

New report calls for city 'job czar'

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Among the many high-level appointments the next mayor of New York City will make, there's one top post he or she might consider adding to the cabinet: the city's first official "job czar."

That's one of the recommendations put forth in a [new report by the New York City Workforce Strategy Group](#), which seeks to reduce the city's 9.1% unemployment rate by better connecting tens of thousands of New Yorkers looking for work with employers looking to hire.

The "job czar" would work in the mayor's office and direct the city's \$450 million of city, federal and philanthropic cash that funds workforce development.

At present, the group argues, the system for dispensing the cash and making the connection between job seeker and employer is done piecemeal and is riddled with holes that leave the supply going unfilled.

The city's Department of Small Business Services runs workforce career centers throughout the five boroughs that connect trained candidates with jobs. But that system serves only about 10% of the unemployed in New York City, the group argues.

In New York City, 372,000 people were unemployed in 2012, 38% for a year or longer. The number of people served by the city's workforce career centers was about 27,000 last year. Those job seekers also represent the segment of the unemployed population that is "job ready," i.e. doesn't need training.

There are also for- and non-profits who provide skills training, as well as educational and literacy programs. But all of the programs for helping New Yorkers get trained and employed are being funded by different sources.

Another problem: there's little communication between the different groups trying to help solve the same problem. The system can leave a hotel looking for 300 workers, for instance, struggling to fill the jobs while New Yorkers who could do the work are not aware of the opportunity.

"The city is still suffering from a high unemployment rate and there are employers complaining they have job openings but no workers," said Steven Dawson, co-chair of the Workforce Strategy Group. "Our next mayor will have a unique opportunity to deliver on the promise of job creation, but only by redesigning our workforce system."

A streamlined workforce development system would ideally aid both the worker and the employer. "There's very little strategy in understanding where the labor market is going," Mr. Dawson said. In addition to creating a post for a "job czar," the group recommends other ways to make the workforce development system more universal. The group—made up of ten practitioners, employers and union leaders in the city's workforce system including JobsFirstNYC and LaGuardia Community College—also recommends that a council made up of foundations, businesses and unions that would advise the mayor on employment issues.

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