

# Lower East Side Employment Network

Manhattan's Lower East Side, known for its vibrant culture and colorful history, faces many of the same challenges related to poverty and jobs that beset the community more than a century ago. A number of highly regarded nonprofit organizations offer a wide range of services to help residents gain skills and connect to employment opportunities, but limited capacity and inadvertent competition have reduced their impact. The Lower East Side Employment Network (LESEN), a collaborative of nonprofit organizations works to align the efforts of its members to better serve Lower East Side employers and jobseekers, particularly young adults between the ages of 18 and 25.

LESEN, formed in 2007, is comprised of seven provider organizations—Chinese American Planning Council, Chinatown Manpower Project, The Door, Good Old Lower East Side, Grand Street Settlement, Henry Street Settlement, and University Settlement—and Manhattan's Community Board 3 (CB3). Its dual mission is to help residents gain access to high quality jobs created through economic development, in the neighborhood, while assisting Lower East Side employers in finding highly qualified candidates for employment. In 2012, JobsFirstNYC contributed resources that helped LESEN to hire a full-time Employment Coordinator.

While each organization retains its own job developers, the Coordinator—an employee of the network rather than any of the member organizations—serves as the conduit for collective recruitment. Because the combined capacity of all participating organizations is so much greater than any of them individually, LESEN as a network can engage with larger employers and projects that would be well beyond the scope of the members operating on their own. For their part, the employers benefit by having a single point of contact for all provider organizations within the network. The Coordinator works with the members to jointly recruit and pre-screen candidates according to employer specifications, ensuring higher quality referrals and a lower rate of interviews per hire.

LESEN member organizations share organizational best practices and are moving toward greater collaboration around training: in 2014, the LESEN partners piloted a training program for bicycle repair that ultimately placed 24 trainees into employment at an average hourly wage of \$10.86. The organizations also share existing and new employer relationships, enabling individual participants from one LESEN member organization to fill jobs identified by developers working for a different LESEN partner. The network has its own website, at [www.lesemploymentnetwork.org](http://www.lesemploymentnetwork.org), and is on Twitter at @LES\_Employ.

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Between March 2012 and June 2014, LESEN engaged a total of 91 area employers, arranging a total of 410 candidate interviews from which 143 hires were made, for an impressive interview-to-hire ratio of 3:1. Nearly half of those placed were young adults. The average wage at placement was \$10.61 per hour, nearly a dollar per hour more than the average for hires through the publicly supported Workforce1 Career Centers.

LESEN has made placements with high-profile employers such as Kushner Companies, NYC Bicycle Share, Basketball City, CVS Caremark, Modell's Sporting Goods and S&E Hotels/BD Hotel Group. LESEN has also executed a Memorandum of Understanding with Hotel Indigo, a major project now in



development. As several major developments on the Lower East Side are projected to break ground over the coming years, LESEN anticipates employment opportunities in construction, retail, hospitality and other sectors. Among these projects is Essex Crossing, a major development in the heart of the Lower East Side community for which LESEN has executed an agreement to serve as a primary vehicle for local hiring and recruitment for training opportunities.

JobsFirstNYC supports LESEN as part of its organizational mission to nurture and scale multi-organizational workforce partnerships among community-based organizations. In its role as a neutral intermediary, JobsFirstNYC helps partnerships such as LESEN to better serve both young jobseekers and the employers who might hire them. Ultimately, as the successes of LESEN and related collaborations point the way toward better workforce practice, JobsFirstNYC seeks systems change to better support and replicate such efforts.

