

JobsFirstNYC's 2017 Working Policy Strategy

Creating a comprehensive strategy to improve the conditions of out-of-school, out-of-work young adults in NYC

This year marks critical political transitions at the local, state, and federal levels. As workforce advocates and practitioners prepare for the policy priorities of the Trump Administration and new congressional leaders, Governor Cuomo's recently released budget and legislative agenda, and the upcoming New York City mayoral election, it has never been more critical to propose investments and initiatives that will increase opportunity for young New Yorkers. In our city, more than 180,000 young adults between 16- to 24-years-old are neither working nor in school. In some neighborhoods, graduation rates are as low as 54 percent—and even among young New Yorkers who do finish school and find work, most tend to hold low-wage jobs and make up a significant portion of the city's working poor. Addressing this crisis requires policy interventions that expand opportunity for young adults; encourage innovation and collaboration in education and young adult workforce development; and break down systemic barriers to young adults' long-term economic success.

Building on our work over the years, JobsFirstNYC recommends three approaches to reduce the number of out-of-school, out-of-work (OSOW) young New Yorkers and increase the economic prosperity of every young person in our city. 1) Our local leaders should develop and sustain a large-scale employer engagement campaign to train and hire young New Yorkers for living-wage careers in in-demand industries. 2) City, state, and local leaders should increase investments in services that have a record of reconnecting OSOW young adults to training and work that pays livable wages. 3) Our city must adopt an intentional strategy to reduce the inflow of young adults into the OSOW population through increased alignment of education curricula and employment demands.

APPROACH I:

Create a large-scaled New York City public campaign to engage employers from all sectors to commit to developing local talent, a "Business for Young New Yorkers" campaign.

Over the last two years, we have seen a national movement from the private sector to increase employment and work-related experience opportunities for young adults. We recommend that our local government, with its vast array of relationships with small and large businesses, should launch a citywide marketing campaign to encourage private sector employers to develop and hire local young talent. We believe the City can encourage employers to provide a of range jobs and employment-related experiences (internships, coaching, mentoring, career exploration, etc.) to young New Yorkers.

The City has an existing abundance of mechanisms and partners to help build out this campaign. Specifically, we recommend engaging the NYC Small Business Services Industry Partnerships, Chambers of Commerce in all five boroughs, local Business Improvement Districts, the NYC Economic Development Corporation, the Partnership for New York City, and the Association for a Better New York. A strong example of small businesses pledging to developing talent is a project underway between the Small Business Majority and U.S. Small Business Administration called *Small Biz 4 Youth Campaign*.

To create sustainable, citywide employer engagement, we recommend:

- 1. Engaging borough- and neighborhood-based employers that are small, medium, and large:** Ongoing convenings of employers is necessary to assess their interests and capacities for collaborating with the public workforce system and K-12 schools. There is a vast network of small-, medium-, and large-sized employers in growth sectors of the borough's economy that policymakers and leaders should access to explore opportunities to create employer partnerships.
- 2. Investing in engagement with employers through sector-focused strategies:** Sectoral strategies yield even greater gains when they go beyond strategies focused on job placement to collaborating with employers to identify ways to improve workers' conditions while also supporting business success. Successful examples of engaging employers through sector-based initiatives include JobsFirstNYC's Young Adult Sectoral Employment Project and Social Innovation Fund's WorkAdvance.

- 3. Creating innovative, business-led employer collaborations:** Business-to-business employer supports such as the *Small Biz 4 Youth Campaign* and JobsFirstNYC's emerging seasonal employer collaborative, the *Seasonal Talent Exchange* allow employers to work together to design and lead collective efforts to successfully hire and retain local workers.
- 4. Investing in post-hire employment services:** Post-hire supports for young people and employers should continue to advance workers through skills training and ongoing social, educational, and financial supports. This could include: worker up-skilling and worker advancement, incumbent worker training, and employee access to training and supportive services. Examples include WorkLife Partnership in Denver, Colorado and The SOURCE in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

APPROACH II:

Reconnect OSOW young adults by investing in training and employment opportunities that pay livable wages.

New York City has taken steps to improve the quality of services delivered to OSOW young adults. These improvements include the NYC Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD)'s recent Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) rollout of Out of School Youth (OSY) programs and the NYC Human Resource Administration (HRA)'s restructured Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) services for young adults. However, many young adults remain disconnected from training and employment opportunities for living-wage careers.

In order to increase the quality and reach of effective programs, we recommend:

- 1. Aligning economic and workforce development strategies:** To improve young adult education and employment outcomes, community-level economic outcomes and local business outcomes, invest in partnerships that align education and workforce organizations with economic and labor market trends in under-resourced neighborhoods. JobsFirstNYC's Lower Eastside Employment Network (LESEN) and Staten Island Youth Workforce Initiative Network (Youth WINS) are strong local examples of this kind of partnership.
- 2. Creating a public sector young adult employment initiative:** There is interest from public agencies and public employee organizations, such as unions, to create programs to train and intentionally place younger workers into careers in the public sector. Many city and state government workers are projected to retire in the next decade, and public sector jobs have historically been pathways into the middle-class for low-income or low-skilled people and people of color. Cities undertaking similar efforts successfully include Hennepin County, Minnesota; Albuquerque, New Mexico; and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
- 3. Investing in the creation of a two-year post-education, training and placement strategy for OSOW young adults:** Young adults newly connected to employment need supportive services to overcome challenges both in and out of the workplace that often lead to job loss. Providing initial guidance and support can help to build long-term resiliency and prevent young adults from returning to the OSOW population.
- 4. Investing in apprenticeships and certificates that lead to middle-skill jobs:** Investing in apprenticeships is investing in the preparation of talent for the growing number of middle skills jobs. On average, an individual who completes an apprenticeship earns \$50,000 annually and is over 90 percent likely to retain their job. In an era when many students are shouldering large amounts of student loan debt, apprenticeships can offer a debt-free credential that leads to a living-wage career.
- 5. Connecting career preparation and training services for OSOW young adults to the Mayor's existing efforts to serve homeless young adults, young adults with mental health needs, young adults in foster care, and young adults with engagement in the criminal justice system:** Throughout his tenure, Mayor de Blasio has made formal commitments to serve homeless young adults, including LGBTQ young people, and those with mental health needs. Homelessness and unmet mental health needs are two significant barriers to securing and maintaining employment for young adults. Alignment of the Mayor's existing efforts with any new efforts to help OSOW young adults would significantly strengthen overall outcomes for our City's young people. Other efforts to align with include initiatives to improve criminal and juvenile justice and foster care.

- 6. Expanding NYC Department of Education (DOE) programs to serve OSOW young adults up to age 24 and enhance supportive services to young adults served through the Office of Adult and Continuing Education (OACE):** Expanding services to OSOW 21- to 24-year-olds offered through the DOE's District 79/Pathways to Graduation divisions could provide the necessary support young adults need for positive education and employment outcomes. We also recommend more intentional focus on the career preparation needs of young adults within OACE.
- 7. Creating a network of young adult opportunity centers:** Investing in a network of opportunity centers in communities with the greatest numbers of OSOW young adults would connect these young people to jobs and to the educational, training, and support services. The NYC Department of Small Business Services could incorporate more young adult services into its centers across the City or convert some of the current centers to provide more targeted supports for youth, similar to its new center in the Bronx.
- 8. Creating a one-stop portal that helps young adults make career-related decisions:** A comprehensive web portal would provide access to career-related and educational information that many young New Yorkers cannot currently find. It would offer information about job openings, occupations and their required qualifications, training and education programs, and available resources to offset the costs of these programs.

APPROACH III:

Stem the flow of young adults into the OSOW population (from K–12 and CUNY).

Create a comprehensive approach that connects K–12 schools, post-secondary institutions and post-service employment to prevent young adults from entering or re-entering the OSOW space. This approach would create a more intentional and coordinated alignment of career exploration and relevant market demand training that accurately responds to the interests and diversity of students. In New York City, one such approach to better align education and employment systems has been the addition of career and technical education (CTE) in high schools.

To increase coordination among these systems and prevent students from dropping out of school or graduating and entering the labor market unprepared, we recommend:

- 1. Increasing career readiness exploration:** Focus career readiness and education efforts in K–12 schools on growing employment sectors and subsectors. The current and planned career-focused tracks within the CTE schools/programs need to be closer aligned with market demand. Aligning career exploration and work-based learning in the K-12 system with business needs can result in more successful career choices and more sustained attachment to the labor market.
- 4. Developing and coordinating robust work-based learning providers:** K–12 schools should strategically collaborate with post-secondary institutions and community-based organizations to effectively deliver market-demand skills training. The City's Industry Partnerships can provide support to strengthening and diversifying work-based learning within the K–12 system.
- 3. Developing successive learning models:** A system-wide work-based learning model that includes in-school young adults, integrating career exploration and work-based experience, should start at ninth grade in order to generate a long-term impact on students' opportunities and choices for career and post-secondary options. Career Clue is one example of a strong successive learning model.
- 2. Strengthening CUNY's workforce development and work-based learning capacities:** Too many young adults are dropping out of the CUNY system without marketable skills. Policymakers should work with CUNY to improve students' career readiness, strengthen the system's relationship with employers, and align training options with market demand sectors.

JobsFirstNYC is a neutral intermediary founded in 2006 with investments from Tiger and The Clark Foundations and the New York City Workforce Funders, with a mission that calls us to leverage all available community, corporate, human, organization, private and public resources to bring out-of-school and out-of-work young adults into the economic life of New York City. We work closely with employers, civic leaders, non-profits and private philanthropy to develop systemic solutions for out of school and out of work young adults. Since our inception, we have developed a range of initiatives – most of which have focused on more effective ways to bring employers to the table – that have successfully reconnected over 4000 young adults to workforce, training, and education services resulting in their successful attachment to the labor market. This is partial progress towards a five year institutional goal of reducing the number of 16-24 year-olds that are neither working nor in school by 5 percent in five years.