this effort and are supporting the implementation of the solutions we have co-designed, including the Berges Family Foundation, Rio Vista Foundation, Marillac Mission Fund, Incarnate Word Foundation, and the St. Louis Community Foundation.

The result of these many contributions is a solution designed to create value across the communities we represent by:

- Supporting St. Louis residents in accessing and advancing in quality job pathways
- Strengthening employers' talent pipelines
- Enabling nonprofit and community partners to collaborate more effectively and connect people to opportunity
- Advancing a more coordinated, responsive workforce ecosystem for the region

The Blueprint for Action outlines the core components of this solution, including the focus populations, priority action areas, and shared definitions and standards that will guide effective implementation.

While the Blueprint for Action marks the culmination of months of hard work, it is a beginning, not an ending. A beginning for a more cohesive, well-coordinated workforce ecosystem for the St. Louis region and for continued collaboration rooted in shared purpose and mutual respect.

Thank you for being part of this journey. We are excited about the possibilities ahead and look forward to working closely with all of the Inclusive Prosperity Partnership's collaborators to advance our shared vision.

Thank you,

Keith George
Vice President, Talent Strategies at BJC Health

Leslie Gill
President & CEO, Rung for Women

Evelyn Kumeh
Founder, Humanity First

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is strength in the St. Louis region’s workforce system. However, access to quality jobs remains uneven and out of reach for many residents. While employers report ongoing demand for talent, many residents—particularly those living in low-income neighborhoods and communities that have experienced long-term disinvestment—remain disconnected from pathways to stable, quality employment. This challenge reflects a workforce ecosystem that is often fragmented, misaligned, and difficult to navigate effectively. The Solution Design Cohort (SDC) process brought representatives from employers, workforce organizations, jobseekers, and civic institutions to a common table. Through the process, they examined regional challenges and found actionable opportunities for increasing access to quality jobs.

The Problem

The current system does not consistently work for the three groups most essential to workforce success—jobseekers, providers, and employers.

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| JOBSEEKERS | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Must navigate fragmented training, employment, and support systems with limited guidance or coordination• Lack clear, trusted information about high-opportunity career pathways, including requirements, timelines, and advancement opportunities• Face inconsistent hiring practices and limited access to stabilizing supports such as childcare, transportation, housing, and mental health services |
| PROVIDERS | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Operate within siloed, jurisdictionally bound systems with limited shared infrastructure• Lack consistent mechanisms to track outcomes and coordinate across organizations• Experience misalignment between training programs and employer hiring and advancement practices |
| EMPLOYERS | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Face persistent talent shortages in high-opportunity roles• Navigate fragmented workforce partnerships with limited coordination• Lack consistent mechanisms to connect with prepared local talent and address non-work barriers that affect retention |

Across these perspectives, three structural barriers emerge: 1. Fragmentation across systems and funding; 2. Limited capacity to support the whole person over time; and 3. Siloed, and at times intermittent, employer engagement.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Solution

To address these challenges, the Solution Design Cohort proposes a coordinated regional approach:

Create a shared, human-centered workforce onramp that integrates high-touch and high-tech navigation, targeted wraparound supports, and employer-aligned skill pathways into a focused set of high-opportunity industries and roles.

The Six Components

<p>1. Shared Front Door: Create coordinated entry points into workforce pathways through a high-tech, centralized platform supported by multiple access locations (online, community-based, and institutional)</p>	<p>2. High-Touch, Human Integration: Provide coaching and navigator roles that connect jobseekers to services, training, and employment opportunities using shared data and real-time labor market information</p>	<p>3. Focused on High-Quality Pathways: Align stakeholders around a defined, limited set of industries and roles where demand is strong and advancement opportunities exist</p>
<p>4. Incentivized Employer Participation: Engage employers through cohorts, peer leadership, shared job-quality standards, and demonstrated returns on investment</p>	<p>5. Integrated, Whole-Human Supports: Embed wraparound supports directly into workforce pathways and maintain engagement beyond placement to support stabilization and advancement</p>	<p>6. System Infrastructure (Funding, Data, and Messaging): Strengthen regional coordination through braided funding strategies, shared outcomes dashboards, aligned pathway governance, and a common narrative about workforce opportunity</p>

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Rather than adding new standalone programs, this approach strengthens the underlying infrastructure that connects jobseekers, providers, and employers to improve how the system functions as a whole. It balances scale and personalization through both digital tools and sustained human support, enabling clearer pathways into quality jobs and stronger long-term outcomes.

Focus Populations

This work is intentionally focused on residents who face the greatest barriers to accessing quality jobs and who stand to benefit most from a more coordinated system.

The Solution Design Cohort prioritized four focus populations:

1. Individuals living in Low Income Neighborhoods (LIN);
2. Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed households (ALICE);
3. Skilled Underpaid Earners (SUE);
4. Youth ages 14–24.

These populations reflect data showing stark disparities in access to economic opportunity across the region, particularly for Black residents and those in historically disinvested communities.

What Happens Next

With the completion of the Design phase, the work now enters the Design to Deployment phase to shift from strategy development to implementation. In the months ahead, partners will build the operating and business models needed to bring this system to life, including clarifying roles. This phase will include designing and testing pilots of the solution, refining the approach based on real-world learning, and launching an initial version of a coordinated workforce system.

ABOUT THE INCLUSIVE PROSPERITY PARTNERSHIP

The Inclusive Prosperity Partnership (IPP) is a regional initiative designed to strengthen economic mobility and advance inclusive growth across the St. Louis region. Grounded in the understanding that solutions are stronger and more sustainable when they are designed with all stakeholders in mind, the IPP brings together philanthropic partners, employers, public agencies, service providers, and community voices to co-design and implement solutions that create pathways to long-term economic mobility. By investing in how the region collaborates, the IPP's goal is to enable the St. Louis region to address complex barriers to economic mobility and inclusive growth.

The IPP is designed as a long-term civic infrastructure investment. Rather than supporting isolated programs, the IPP advances a coordinated regional approach that combines collaborative solution design, targeted implementation funding, and shared learning to accelerate progress over time. Through pooled philanthropic investment and cross-sector partnership, the IPP supports community-informed strategies that can be tested, refined, and scaled across the region.

Over the next decade, the IPP will address five major barriers to economic mobility through a series of issue-focused cycles. For each cycle, the IPP will convene a Solution Design Cohort (SDC)—a diverse group of stakeholders with different perspectives and connections to the issue—to co-create solutions and develop actionable implementation strategies. The IPP will support the design, planning, piloting, and launch of scalable interventions for each issue area.

ABOUT THE QUALITY JOBS SOLUTION DESIGN COHORT (SDC)

The first issue area, expanding access to quality jobs for people with low incomes, serves as a central lever for improving financial stability and strengthening the regional workforce. A quality job is defined as one that provides a living wage, comprehensive benefits, and opportunities for advancement. For the purposes of this work, “low income” refers to individuals earning less than \$50,000 annually and families earning less than \$100,000 annually in the St. Louis region. These thresholds align with benchmarks from the MIT Living Wage Calculator, which estimates the income required for individuals and families to meet basic needs (including housing, food, transportation, healthcare, and childcare) without relying on public assistance. Increasing access to these jobs is essential not only for individual and family well-being, but also for the long-term competitiveness and resilience of the regional economy.

Despite its many assets, the St. Louis region continues to face persistent disparities in access to quality jobs. While employers report ongoing demand for talent, many residents—particularly those living in low-income neighborhoods and communities that have experienced long-term disinvestment—remain disconnected from pathways to stable, quality employment.

St. Louis’s economic growth rate from 2012 to 2022 ranked in the bottom third of U.S. metropolitan areas, limiting opportunity for St. Louis residents.

In 2024, nearly half (45.7%) of people in the St. Louis region did not have sufficient income to cover basic living expenses.

Racial disparities in median household income are more pronounced for families with young children.

Source: American Community Survey, St. Louis MSA (5 year estimate: 2017-2021)

Non-Hispanic White

\$76,283

\$100,991

Black/African American

\$39,460

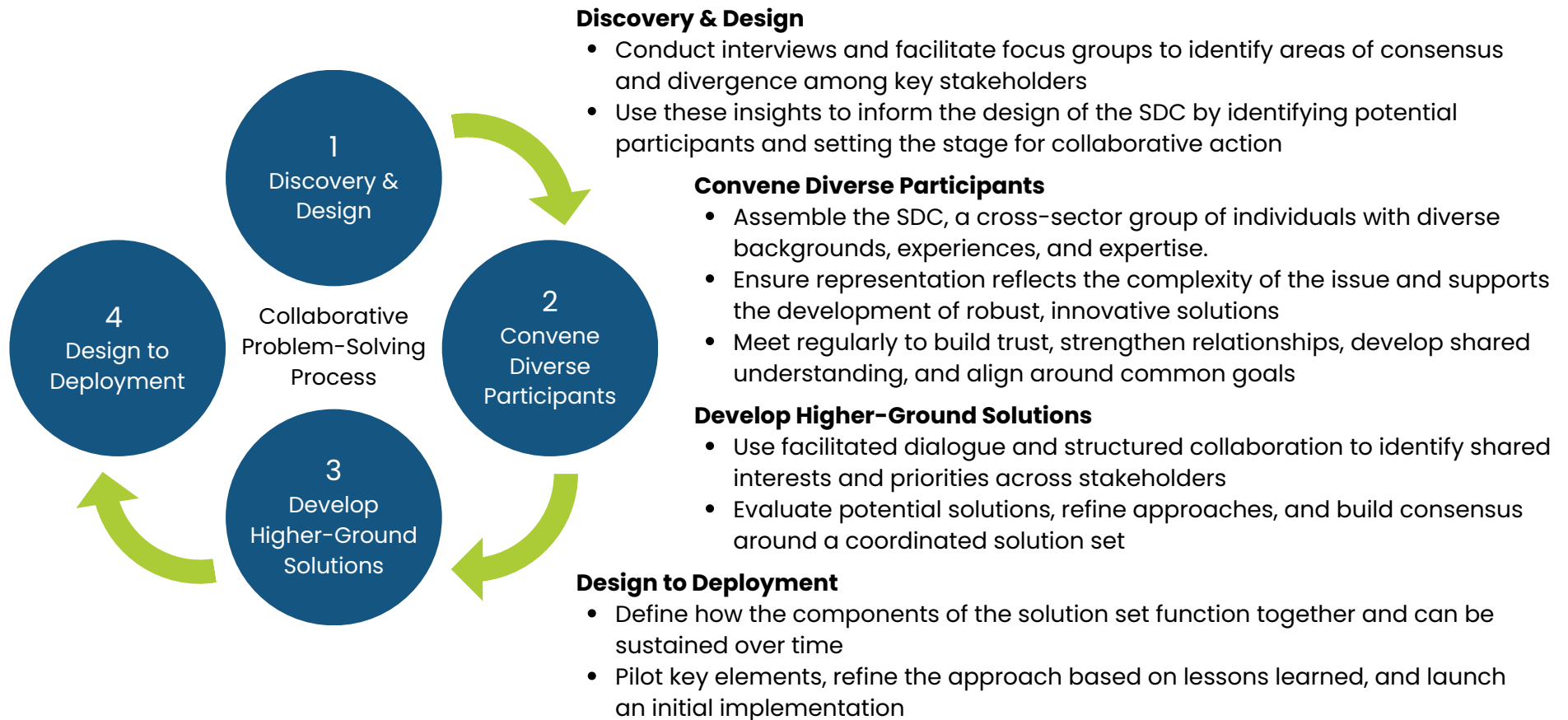
\$38,843

■ Median Household Income
■ Median Household Income with Children Under 5

This is not due to a lack of effort, programs, institutions, or leaders. What St. Louis currently lacks is a common vision and coordinated action across sectors to effectively leverage regional assets and address challenges. Therefore, the IPP convened its first SDC focused on quality jobs beginning in July 2025. This cross-sector group of 29 regional leaders and community stakeholders was tasked with designing actionable strategies to improve access to quality employment. Through a structured collaborative problem-solving process outlined below, the SDC examined barriers facing jobseekers and employers, identified opportunities for greater coordination across systems, and developed a shared approach to strengthening pathways into quality jobs. This first cycle serves as a proving ground for building a durable regional model for inclusive economic problem-solving.

ABOUT THE QUALITY JOBS SOLUTION DESIGN COHORT (SDC)

The Quality Jobs SDC followed a structured, multi-phase methodology designed to move from shared understanding to actionable solutions. This process emphasized cross-sector learning, community- and data-informed analysis, and the development of strategies capable of operating at a regional scale.



This Blueprint for Action reflects the outcome of the collaborative effort thus far and outlines a regional strategy for expanding access to quality employment and advancing economic mobility across the St. Louis region.

Learn more about the Inclusive Prosperity Partnership: <https://ippstl.org/>

MEET THE SOLUTION DESIGN COHORT

The initial Solution Design Cohort is a broad group of St. Louisans who work in collaboration to create dynamic solutions for increasing Quality Jobs in the region. This group includes nonprofit representatives, leaders from corporations, institutions, community associations, and community voices of varying backgrounds.

Tamiko Armstead

Cardinal Ritter College Prep High School

Sean Armstrong

Washington University in St. Louis

Vianey Beltran

Wells Fargo

Yoni Blumberg

WEPOWER

D'Andre Braddix

St. Louis Community College

Maggie Farrell

Missouri Works Initiative

Kyon Favell

St. Louis Community Member – Youth

Kiara Fortson

ArchKey

Hillary Frey

St. Louis Youth Jobs

Leslie Gill

Rung for Women

Keith George

BJC Health

Richard von Glahn

Missouri Jobs with Justice

Michael Holmes

Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis

Brandi Jahnke

Connections to Success

Connie Johnson

SLATE

Shanise Johnson

Boys & Girls Club of Greater St. Louis

Michael Jones

Friendly Temple Church

Jerrick King

St. Louis Community Member – Youth

Shannon Koenig

St. Louis County Housing

Evelyn Kumeh

St. Louis Community Member

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St. Louis Community Member

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Employment Connection

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St. Louis Community Member – Youth

Bob Olwig

World Wide Technology

Suzanne Sierra

St. Louis Mosaic Project

Patricia Smith

St. Louis Community Member

Kristin Sobolik

University of Missouri, St. Louis

Susan Stith

Concordance

Michael Woods

Dream Builders 4 Equity

SDC VISION FRAMEWORK

The SDC members created a cohesive vision framework to capture their insights on the workforce system, regional data, and discussion highlights. It served as a foundational scoping exercise that ensured the SDC had a shared orientation around a north star. The framework includes a high-level vision, goal, population focus, and principles for action. The solution then emerged as an actionable strategy to advance toward this north star vision and goal.

The Vision

- St. Louis is recognized as a top city in the nation for quality jobs, equitable growth, and thriving communities.
- St. Louis leads the nation in retaining jobs locally and preventing economic leakage.
- Employers choose to stay and expand in the region because they find a ready, talented, and diverse workforce.
- The region stabilizes and grows its population, especially in historically disinvested North St. Louis and North County.

“The economic landscape of St. Louis has changed!”

“Success: Jobs. Growth. Prosperity for All.”

“5 years after launch, employers are overwhelmed with local talent.”

“Quality jobs for ALL St. Louisans.”

“St. Louis is the most desirable city for young people”

SDC VISION FRAMEWORK

The Goal

Increase access to high-quality, high-paying jobs for residents with low incomes in the St. Louis region.

- **High Paying:**
 - Individual earning over \$50,000
 - Family earning over \$100,000
- **High Quality:**
 - Adopting the Quality Job Framework from the IPP's Enhanced Labor Market Analysis (ELMA), which outlines standards for (1) Compensation, (2) Benefits, (3) Advancement, (4) Structure, (5) Culture

Desired Outcomes

- **Living wages** (and benefits) are the norm; the majority of residents are earning enough to thrive, not just survive.
- **Wealth gaps close** across race, zip code, and neighborhood, with particular attention to **increases in Black wealth**.
- Residents have **freedom and stability**; fewer people are forced to leave St. Louis, and more people are moving into the region because of its opportunities.
- Youth have **clear pathways** from education into stable, high-quality employment.

SDC VISION FRAMEWORK

Focus Populations

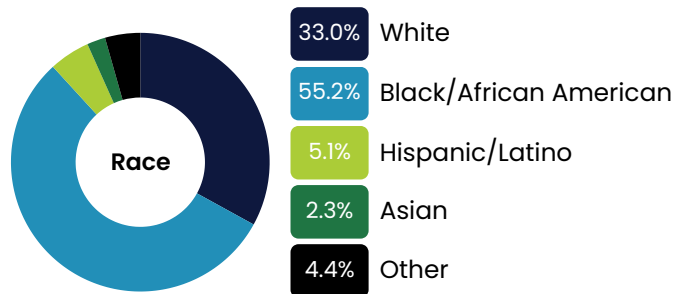
The SDC reviewed data on economic opportunity in the St. Louis region that showed stark disparities for Black jobseekers, workers, and families in disinvested neighborhoods. Within the City of St. Louis and St. Louis County initial focus defined by the IPP for this issue cycle, the SDC resolved to focus on solutions that would benefit at least one of four focus populations.

Improved high-quality job access for:

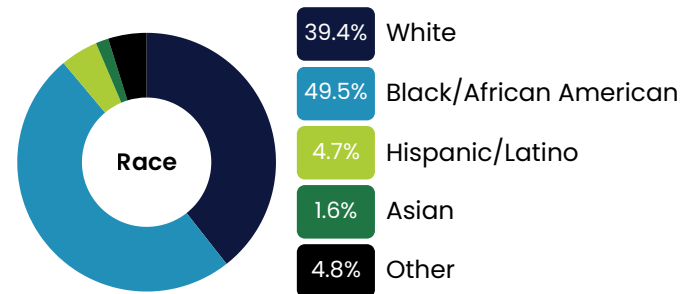
- Low Income Neighborhoods (LIN),
- Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed (ALICE),
- Skilled Underpaid Earners (SUE), and
- Youth 14-24

LIN, ALICE, and SUE are population “clusters” from the Enhanced Labor Market Analysis (ELMA) tool. ELMA uses innovative analysis of multiple data sources to create powerful clusters that more granularly describe residents beyond broad categories like “low-income”. These data-based archetypes helped identify unique needs from subsets of the population and are summarized below.

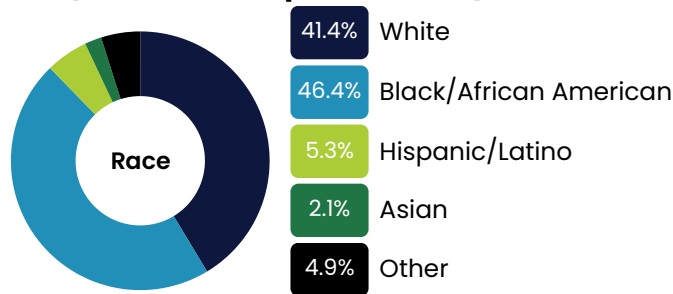
LIN (Low-Income Neighborhoods):



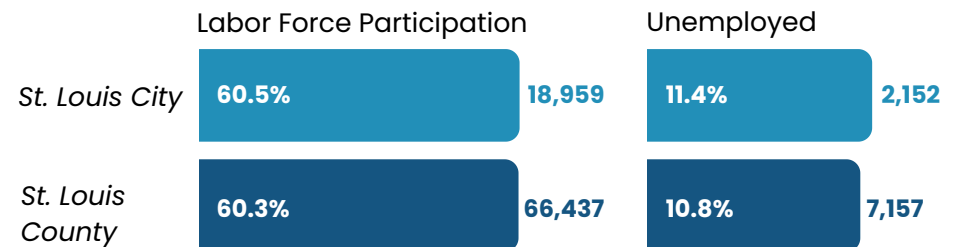
ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed):



SUE (Skilled, Underpaid Earners):



Youth Employment (ages 16-24):



Note: There is an overlap between these categories. Full details are available in the [ELMA report](#).

SDC VISION FRAMEWORK

ACTION IMPERATIVES

- 1. Address Structural Inequities that Restrict Access to Quality Jobs:** Keep equity at the center by embedding community voice and prioritizing wealth-building opportunities for communities with significant historical and current barriers. Examine structural racism and inequities in hiring, education, housing, and labor markets.
- 2. Grow Civic Collaboration & Regional Leadership:** Build the civic infrastructure needed to overcome fragmentation and silos in workforce development. For example:
 - a. Establish a regional “north star” or shared frameworks that align leaders, coalitions, and institutions across sectors.
 - b. Build on existing coalitions and initiatives.
 - c. Grow shared infrastructure, including cross-organization workforce pipelines.
 - d. Avoid competition and resource hoarding.
- 3. Shift Narratives & Build Public Will:** Contradict popular narratives about St. Louis’s workforce by lifting success stories, community voices, and examples of thriving. Use strategic communications to counter negative stereotypes (e.g. the perception that non-college pathways are less valuable, or that younger generations don’t want to work) and build broad civic pride and shared commitment. Ensure that change happens with and by communities, rather than forcing change onto communities.
- 4. Consider Place and Live-Work Communities:** Consider the role of place, how inequity shows up geographically, and how to build and adapt to the unique needs of communities. Explore models that link growth to community well-being. Connect economic development with local housing, transit, and essential services to make quality jobs more accessible across communities.
- 5. Prioritize Scalability:** Seek interventions that can operate at scale to create transformative impact rather than incremental improvements on the margins. This includes assessing the ability of partners to implement (feasibility), determining how to sustain efforts for the long term, and ensuring that solutions meet the needs of both jobseekers and employers.
- 6. Integrate the Needs of Jobseekers, Providers, and Employers:** Consider the concerns and barriers faced by employment’s three most critical stakeholder groups to find higher-ground solutions that solve shared issues and create mutual benefits. These solutions will likely be more durable and have a higher probability of sustained implementation.

THE PROBLEM

Across the St. Louis region, jobseekers, providers (including both workforce development and wraparound support organizations), and employers are navigating a workforce ecosystem that is fragmented, misaligned, and difficult to access effectively. The current regional workforce system lacks the coordination and shared infrastructure needed to support clear pathways into quality employment. As a result, jobseekers struggle to access and retain quality jobs, providers are constrained in their ability to collaborate effectively, and employers face persistent talent shortages and retention challenges.

FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF JOBSEEKERS

Accessing quality employment often requires navigating fragmented training, employment, and support systems with limited awareness, guidance, and coordination. Many residents lack clear, trusted information about high-opportunity career pathways—including knowledge about available jobs, employment expectations, timelines, credential requirements, and advancement opportunities. Jobseekers also encounter bias and less inclusive hiring practices that can limit access to opportunities, even when they meet qualification requirements. In addition, inconsistent employer practices and limited access to stabilizing supports such as childcare, transportation, housing, and mental health services further constrain their ability to enter and advance along quality career pathways.

FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PROVIDERS

Workforce organizations operate within jurisdictionally bound systems with limited shared infrastructure to support coordination across programs. Providers frequently lack consistent mechanisms to track participant engagement, service utilization, and employment outcomes across organizations, and face misalignment between training programs, employer hiring and career advancement practices. These conditions reduce the ability of programs to fully scale services. They also make it difficult to translate program participation into quality job placement and long-term mobility.

FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF EMPLOYERS

Persistent labor shortages in high-opportunity roles are compounded by variations in job quality, hiring practices, and advancement pathways, as well as limited coordination with workforce and support systems. Employers also face challenges addressing non-work barriers that affect retention and often lack consistent mechanisms to connect with prepared local talent through shared regional infrastructure.

THE PROBLEM

Across the region, these dynamics present three core structural barriers:

- 1 Fragmentation across systems, funding, and actors**
Disconnected programs and siloed resources limit continuity and a focus on high-quality jobs across training, employment, and supports.
- 2 Limited capacity to support the whole person over time**
Many efforts cannot provide the sustained navigation and stabilization supports needed for long-term advancement of low-income jobseekers.
- 3 Siloed and intermittent employer engagement with unclear value proposition**
Employers often participate individually rather than through coordinated partnerships tied to shared workforce goals, increasing the burden of partnership-building and placing additional strain on employers' HR capacity.

OPPORTUNITY FOR REGIONAL ACTION

These structural barriers point to clear opportunities for action. They can be addressed through targeted civic infrastructure interventions that strengthen coordination across the workforce system. The St. Louis region has the opportunity to build:

- Coordinated workforce training infrastructure
- High-touch navigation aligned to priority pathways
- Employer participation incentives, cohorts, and peer leadership models
- Integrated wraparound supports tied directly to workforce outcomes

Together, these represent practical system-level investments that can reduce fragmentation, align partners around shared priorities, and support population-level gains in job access, retention, and mobility.

THE SOLUTION

OVERVIEW

The SDC developed a coordinated regional solution to address persistent barriers that limit access to quality jobs across the St. Louis region. Rather than advancing a single program or intervention, the proposed approach focuses on strengthening the underlying infrastructure needed to better connect jobseekers, service providers, and employers through more aligned pathways, shared information, and coordinated supports.

This solution reflects a central finding from the Discovery & Design phase and the SDC process: expanding access to quality jobs requires improving how systems work together, not simply expanding individual programs. Three stakeholder groups play a central role in shaping access to quality employment: **jobseekers, service providers, and employers**. Structural disconnects across these groups limit the effectiveness of existing workforce investments and make it difficult for St. Louis residents to enter high-opportunity career pathways and advance along them.

THE SOLUTION

SOLUTION OVERVIEW

To address the aforementioned challenges, the SDC proposes a coordinated regional approach:

Create a shared, human-centered workforce onramp that integrates high-touch and high-tech navigation, targeted wraparound supports, and employer-aligned skill pathways into a focused set of high-opportunity industries and roles. By aligning providers, employers, and jobseeker supports around priority pathways, the region can increase access to quality jobs, raise incomes, and advance economic mobility for low-income residents. The solution outputs that enable this population-level impact include:

- Reduced duplication across programs;
- Strengthened workforce participation among priority populations;
- Improved hiring efficiency and stability for employers
- Increased job attainment and retention;

This approach balances scale and personalization through both digital infrastructure and sustained human navigation.

THE SOLUTION

CORE COMPONENTS OF THE SOLUTION

The proposed system includes six mutually reinforcing functions.

1. Shared Front Door:

Create coordinated entry points into workforce pathways through a centralized platform supported by multiple access locations (community-based, institutional, and virtual).

2. High-Touch, Human Integration:

Provide coaching and navigator roles that connect jobseekers to services, training, and employment opportunities using shared data and real-time labor market information.

3. Focus on High-Quality Pathways:

Align stakeholders around a defined, limited set of industries and roles where demand is strong and advancement opportunities exist.

Expected impacts:

- Clearer connections between services and employment, lowering burdens for both jobseekers and employers
- Reduced duplication across programs
- Fewer jobseekers falling through gaps
- Improved access for priority populations (LIN, ALICE, SUE—see Enhanced Labor Market Analysis ([ELMA](#)))—and youth 14-24)

Expected impacts:

- Stronger transitions from training to employment
- Improved job matching, helping employers connect with jobseekers who are prepared for and aligned with available roles
- Increased employment retention, benefiting jobseekers and employers
- Reduced underemployment among trained workers
- Improved persistence across career stages

Expected impacts:

- Faster entry into quality jobs
- Stronger pipelines that help employers fill high-demand roles
- Improved alignment between training investments and meeting employer demand
- Clearer career progression pathways

THE SOLUTION

CORE COMPONENTS OF THE SOLUTION

4. Incentivized Employer Participation:

Engage employers through cohorts, peer leadership, shared job-quality standards, and demonstrated returns on investment.

5. Integrated Whole-Human Supports:

Embed wraparound supports directly into workforce pathways and maintain engagement beyond placement to support stabilization and advancement.

6. System Infrastructure: Funding, Data, and Messaging:

Strengthen regional coordination through braided funding strategies, shared outcomes dashboards, aligned pathway governance, and a common narrative about workforce opportunities.

Expected impacts:

- Improved hiring efficiency
- Stronger retention outcomes
- Increased employer participation in workforce partnerships
- Strengthened employer leadership in advancing regional workforce goals and enhancing St. Louis's reputation as a strong place to do business

Expected impacts:

- Higher retention rates
- Stronger long-term workforce attachment
- Improved outcomes for jobseekers facing structural barriers

Expected impacts:

- Clearer regional workforce priorities
- Stronger collaboration across institutions
- Improved sustainability of workforce investments
- A more coordinated regional workforce system that works better for jobseekers, providers, and employers

Together, these elements position the region to move from a collection of programs and services to a more coordinated workforce system that supports long-term mobility and economic growth for those on the margins of regional prosperity.

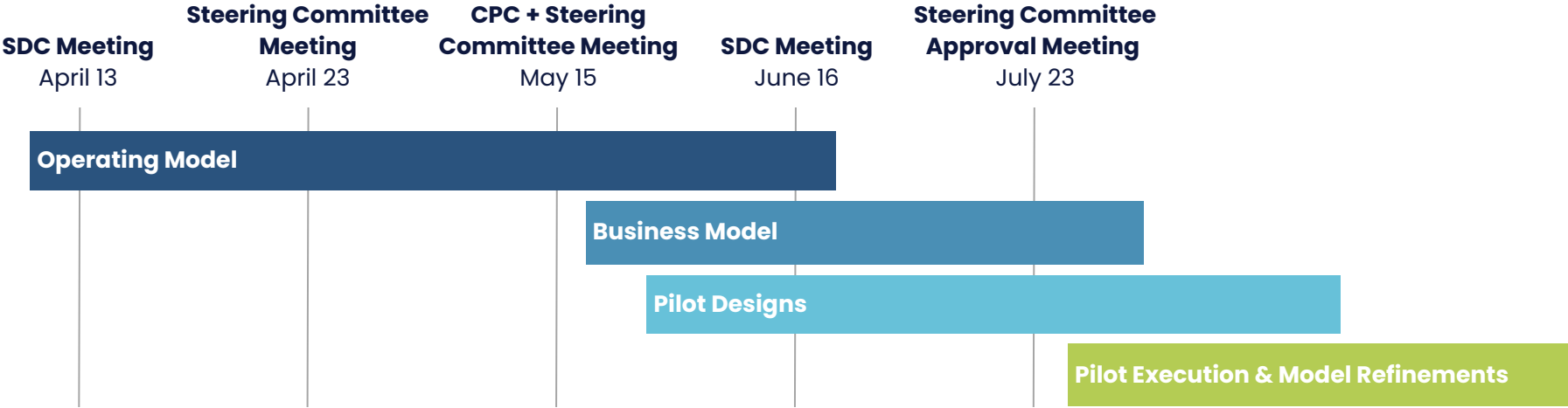
NEXT STEPS

The Solution Design Cohort completed its co-design work and is now entering the Design to Deployment phase, where the focus shifts from developing a shared solution set to determining how those solutions will function in practice. This next stage builds the operating and business models needed to translate the SDC's recommendations into a coordinated regional system—clarifying how partners will work together, how value will be created for stakeholders, and how the effort can be sustained financially over time.

A dedicated Design to Deployment team is now leading this work in partnership with the Facilitation team. Over the coming months, this phase will include designing and testing pilot efforts to answer key questions about critical elements of the system, refining the approach based on lessons learned, and launching an initial version of a coordinated workforce system. Together, these steps will establish the partnerships, infrastructure, and pathways needed to support long-term economic mobility and inclusive growth for residents on the margins of regional prosperity in St. Louis.

NEXT STEPS

Design to Deployment (D2D) Timeline



Design to Deployment (D2D)

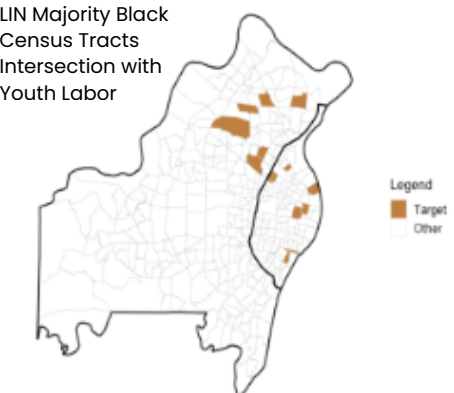
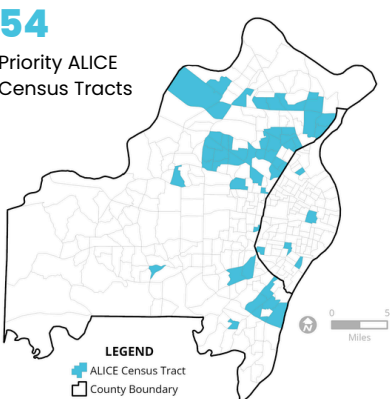
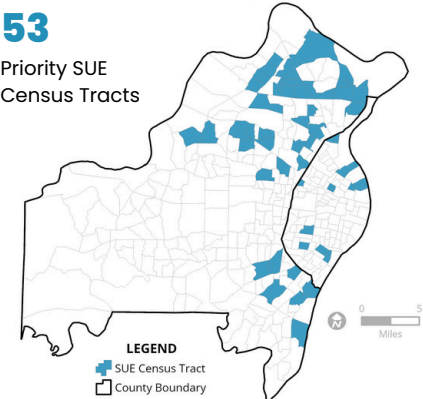
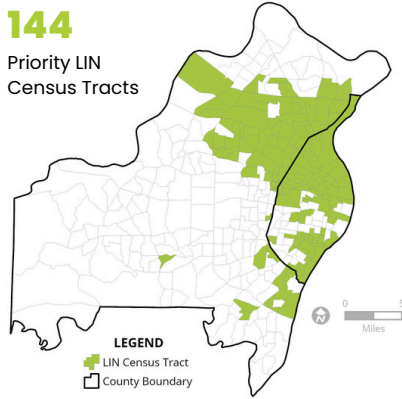
Operating Model	Business Model	Pilot Designs	Launch
<p>How the system functions to create value for stakeholders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch / minimum viable product • Steady state model • Future expansion 	<p>How the system sustains itself financially over time</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reverse income statement • Operating parameters • Integrated business model 	<p>Answering questions on how critical elements will work in practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discovery to validation • Portfolio of projects • Clear measurement, evaluation, and refinement of models 	<p>Setting the first version of a whole system solution in motion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch / minimum viable product • Active monitoring and adjustment • Manual bridging capabilities

NEXT STEPS

Potential Implementation Geography

The Enhanced Labor Market Analysis (ELMA) tool identified census tracts with high concentrations of the four focus populations. With further analysis, SDC members identified areas of overlap between the population categories. These overlaps, combined with asset mapping, will guide efforts in the implementation phase.

For example, ELMA data can be used to help determine where to prioritize in-person jobseeker supports, how to market services to residents, and which employers are accessible by public transit.



CONCLUSION

This Blueprint for Action represents a rare and powerful alignment of vision, resources, and collective will. It is uncommon for a funder to commit meaningful capital for implementation at the outset of a collaborative design process, before solutions are fully defined. This early commitment from the Inclusive Prosperity Partnership, paired with the radical trust of the leaders at the table, created the conditions for this work to be both ambitious and grounded. It signaled that the ideas developed through this process are intended to be built, tested, and brought to scale. It shifted the work from a theoretical possibility to a real opportunity.

The process to arrive at this point required deep engagement, sustained effort, and a willingness to navigate complexity together. Members of the Solution Design Cohort showed extraordinary dedication throughout an intensive and often demanding process, bringing their expertise, lived experience, and institutional perspectives into honest dialogue. The scale of the economic challenges the SDC grappled with was profound and, at times, emotional with a recognition that these conditions have affected everyone at the table in ways both direct and indirect.

Across months of convening, learning, and co-creation, members stayed committed to working through differences, holding tension, and building toward solutions that reflect both rigor and shared ownership. This commitment is embedded in the strength of the solution itself—a coordinated, human-centered workforce onramp designed to address structural barriers at scale and support access to high-quality, high-paying jobs for residents currently locked out of economic prosperity.

CONCLUSION

This work has also been shaped and strengthened by the broader ecosystem surrounding the SDC. Institutional partners across the Steering Committee and Community Partnerships Committee provided guidance, accountability, and strategic perspective throughout the process. The firms and teams supporting IPP—including research, facilitation, implementation, communications, and fundraising strategy partners—helped build and sustain the container for this work, translating inputs into insight and momentum into structure. Together, this network of contributors reflects the kind of civic infrastructure required to take on challenges of this magnitude.

What emerges from this Blueprint is a set of solutions and a foundation for the next phase of action. The solution offers a clear, coherent approach to strengthening pathways into quality jobs, with a level of alignment that positions the region for meaningful progress. This process has also generated a sense of shared ownership and forward momentum that will be critical in the transition from design to deployment. The opportunity now is to carry this energy forward; to translate this strategy into operational reality; and to deepen and marshal new partnerships in service of delivering tangible outcomes for the residents of this region.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In addition to the dedicated Solution Design Cohort (SDC), this work would not have been possible without the time, expertise, and commitment of many individuals and organizations. Deep gratitude is extended to all who contributed their knowledge, time, and resources in support of the Inclusive Prosperity Partnership's first SDC on quality jobs.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Key Informants

Stakeholders Interviewed During Discovery & Design Process

- Allie McFadden – Edward Jones
- Andrew Martin – Washington University in St. Louis
- Andwele Jolly & Bill Winfrey – Integrated Health Network
- Ben Kesler – NPower Missouri
- Blake Hamilton – International Institute of St. Louis
- Brandi Jahnke & Rachael Meuser – Connections to Success
- Brandon Williams – St. Louis Internship Program – Boys and Girls Club
- Brittany Whitley & Ben Johnson – BioSTL
- Carolyn Seward – Family and Workforce Centers of America
- Charli Cooksey – WEPOWER
- Connie Johnson – St. Louis Agency on Training and Employment
- David Winton – Winton Policy Group
- Dawn Price – Sophia Project
- Dr. Eric Clark – Loyola Academy
- Dr. LJ Punch – Power4STL
- Dr. Terry Harris – Legacy Center
- Dustin Allison – Greater St. Louis, Inc.
- Emily Hemingway – TechSTL
- Greg Laposa – Workforce Development – St. Louis County
- Hillary Frey – STL Youth Jobs
- Jeff Pittman & Pyllis Ellison – St. Louis Community College
- Jeremy Al-Haj – Missouri Workers Center
- Juanita Logan & Bob Olwig – World Wide Technology
- Karen Branding – Regional Business Council
- Kathy Reeves – Enterprise
- Kristin Sobolik – University of Missouri – St. Louis
- Krystal Barnett – Bridge 2 Hope
- Lara Granich – Missouri Wins Investor Network
- Leslie Gill – Rung for Women
- Lus Haberberger – Luzco Technologies
- Megan Price & Maggie Farrell – Missouri Works Initiative
- Michael Holmes – Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis
- Michael Woods – Dream Builders 4 Equity
- Michael England – St. Mary’s South Side Catholic High School
- Montague Simmons – The Movement for Black Lives
- Pastor Brent Roam – One Family Church
- Pastor Michael Jones – Friendly Temple Church
- Rich Liekweg – BJC HealthCare
- Richard von Glahn – Missouri Jobs with Justice
- Sal Martinez – Employment Connection
- Sandra Moore – Advantage Capital
- Sen. Brian Williams – Missouri State Legislature
- Shannon Koenig – St. Louis County Housing Authority
- Steven Stone – ArchKey Solutions
- Susan Stith – Concordance
- Suzanne Sierra – St. Louis Mosaic Project
- Tamiko Armstead – Cardinal Ritter College Prep High School
- Tom Finan – Construction Forum
- Tony Fuhrmann – Gateway Registered Apprenticeship Hub
- Vianey Beltran – Wells Fargo

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Key Informants

Focus Group Participants During Discovery & Design Process

The Facilitation team conducted four focus groups with people who have lived experience seeking high-paying, quality jobs in the St. Louis region. A total of 48 people engaged in the process. The Facilitation team partnered with Dream Builders 4 Equity, the Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis, and the St. Louis Mosaic Project to engage distinct target audiences, including Black youth, male and female householders, and immigrant community members.

Additional non-SDC members who joined SDC workgroup sessions:

- Jessica Lansing – BJC HealthCare
- David Stiffler – Edward Jones
- Matt Rizzo – World Wide Technology
- Teaira Spencer – Wells Fargo

IPP Co-Investors

- Anonymous
- Berges Family Foundation
- Incarnate Word Foundation
- James S. McDonnell Foundation
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IPP Teams

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Convergence Center for Policy Resolution
Emerging Wisdom

Knowledge Infrastructure Team

Civic Insight
East-West Gateway Council of
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Key Strategic Group

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CCS Fundraising

Design to Deployment

New Origin Studio

Fund Development

CCS Fundraising

Communications

Cannonball
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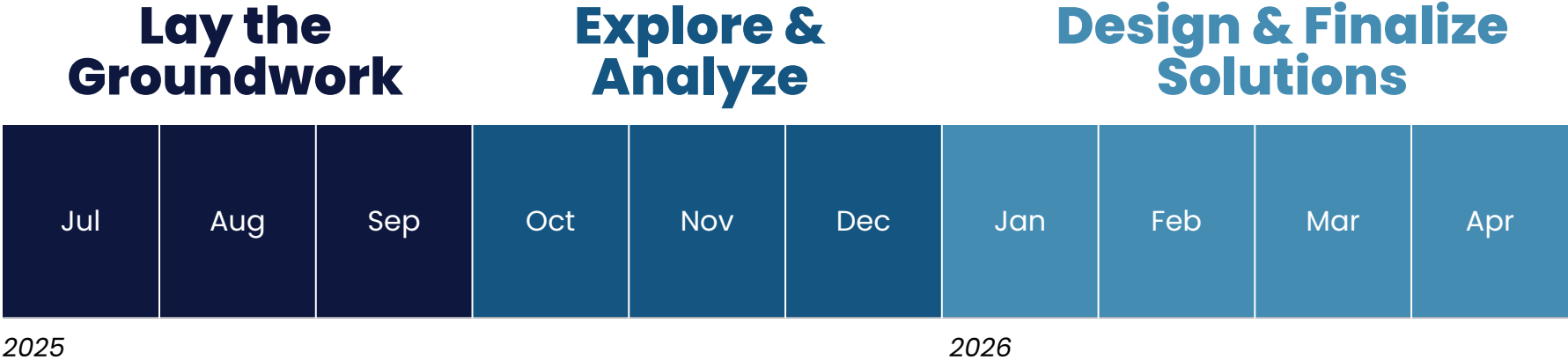
APPENDIX

- Solution Design Cohort Process
- Solution Component Tactics

SOLUTION DESIGN COHORT PROCESS

The Quality Jobs Solution Design Cohort (SDC) followed a structured, multi-phase methodology designed to move from shared understanding to actionable solutions. This process emphasized cross-sector learning, community- and data-informed analysis, and the development of strategies capable of operating at a regional scale. Early phases of the work focused on building a shared understanding of the workforce landscape, identifying systemic barriers to quality employment, and learning from both local initiatives and national models with demonstrated success.

The SDC began convening in July 2025 following the Discovery & Design phase. The timeline below illustrates the steps the SDC has taken from July 2025 through April 2026 as the initiative transitions to the Design to Deployment phase.



SOLUTION DESIGN COHORT PROCESS

1. DISCOVERY & DESIGN

The SDC built on insights generated during the Discovery & Design phase, which engaged regional stakeholders, employers, practitioners, and community members to better understand barriers to economic mobility in the St. Louis region. Between April 7 and July 3, 2025, Convergence Center for Policy Resolution and Emerging Wisdom conducted 56 interviews with a wide range of key stakeholders and facilitated four in-person focus groups with residents who have direct experience navigating economic barriers. Additional details on this engagement process is available in the *Discovery & Design Report* ([LINK](#)).

Key findings highlighted persistent fragmentation across workforce and support systems, barriers to access that operate at both individual and structural levels, and the prevalence of transactional relationships that limit opportunities for sustained coordination and long-term solutions. Stakeholders also identified systemic racism and place-based inequities as central drivers of unequal access to opportunity, alongside growing challenges facing organizations working to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion. Together, these findings shaped the structure and priorities of the SDC process and reinforced the importance of designing solutions capable of addressing structural challenges rather than isolated program gaps.

SOLUTION DESIGN COHORT PROCESS

2. CONVENING THE SOLUTION DESIGN COHORT

The SDC includes 29 members representing residents and jobseekers, nonprofit organizations, public and civic institutions, employers, and workforce and support service providers. Members were selected through a structured process developed to ensure the cohort reflected both the diversity of perspectives surfaced during the Discovery & Design phase and the range of expertise needed to address complex barriers to quality job attainment. Selection emphasized individuals with deep knowledge of regional workforce challenges, demonstrated involvement in efforts to improve job quality and economic mobility, and lived or professional experience navigating barriers to employment across the region. The process also prioritized geographic diversity across the St. Louis area and sought to balance representation of established institutional leadership with emerging voices from community-based organizations and frontline systems.

In addition to expertise and sector-based diversity, individuals were chosen for their ability to contribute to collaborative problem-solving and support implementation beyond the design phase. This included credibility with workers, employers, and community stakeholders; the ability to mobilize partnerships and resources; familiarity with systems shaping workforce outcomes; and a demonstrated commitment to sustained regional collaboration. Members were also selected for their readiness to engage constructively across differences and work toward solutions capable of operating at scale.

JSMF and the facilitation team made an intentional choice to prioritize six of the member slots for residents and jobseekers to ensure that those most impacted were involved in the entire decision-making process. These members signaled their interest during the focus groups with residents facing economic barriers. All SDC members were compensated for their participation and expertise.

Collectively, the SDC was charged with examining structural barriers to quality employment and developing coordinated regional strategies to strengthen pathways into quality jobs for residents with low incomes.

SOLUTION DESIGN COHORT PROCESS

2. CONVENING THE SOLUTION DESIGN COHORT

The Design Team

Solution Design Cohort (SDC)

29 individuals representing community members, nonprofit organizations, public and civic institutions, employers and workforce and support service providers. Across the process, they translated the charge to increase high quality, high-paying jobs for low-income residents into actionable solutions.

Quality Jobs Champions

Three members who served as liaisons to the IPP governing bodies.

Facilitation Team

Two firms partnered to develop a process and container for the SDC, build trust and relationships, facilitate meetings, and synthesize emergent information into actionable products.

Knowledge and Information Team (KIT)

Researchers and analysts from several local firms and institutions who regularly answered data requests, produced briefs, and provided pivotal workforce analysis frameworks such as the Enhanced Labor Market Analysis.

IPP Steering Committee and Community Partnerships Committee

The governance bodies of IPP, convened by JSMF, provided advising and feedback across the design process. The Steering Committee serves as the approvers of the final solutions and plans.

SOLUTION DESIGN COHORT PROCESS

3. DEVELOP HIGHER-GROUND SOLUTIONS

With the SDC selected, the facilitation team developed and implemented a solution design process that invited a diverse set of insights from participants. The process also advanced relationship and trust building among members with an understanding that the efficacy of collaborative problem-solving is dependent upon the strength of connections and dialogue between participants. Additionally, the process involved data, research, and case studies to foster deeper understandings of the problem and potential solutions. SDC members considered these inputs within a supportive environment that encouraged the open exchange of knowledge and ideas, including dissenting perspectives, and that managed conflicts constructively to generate higher ground solutions.

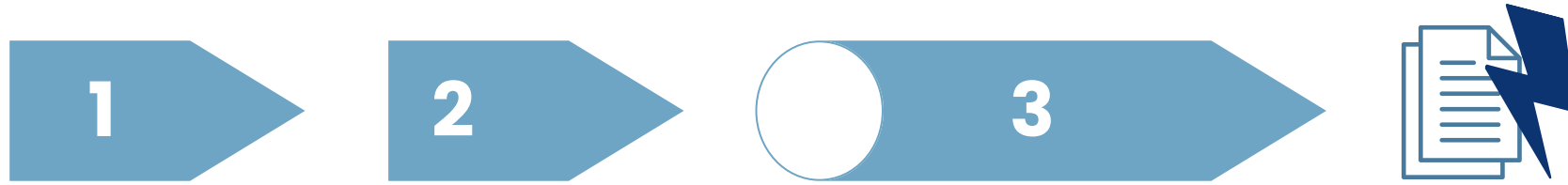
To help develop its process as the prototype for future IPP issue cycles, the facilitation team drew from several frameworks for participatory design and systems change.

- **Collaborative Problem Solving:** The Convergence team brought an ethos and set of tools for navigating healthy conflict to arrive at consensus decisions.
- **Community-Based Process Integrity:** The Emerging Wisdom team engaged people with lived experience in process planning, development, and implementation, building upon its experiences leading several regional design processes across the last decade.
- **Systems Change and Economic Equity:** Facilitators leveraged SDC members' understanding of systems change and economic equity to develop a shared analysis of workforce systems, stakeholder needs, and differential economic mobility outcomes.

SOLUTION DESIGN COHORT PROCESS

3. DEVELOP HIGHER-GROUND SOLUTIONS

The Solution Development Process



1. Lay the Groundwork

(July - September 2025)

- Built relationships
- Grew shared understanding of issues and current data
- Aligned on vision and goals
- Defined focus topics and populations

2. Explore & Analyze

(October - December 2025)

- Established and activated workgroups
- Explored focus areas
- Learned together (data, evidence, case studies, community expertise)
- Developed solution options

3. Design & Finalize

(January - April 2026)

- Develop and organize solutions
- Hone focus populations and geography
- Evaluate and strengthen proposals
- Decide on solutions via consensus
- Draft Blueprint for Action

Implement

(February 2026 and Beyond)

The Design to Deployment team is charged with engaging the SDC and IPP to build operational plans, business models, and pilots that implement the solutions. They began work in February 2026, overlapping with the end of the design process to support continuity.

SOLUTION DESIGN COHORT PROCESS

THE SOLUTION DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Lay the Groundwork

July – September 2025

- *Built relationships*
- *Grew shared understanding of issues and current data*
- *Aligned on vision and goals*
- *Defined focus topics and populations*

During the Lay the Groundwork phase, SDC members built a shared foundation for the work ahead by reviewing findings from the Discovery & Design process and the Enhanced Labor Market Analysis, strengthening cross-sector relationships, and aligning around a common vision for expanding access to quality jobs. This phase also helped establish clarity about the goals, expectations, and collaborative approach that would guide the SDC's work.

Additionally, in the first six months, the facilitation team hosted separate events specifically dedicated to growing relationships between SDC members. These events provided time for socializing, reflecting on members' workforce journeys, and learning more about fellow members' current work. This relationship building was crucial for group cohesion and supported later phases when dissenting perspectives and viewpoints arose.

SOLUTION DESIGN COHORT PROCESS

THE SOLUTION DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Explore & Analyze

October - December 2025

- *Established and activated workgroups*
- *Explored focus areas*
- *Learned together (data, evidence, case studies, community expertise)*
- *Developed solution options*

Building on this foundation, the SDC moved into the Explore & Analyze phase, where members worked in four thematic workgroups to examine key barriers shaping access to quality jobs across the region. The four workgroups consisted of:

1. Workforce Pathways & Career Exposure: Expand and align career pathways from youth through adulthood, with clear onramps to quality jobs. This includes early career exposure, mentorship, apprenticeships, second-chance programs, and stackable credentials that lead to advancement, not just entry-level work.

2. Employer Practices & Culture Change: Shift employer norms to prioritize high-road practices such as living wages, supportive management, and inclusive hiring. Focus on building long-term employer-community partnerships that foster retention, advancement, trust and accountability. Invest internally in onboarding, mentorship, or manager training for inclusive workplaces.

3. Wraparound Supports & Job Access: Address barriers like childcare and family member care, transportation, housing, and mental and physical health, which prevent residents from accessing and keeping jobs. Support financial inclusion, such as being banked and receiving financial education/literacy. Create an integrated system of supports that meet people where they are and helps to sustain them through career growth.

4. High-Opportunity Industries & Jobs of the Future: Target training and pathways toward sectors with strong growth potential such as advanced manufacturing, biosciences, IT, logistics, trades, ag-tech, and healthcare. Ensure residents are prepared for both today's jobs and those emerging in the future economy, such as educational pathways.

SOLUTION DESIGN COHORT PROCESS

THE SOLUTION DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Design & Finalize

January - April 2026

- *Develop and organize solutions*
- *Hone focus populations and geography*
- *Evaluate and strengthen proposals*
- *Decide on solutions via consensus*
- *Draft Blueprint for Action*

In the final phase, the workgroups used their learnings and discussion to produce solution options and present them to the full group. Over several meetings, the SDC found areas of overlap and synergy, prioritized options, and made adjustments. Members discovered that the workgroups were largely developing interlocking solution ideas that addressed complementary parts of a larger whole. This greater whole became a “meta-solution” and organizing idea that linked the solutions into a single (though multifaceted), implementable initiative.

Together, these learning and design activities helped the SDC examine structural barriers to quality employment, identify opportunities for stronger coordination across systems, and develop a shared foundation for strategy design. The process emphasized the development of strategies capable of operating at a regional scale and that would strengthen pathways into quality jobs for residents with low incomes.

SOLUTION DESIGN COHORT PROCESS

THE SOLUTION DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

Design to Deployment

February 2026 and beyond

The solution design process culminates with the creation of the Blueprint for Action, which aggregates the products of the SDC's collective work: vision, theory of change, focus populations and geography, and solutions.

While not the focus of this report, the Blueprint for Action is the basis for the implementation phase of the IPP issue cycle called Design to Deployment. During this phase, the Design to Deployment team will take the framework and solution developed by the SDC and operationalize them, including creating an operational model, business model, and plans for pilots.

SOLUTION DESIGN COHORT PROCESS

3. DEVELOP HIGHER-GROUND SOLUTIONS

Solution Component Tactics

As discussed in the SDC Process section of this Blueprint for Action report, the solution emerged from parallel development of smaller solution ideas by the four workgroups. Full SDC meetings quickly surfaced that these solution ideas could naturally be linked under a central initiative structure. Below is a summary table of the underlying tactics developed by the workgroups, organized under the solution components.

1. Shared Front Door	2. High-Touch, Human Integration	3. Narrow Set of HQ Pathways	4. Employer Participation	5. Whole-Human Approach	6. System Fixes (Funding, Data, Messaging)
1a. Centralized workforce onramp	2a. High-touch coaching and navigation (engagement)	3a. Consistent regional pathway prioritization practices	4a. Shared, job-quality framework & standards	5a. Unified needs assessment for stabilizing supports	6a. Governance & admin function (coordination)
1b. High-tech approach (scale)	2b. Jobseeker retention and early success supports	3b. Skill-based training for high-quality and high-opportunity job pathways	4b. Employer engagement and commitment supports	5b. Cross-agency coordination/case management system	6b. Shared outcomes dashboard
1c. Multi-entrance system (access)			4c. Employer-workforce partner referral model	5c. Partnership/referral playbook	6c. Narrative building strategies
1d. User training (participation)					6d. Public-private funding



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