JobsFirstNYC

Going Beyond the Bottom Line

Employer Perspectives on the Young Adult Workforce Development System in New York City

JobsFirstNYC: Accelerating opportunities to connect out-of-work and out-of-school young adults to the economic life of New York City.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

This study provides a fresh lens on efforts to improve the workforce system in New York City so it better supports out-of-work and out-of-school young adults: It asks employers what they think about younger adult workers and what they need from workforce service providers who prepare and present young adult candidates for employment.

JobsFirstNYC, working with Public Works Consulting, went directly to employers, inviting hiring managers to describe their experiences with and perceptions of young adult workers, and their experiences with and perceptions of the workforce system. We received candid feedback from over 95 employers via focus groups, key-informant interviews, and an online survey. This tripartite research methodology surfaced a rich array of findings, which we present in the following report.

Readers should note some caveats: First, the purpose of this research was to get authentic, candid, and neutrally-acquired input from employers across sectors of the New York City economy to help workforce practitioners serving young adults better understand employer perceptions, then to use this understanding to improve practice. While many direct service organizations are sophisticated and adept at engaging employers, the ways that employers recruit, hire, and train employees are becoming increasingly complex. Online job applications, for example, place an electronic gate-keeper into the process, something that has befuddled and challenged even some of the most experienced service providers. More changes keep coming fast.

Second, a series of systemic gaps have resulted in the recent larger-scale disconnection and disengagement of young adults, and there is no single, comprehensive approach to address all the gaps. The workforce system often has to play the role of "clean-up crew" for older out-of-work and out-of-school young adults in particular, and the scale and difficulty of this role cannot be overstated. The inability of the education, workforce, and human services systems to coalesce around the needs of younger workers and the lack of connection between developmental principles (or "youth development") and workforce practices combine to constrain self-sufficiency outcomes for these young adults.

Third, the requirements of both the public and private philanthropic funding streams supporting workforce organizations can create a culture of competition and a focus on job *placement* (rather than ongoing, comprehensive, and holistic services) that can prohibit the development of better practices, notably the critical provision of services post-hire in order to support newly hired young people.

Finally, there are challenges in the employment pipeline that the workforce system alone cannot adequately and structurally address. We cannot overstate the effect of the low literacy rate of the overall workforce in NYC, and the challenges this presents to organizations and employers alike. Research from the Education Trust in 2010 ranked the functional literacy of the working-age population (ages 18–64) in New York State 49th out of the 50 states.[1] This is a systemic challenge that warrants an inter-system remedy.

This report presents findings, not conclusions. Its purpose is to invigorate a dialogue about how to best address evolving challenges faced by young adult employment and training providers and how to best capitalize on employer relationships to provide young adults with more and better employment opportunities. Most importantly, we hope that it serves as a building block of more rich, integrated, and substantive inquiry.

JobsFirstNYC recently completed a strategic planning process that features a specific institutional goal of reducing the total out-of-work and out-of-school population in NYC by 5 percent in five years. This ambitious goal can be achieved only by galvanizing the good will, resources, and commitment of many people and institutions, and most especially employers. This report is a critical first step toward that goal. It is often said that effective non-profits work to improve the bottom line for employers. However, to successfully convert out-of-work and out-of-school young adults to the labor market (we are at 170,000+) non-profits and employers alike will need to go "beyond the bottom line." We hope you will join us in this important effort.

[1] *Presentation by Katy Haycock, 2010 NYATEP Workforce Conference. http://www.edtrust. org/dc/presentation/closing-the-achievement-gap-can-we-do-it-what-will-it-take.*

SECTION I:
OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

New York City's economic growth and the ability of young adults to share in it are at risk. Businesses need young adult workers to fill entry-level positions crucial to their operations. Young adults who are out of school and out of work struggle to get jobs that help them start a career. Workforce providers are an essential link between the two, yet businesses often do not perceive high value in the hiring and retention assistance they currently get from the young adult workforce system. This report fills a gap in understanding what businesses need from their young workers and their service providers.

In New York City, young adults who are both out of school and out of work have long challenged workforce development providers and funders. These young people have lost or never had a connection with the institutions that exist to expand their knowledge and enrich their experience at a critical time in their lives, and they reach adulthood with a deficit from which many do not recover. An estimated 172,000 young adults in New York City are out of school and not working.[2] A majority of these have literacy and numeracy (LITNU) skills at or below the 9th grade level. With high rates of unemployment and incarceration, they face uncertain futures.

JobsFirstNYC (JFNYC) identified an as-yet-unexploited opportunity: to develop new and creative ways to engage employers by better meeting their hiring needs. JFNYC recognized, however, that workforce providers, researchers, and funders lacked a clear and comprehensive understanding of those needs, of the ways that workforce providers could meet those needs, and of how employers view young adult workers. Initiating a first-of-its-kind study, JFNYC asked Public Works Consulting to conduct research to obtain a better grasp of employers' hiring needs, to understand employers' current attitudes toward young adult workers, and to recommend specific approaches for most effectively filling hiring needs now and over time.

Employer Research Findings

Public Works solicited and received feedback from over 95 employers. 33 participated in focus groups or individual interviews in November 2011, and 65 responded to an online survey in January 2012[3]. These employers represent a mix of business sizes across nine sectors relevant to young adult employment; all have experience hiring young adults for entry-level positions. Public Works asked employers to share their experiences using nonprofit organizations that provide employment services, and to speak to the characteristics of the young adults in their workplaces, including their experience managing them. They also asked employers to share their impressions of providers' support services for their young adult workers (post-placement) and to suggest ways organizations could make the placements more effective. Employers appeared very genuine and often detailed in their comments. The following summary of findings includes a synthesis of employer responses.

Strengths and Challenges of Young Adults in the Workplace

Employers stated that young people bring many benefits and strengths to the workplace, including enthusiasm, stamina, a high degree of self-confidence, creativity, ability to learn quickly (particularly with regard to computers and technology), lower labor costs, and more flexible schedules.

However, the qualities young adult workers bring with them that are particular to their age group often pose challenges in the workplace. Employers often noted overconfidence and a sense of entitlement, both of which make constructive criticism by supervisors difficult to accept productively. Many employers felt that young adults generally do not seem well prepared with the communications and interpersonal skills needed in a work environment. Many come to the workplace without

[2] JobsFirstNYC website: http://jobsfirstnyc.org

[3] The focus group, interview, and online survey instruments can be found in the Appendices of this report.

basic professionalism; they have difficulty communicating appropriately in a business environment and are easily distracted, especially by technology and social networks. Relatively high turnover among young adult workers is frustrating and presents a specific direct and opportunity cost to employers.

Managing Young Adults in the Workplace

Many young adults who are screened and hired pose management challenges that require a variety of nuanced approaches. Some employers respond with accountability methods whereas others use more empathic approaches; still other employers synthesize a strict approach and a more empathic one. In addition to dealing with young adult workers on an individual basis, employers take advantage of the power of group dynamics. They try to harness positive conversations among peers for the benefit of all workers and cut off negative behavior quickly before it effects or influences a wider group of workers.

Using the Workforce System to Meet Hiring Needs

Many of the employers who provided information in this study have used nonprofit workforce development service providers to meet their hiring needs. Employers appreciate the ability of workforce providers to internalize their hiring needs and send quality candidates, as well as handle the logistics of high-volume hiring processes. Negative experiences include a lack of consistency from providers, often seen as caused by staff turnover. Many employers articulated that workforce organizations appear to be more interested in placement volume than in making careful placements that meet businesses' needs, which may take longer to effect and/or may be fewer in number. Performance-based funding was cited as a factor influencing this behavior.

Providers' Preparation and Support Services for Young Adult Workers

Some employers have used post-hire services provided by workforce service providers. Employers in this study mostly regarded such services as geared toward keeping at-risk young people from falling into trouble rather than helping the business itself improve productivity or to affect their bottom line. Preparation and training services are, in fact, seen as a source of some of the difficulties

> **Many employers articulated that workforce organizations appear to be more interested in placement volume than in making careful placements that meet businesses' needs, which may take longer to effect and/or may be fewer in number.**

employers experience with young adults: Employers often feel that organizations give young people false expectations of the work experience and that training may focus too heavily on the interview itself rather than the entire work-readiness continuum, or the critical steps new employees must take during the onboarding and probationary and training phase of the hiring process. Employers frequently stated that many young people who are hired on the basis of a strong interview are later found to be unprepared for conducting themselves properly in the workplace.

Helping Providers Better Serve Employer Needs

As a first step to better serving their needs, employers stated that providers must first improve their understanding of employers' specific needs and culture, and ensure that this knowledge survives organizational staff transitions. Providers must offer better training on soft skills, including basic business communications and etiquette; employers would particularly like to see organizations use reality-based training in simulated work environments to teach young adults both general soft skills and specific occupational skills.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Providers

Based on employer perspectives and findings of the research, JFNYC makes the following recommendations to workforce development service providers specifically working with young adults:

- **Serve the employer as an equal and primary customer:** Ask about and understand each employer's needs and provide high-quality services to meet them. Orient staff toward employer engagement. Ensure that employer services are internalized at an

organizational level so that they survive the transitions of individual staff members.

- **Instill good work practices in young adults:** Ensure that young adults understand the proper mindset or approach to the workplace over the long haul, and give them tactics to use while on the job, not just tactics to use during the interview and hiring processes.

- **Provide support on the job to both young adults and their supervisors:** Support young adults through the workplace acculturation process. Where possible, put more resources into post-placement support and services.

- **Sell employers on the strengths of young adult workers.** Be positive and honest about young adult workers, while focusing on their strengths. Think in terms of what enables a young adult to become a really valuable employee over time, and vis-à-vis the specific institutional culture of the employer in question.

- **Understand and articulate the actual value of your services:** Recognizing that young adults often present with personal or other issues beyond the control of the workforce provider, focusing on the tangible services workforce providers can offer—and what those services mean in terms of saved time and resources for employers—is essential.

Recommendations for the Field

In addition to these specific recommendations to organizations serving young adults, JFNYC makes the following recommendations for how funders and intermediary organizations can better support this work.

- **Learn about the perspectives of young adults all along the spectrum of service provision and work experience.** Young adults were not included within the scope of this research project, which is a specific limitation for the scope of this research. Feedback from young adults is critical to incorporate into the ongoing employer relationship-cultivation and engagement process.

- **Integrate a youth development approach into workforce services.** Early work experiences can provide a tangible context for young adults to

> To better serve employer needs, providers must first improve their understanding of employers' specific needs and culture, and ensure that this knowledge survives organizational staff transitions.

continue their development, provided they receive support to help them learn and take on new challenges. Providers and young adults will then be better able to serve employer needs.

- **Invest in areas that will help move providers to a more employer-service orientation.** This may include giving account managers (job developers) time to research and understand employers' specific needs, providing for simulated work environments during job preparation, and for more opportunities for both providers and young adult clients to interact with employers and learn from what they do. This might also include formalized or semi-formalized partnerships among funders, employers, and service providers in which employers commit to hiring young people and providers commit to sustained, ongoing educational, social and work supports. These support can be directly supported by funders, and through such support, such partnerships become institutionalized as field-based best practices.

- **Provide, and advocate for, more funding for post-placement supports,** especially for young adults new to the workplace and for supervisors new to working with young adults.

SECTION II:
DETAILED EMPLOYER RESEARCH FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

JFNYC and Public Works Consulting conducted this research to understand how young adult employees can be best prepared to meet employers' needs. We started from the assumption that there is an as-yet-unexploited opportunity for workforce development providers to engage employers in new and creative ways, to better meet their business needs and thereby to place more young people in employment. To identify business needs, we targeted employers in key sectors to learn how they use workforce providers and other sources for employees, and what skills or characteristics they find most important in a successful employee. We conducted additional background research to identify sectors, occupations, and particular employers that provide job opportunities for young adults. Our initial research allowed us to develop a list of employers to engage through focus groups, interviews, and an online survey in order to learn about their experiences and needs. This report presents the results of these efforts to workforce service providers, researchers, and funders.

Research Findings

Public Works solicited and received feedback from over 95 employers. 33 participated in focus groups or individual interviews in November 2011, and 65 responded to an online survey in January 2012.[4]

We asked employers to provide their opinions in the following topic areas:

- Strengths and challenges of young adults in the workplace
- Managing young adults in the workplace
- Working with workforce service providers to meet hiring needs
- Workforce service providers' preparation and support services for young adult workers
- Helping workforce service providers better serve employer needs

We asked employers to speak candidly about the young adults they work with and the providers that serve them. Employers shared success stories, challenges, and recommendations in a constructive and supportive manner. Even those with no connection to either Public Works, JFNYC, or provider organizations were active and valuable participants in these discussions and hoped that the information they provided would help improve the opportunities available to out-of-work young adults. We present our findings by topic area, synthesizing what we learned from employers and sharing particularly salient employer comments in their own words.

Strengths of Young Adults in the Workplace

Employers see that young people bring many benefits and strengths to the workplace, including enthusiasm, excitement, energy, and stamina. These qualities are particularly important because many jobs for which young people are hired require extended periods of standing, moving around, and lifting, often in fast-paced, hectic environments. Young people also bring a high degree of self-confidence and self-esteem to their jobs; although these attributes are potential strengths, they were most often discussed by participants in a negative context.

They're excited, they bring in energy, they bring a fresh mind set, and they're pretty eager. They're very eager to learn and very eager to work and to be successful at whatever it is that they're assigned to do, and that positive energy sometimes rubs off on those who need positive energy.

They're just looking for someone to give them a chance, so they're a bit more open, and they want to work hard and really want to do well because they really just don't have another option; or they can't get

something else, because they don't have a GED or a high school diploma—they're working towards it. I think that they're willing to work a little bit harder.

I think that the younger people today do have more self-confidence. I think they have self-esteem better than, perhaps, somebody from my era. And they seem to know what they want—they may not always want to go after it, but I find them to be very self-confident.

Employers who are able to easily identify young adult workers' interests can maximize their contributions to their businesses.

They really want to be doing things they love, and if you can identify what those things are, that's when it's really working for your organization.

It doesn't take long to understand what they like and what they don't like, and if you work with that, then it's going to benefit you in the long run.

Employers appreciate the creativity young adults can bring to their jobs.

They think outside of the box because they don't even know what the box is yet.

Young adults are seen as fast learners, particularly with regard to computers and technology.

We're implementing a computer system in the manufacturing floor. It's been a very difficult implementation [with the longer-tenured workers], but young people just gravitate [to using the computers], and as a result of that, we've been able to roll it out.

From an operational standpoint, they pick up on things a lot faster. They're a lot easier to train and are much more computer savvy.

Logistically, it is often easier to employ younger workers because of lower labor costs and their more flexible schedules.

[The job] may require four hours on Thanksgiving, four hours on Christmas, and sometimes a young person doesn't have responsibilities so they don't have a problem doing those hours.

> ## "They think outside of the box because they don't even know what the box is yet."
> –Sales Manager, Medium-Sized IT Consulting Firm

Survey respondents reinforced these findings, with respondents rating ease of training and high energy level as the greatest assets young adults bring to the job.

- 83% (54/65) cited young adults' ability to be trained quickly and easily, including with respect to technology, as their greatest asset.

- 71% (46/65) of surveyed employers described young adults' eagerness, enthusiasm, or energy level as key.

- 42% (27/65) noted that they were also an inexpensive source of labor.

Challenges of Young Adults in the Workforce

Young adult workers also bring with them challenges particular to their age group. One challenge of particular resonance with employers is overconfidence, which leads to what employers described as an unearned sense of entitlement. When queried further, employers attributed this sense of entitlement in part to the broad societal trend of promoting young people's self-esteem above all other things.

It's almost like, "Well, I'm here—I'm showing up. What more do you want from me?" But this is your job. This is what you get paid to do.

When I have to criticize [a younger worker] or bring [them] down to a point that you need to understand you did something wrong… there's a big disconnect sometimes. [Their thinking seems to be,] "I'm better than sliced bread—how can I be wrong?"

This overconfidence may result from young adults' fear of showing weakness at a vulnerable age. A know-it-all attitude may be a defense mechanism, which in turn leads some young employees to resist training or receiving constructive criticism and corrections.

Sometimes they're hard to teach in a systematic way. You have to take one step at a time; you can't start right at the first base and jump all the way to home plate.

They say, "Yes, I got it," but sometimes I feel like they're afraid of getting in trouble [if they don't get it]. I want us to make mistakes so that we can figure out how to fix them and be better, and so it's not like this badge of failure because a mistake was made.

Young people need to understand: Feedback is not about being right or wrong. "Hey, you're going to make mistakes. Totally fine. Let's talk about what we can plan to do for the next time this happens." But I always find they sort of shut down a little bit; I can see that they're just not used to that.

Young adults in the workplaces may miss days, arrive late, and not call in when running late, demonstrating to employers a lack of understanding of basic professionalism. Many young people also have trouble separating personal and informal behavior from that which is appropriate to the workplace.

This is their first job, so they don't have that proper work etiquette.

They will be good for like two weeks, a month, and then all of a sudden it's like you have two weeks of "I overslept, I forgot."

I think a lot of people don't really know how to behave in a professional environment—things not to say, and things to say. I think people say a little bit too much about their private life.

A lot of times we've had major anger-management issues. And part of it is how they deal with stuff when they're at home or with their friends, and they don't realize that you can't speak to the bosses [and coworkers] that way.

Our challenge has been with the workplace versus the hanging-out mentality, where they come in thinking that they can carry on a certain dialogue where maybe amongst your friends and your peers that would be OK.

Many employers felt that young adult workers lack customer service aptitude. One respondent commented that young workers seem too ready to pass customer problems on to someone else rather than tackle them themselves.

They don't understand that customers can vote with the pocketbook and their feet. They don't understand the customer is always right.

Young adult workers may often display short attention spans, associated, in part, with their perceived or actual excessive and disruptive use of cell phones, texting, and social media.

[They think they have a] God-given right to technology, texting, and cell phones, and to use them instead of working.

Finally, young adult workers are highly likely to leave jobs after short tenures, lacking a sense of a career path or an understanding of the value of staying at a job for more than a short period of time.

They feel like they have time, versus someone with real responsibilities. "I don't like it here. I can find a new job."

They have a lot less to lose than adults. They don't have a mortgage or family.

Survey results echoed these findings: Soft skills and attitude emerged as the greatest challenges to working with young adults.

- 54% (34/63) of respondents described young adults' easy distraction as the biggest problem.
- 43% (27/63) said poor work etiquette, dress, or use of informal language was a challenge. (Several of the answers listed as "other" spoke to this issue, too.)
- 40% (25/63) also described high turnover as a problem.

Employers attempt to screen for these challenges when recruiting and hiring young adult workers, but with mixed results. Some employers use a questionnaire during the application process that can catch applicants' negative attitudes towards work. Interviews remain an important part of the screening process. One employer reported that a casual, friendly interview style yields more honest answers.

We have a basic questionnaire before we hire people. What do you do when you're late to work? What do you do when you're out to lunch and you're running five minutes late—do you call your boss? Do you come back? Do you come in late? Or do you come in late or do you take advantage? What do you do when someone speaks negatively towards you?

When you're interviewing with [a friendly] style, you get a more honest reaction to the technical questions. I feel like most people answer what you think you're supposed to answer. [When] people are more relaxed, they slip up and say things that maybe they shouldn't have said.

Managing Young Adults in the Workplace

Many young adults who are screened and hired pose management challenges that require a variety of nuanced approaches. Some employers use strict accountability methods. They make sure to call young adult workers out on mistakes and issues immediately, and they place high value on making sure that rules are consistently enforced across all staff and all situations.

The teenagers that we work with like to push the envelope. They'll show up 5 minutes late this day, show up 10 minutes late the next day, and see if anyone notices. Addressing it as soon as you see it and calling them out on it makes them more aware that people notice, that they're being watched. The sooner the better.

If they think they can play you, it becomes cancerous throughout the organization. So, we've got this thing. It's "end it before it starts." When someone starts going sideways, you sit them down and say, "Here we are. It's up to you at this point. And here's your path towards success, and here's your path towards out the door."

> ## "You can't make an 18-year-old [into] a 30-year-old. The organization has to understand that young talent is something that's nurtured."
> –Sales Manager, Medium-Sized IT Consulting Firm

Other employers take more empathic approaches to young workers' challenges. They try to relate with their young workers and earn their trust and buy-in—doing so most successfully when managers are closer in age to the young adult workers, or can relate to them as though they are.

[As a manager who is close to their age], when I tell them that they've done something wrong or try to explain to them what they've done wrong, they feel like I'm not yelling at them or like I'm not really going to get them in trouble. They feel like I'm more on their level. They're comfortable with [receiving negative feedback] and they're more willing to fix their problem and not [cry or react negatively].

One of the things we realized very, very early is that you can't make an 18-year-old [into] a 30-year-old. The workforce organizations have to understand that young talent is something that's nurtured. It's a whole different mind frame to have them in an established older workforce. So there's a little bit of work there that actually has to take place on both ends.

They want to like and respect you, in order to listen to your feedback. Half of it is you trying to win them over and that you're [hip], but also that you're not their friend. It's this weird juggling both of these things, because if they don't like you and respect you, they're halfway out the door.

Still other employers synthesize a more strict approach and the more empathic one. They allow for flexibility and try to meet young people where they are, but they also apply strict accountability measures in certain situations.

You say, "How could you have done this better?" Or, "Let's think this thing through." And there are other times where you throw the book at them.

It's accountability. We have rules, we have guidelines, and it's up to supervision to be consistent with making sure that those rules and guidelines are followed. Right away once an infraction takes place, you have to be on top of that. And you have to help them to see where they have to take ownership for what they're doing. But you also have to do it in a way where you're communicating with them and not making them feel like they're the enemy, and it's you against them. You have to have some common ground. Because if they feel that you're out to get them, then you're not going to have that positive and energetic spirit that you want."

Beyond dealing with young adult workers on an individual basis, employers are sensitive to the power of group dynamics. They try to harness positive peer energy for the benefit of all workers, and they also try to cut off negative behavior quickly before it spreads to the rest of the group.

We hire [candidates from high schools] in a group together. They're these stars that really shine and are motivated, and [their presence creates a sense of friendly, productive competition with] people who are very disconnected.

If you have that one person that's underperforming, your good people will look at you as the leader and say, "Why do you tolerate that?" And then it brings them right down.

There was one person who was just not motivated, was always on the phone even when she was working. You began to see some of the other people, two or three, start to hang out with her and waste time and not work. And it was very interesting to observe that phenomenon, because these people had been working better and giving it their all. That's the one person that we let go, but it was essential. Everything changed after that to be more productive.

In addition to management tactics for enforcing accountability and discipline, employers offered several techniques for developing young workers and promoting their success. When training young workers, employers see practical, hands-on approaches as more effective than abstract, classroom-based training.

We had the most problems [with classroom training]. So, we try to do more field-based training, and I think that's always beneficial.

Partnering employees with young adults in mentoring relationships can help to develop young workers and give them support.

We have our field supervisors who mentor some new hires and young employees. There is a lot of mentoring going on, which is a good thing. And we've seen some really awesome turnarounds.

Creative tactics can help young adults increase the chances of meeting deadlines and, in the process, foster a sense of accountability for and ownership of their roles.

In the context of a consulting role: Telling them to complete a task by the end of the business day may not necessarily produce as good a result as telling them to complete a task, so that by tomorrow when they come in it's done. A lot of times, they'll be up until 1, 2 in the morning churning out work, and we adapted to this.

I don't set deadlines for my staff members. They set all their deadlines. I find that it works really well with the younger demographic because they always think they can get things done a lot faster than they really can. It makes it a lot easier when they do not fulfill what they've promised to hold them accountable.

Working with Workforce Service Providers to Meet Hiring Needs

Over 75 percent of the employers who provided information in this study have used the workforce development system to meet their hiring needs. Their experiences are mainly positive: Employers value providers' ability to internalize their hiring

> **"We hire [candidates from high schools] in a group together. They're these stars that really shine and are motivated, and we think [their presence creates a sense of friendly, productive competition with] people who are very disconnected."**
> –Program Director, New York City Government Agency

needs and send quality candidates for their positions; some singled out particular job developers with whom they have developed collaborative, effective working relationships.

I work with one of the coordinators [at a youth organization] when I have entry-level positions. We go through the whole interview process. She knows what we're looking for, and what type of skills that we require, and she does really well at matching our needs.

I've had great successes [with public/ nonprofit providers]. They've been able to identify what I'm looking for. It's like having a bunch of agents working for me.

Employers also appreciate providers' abilities to take care of the logistics of high-volume hiring processes.

Of the four stores we've opened in the last two years, 80 percent of my staff came from [public or nonprofit providers], because they did the screening, they assumed the responsibility for the advertising, and so forth.

But there are significant negatives to working with providers to meet hiring needs. Employers' primary concern is a lack of consistency: Initial successes with recruiting candidates turned into unacceptable poor performance. Many employers see provider staff turnover as the cause of this inconsistency.

[After one successful experience with an organization], I've since called the same organization for other positions and the person that I was working with left, and the few requests that I sent were lost. They didn't return my phone calls. My experience has been that it really depends on the person that is at the other end of the phone line.

Another employer concurred, stating that it depends on whom you get as a contact. In this case, the original contact had a good understanding of the business's hiring needs and sent candidates that had been properly vetted; then a new person came in and sent candidates that were a poor fit: "totally off base."

Separate from the inconsistency issue, providers can seem more interested in

achieving a high volume of placements than in making placements that meet businesses' needs, which may take longer or be fewer in number. Employers are thus sent large numbers of unqualified candidates, which builds a negative impression of the workforce system.

They were just sending me people just to make numbers. Despite my extensive requirement on the profile of the associate, they were just sending people, and it was just a waste of my time, and a waste of the candidates' time.

I think some job developers work on commission. I think that's important to [give job developers negative feedback on poor candidates] because we get that a lot. They just want to push as many employees on us as possible because they make money.

The online survey surfaced additional feedback on using workforce service providers. Of those firms who reported using an outside organization to hire young adults,

- 67% (14/21) used either a government-sponsored service or a nonprofit organization.

- 48% (10/21) reported a positive experience working with outside organizations. (A similar proportion—43%, or 6/14—of those who worked with a subset that included either a nonprofit or government-sponsored service reported positive experiences.)

- 48% (10/21) indicated that they were unaware of any support services provided by these organizations to facilitate young adults' success in their workplaces.

Respondents who elaborated gave a few impressions about the positive aspects of working with an outside organization. They liked the access to a volume of candidates

> **"I've had great successes [with public and nonprofit providers]. They've been able to identify what I'm looking for. It's like having a bunch of agents working for me."**
>
> –HR Manager, Medium-Sized Hospitality Company

and the opportunity to fill positions quickly, which lightened the hiring entities' loads. One commented on how helpful it was that an organization "listened to what they were looking for."

Those with negative opinions were less impressed with the quality of the candidates, or felt that the candidates were not well vetted for the positions. One respondent commented that the tenor of the relationship was focused more on the company making accommodations for the young adult than on preparing the young adult for the work environment. Also, several felt pressure to promote within a short period of time to show advancement, presumably to meet the goals of the nonprofit making the referral.

Workforce Service Providers' Preparation of Young Adult Workers

Although employers recognize the need to carefully manage young adult workers, they do not at this point view workforce service providers as a resource to help them beyond the initial hiring. They did speak positively about post-hire services provided to their young adult workers by the providers that supplied those workers. However, they regard such services as geared toward keeping at-risk young people from falling into trouble rather than helping the business improve its productivity or its bottom line.

A few employers integrate these services with their own management practices. Job coaches come to the work site and interact directly with supervisors, and employers see this as a significant value-add. Their supervisors interact with the supporting nonprofit organization, and they actively promote the services to their young workers. One employer who hires large numbers of young adults for seasonal work has explicitly engaged an organization to be on-site to offer support services to its workers.

> It really does help to have [the job coaches] come in. The managers are able to communicate to the job coaches where the employee is doing well and where they can improve, and it helps to have that representative from their agency working firsthand with us because it's kind of difficult for us to take that time out and dedicate to the employee.

> **"They were just sending me people just to make numbers. Despite my extensive requirements on the profile of the associate, they were just sending people, and it was just a waste of my time, and a waste of the candidates' time."**
>
> –Recruiter, Large Regional Retailer

Other employers see these services as separate from, but parallel to, their own management practices. They appreciate this more hands-off approach because it requires no extra time or participation on their part.

> I think we've been successful with the mentorship program with our younger adults because it hasn't occupied any of our time. What I've heard about it, it's only been through the employees and that's only within asking them that yes, somebody is tracking them and going back every six months saying like, "How do you like your job? What do you feel is great for the next batch of people?" I think that's nice that they're getting feedback from them and it doesn't affect my organization.

Preparation and training services are also viewed as contributing to false expectations of the work experience. Employers feel that providers do not prepare young people to deal with the ambiguities and expectations of the professional environment.

> They give them a false expectation of what the real world workforce is like. It's almost like, "OK, show up every day at this time. You get to do these three tasks and if you do that well for six months, then you're ready to go to work." And then they get to work and you're like, "I need you to get 20 tasks done in half the time." And they're like, "Well, this is not the way it was." And then it creates a pushback and you're like, "No this is the real world. This is how it works."

> I partnered recently with [a training service provider]. I ran a training school in my shop, and we had a postmortem and the first thing I said to them was, "You want to teach these guys to work in the manufacturing environment? The first thing you did wrong was to start the class at 9 o'clock.

Manufacturing starts at 7 o'clock in most places." So they start at 9, they show up at quarter after. They were presented with training within a working shop with the possibility of getting a job. They come in dressed [inappropriately], pants too low, hats on backwards, T-shirts—totally unpresentable.

Providers also seem to focus too heavily on preparing young adults for the interview process, leaving young adults untrained in essential work skills.

We find that they present really well [during interviews] and that's coming from somewhere, I imagine; nonprofit organizations are probably known for that. Once they get into the job, I find that they're a little lost. I feel like [the interview is] all they were really prepared for.

What they consider soft skills training is really prepping for an interview…It's very, very clear what they prep them for: dress right, say the right things, and then after that you're in the door, you're on your own.

Helping Workforce Service Providers Better Serve Employer Needs

For workforce providers to better serve them, employers strongly feel that providers must first improve their understanding of employers' specific needs and culture, and ensure that this knowledge survives organizational staff transitions.

[Providers] have to recognize the work environments that they're placing these people into and then adapt to that. It's very important for them to be adaptable and to recognize the industries that they're placing these people in and their distinct needs.

One of the things I like with those agencies is that every time they send someone to us and we don't hire them, they take detailed notes as to why…And then they create a profile for our company.

One thing they can do on their side is implement that focus and maybe create a database…so when you have a new recruiter who comes in to the organization, they can just pull it up, look at your company, know where they've successfully placed someone and there's a history there, versus someone coming in and starting over from scratch.

Employers recognize the limitations of pre-employment training and encourage providers to make it clear to young people that their training is not all-inclusive; they must be prepared to continue to learn while on the job.

They're not really saying, "Listen, this is the tip of the iceberg of what you can expect; these are the essentials. These are the soft skills that we're teaching you, but there are so many other things that you need to have that you will learn on the job, and you need to go in with that expectation."

More than anything else, employers want providers' services to offer better training on soft skills, including basic workplace communications and etiquette—although they acknowledge how hard it can be to teach these skills to young people who did not acquire them at a younger age.

I think a key thing is teaching life skills: What you would do regardless of if you were working somewhere or you were meeting someone for dinner. That is a huge bridge that we have to cross before we can even sort of have a normal conversation about accountability in the workplace.

Teach employment etiquette, such as giving two weeks notice prior to quitting. Since workers who came from a nonprofit organization can use the organization as a reference, they're not as concerned with burning the bridge with the old employer.

Ideally for employers, organizations would offer reality-based training in a simulated work environment that includes strict start times, supervisors who hold young adults accountable, and simulated customer interactions. Employers feel that with this training in particular, young adult workers would come to the job best

> **"One of the things I like with those agencies is that every time they send someone to us and we don't hire them, they take detailed notes as to why… And then they create a profile for our company."**
>
> –President, Small Commercial Cleaning Company

prepared with general soft skills and specific occupational skills.

I think if young people are put in a situation where it's like a mock job. They learn how to answer the telephone, but they actually are going through it with an actual person. They learn how to deal with a person who's maybe really being an a-hole over the phone. You can't curse them out. You can't hang up on them. Just to troubleshoot what they might do when they come across those kinds of issues.

One employer encouraged providers to think about their preparation of young workers from the perspective of reducing the "total cost of labor" for a business. Another employer encouraged nonprofits to brand or sell their services as value-adds for businesses in order to counter any perception of these programs as public assistance.

There is a hidden cost that comes with young people and that is the cost of training employees. At the end, it's the total cost of what that labor pool is at a given time, and so that's why we all like fast learners. Take a look at the overall cost of labor for the employers, how can we lower it through training, through mentoring programs, so that they can perform very quickly or they can learn to perform very quickly at the workplace.

To the survey questions asking what additional support managers could use, roughly half of respondents chose each of:

- Strategic training for supervisors (33/65, 51%);

- Identifying mentors for young adult workers (30/65, 46%); and

- More opportunities for on-the-job training (29/65, 45%)

Recommendations

JFNYC identified the need to bring the employer perspective of the workforce system and of the issues confronting younger workers to the forefront and in a more public way. As a consequence of doing so, it is our hope that we would inspire a dialogue in the field that promotes creative and more effective ways to engage employers, and to build on already existing best practices.

Recommendations for Providers

Based on our findings and strong employer comments, we make the following recommendations to the provider community on employer engagement:

- Serve the employer as both an equal and primary customer for your services.

- Nurture good work practices in young adults.

- Provide support on the job.

- Sell employers on the strengths of young adult workers, and sell young adults on the positives of early career steps.

- Understand and specifically quantify the value of the employer-specific services your organization can and does offer.

Serve the Employer as an Equal and Primary Customer

- Ask about and understand each employer's needs and address them with high quality, employer-oriented services.

  > Visit the worksite often in order to experience the workplace culture firsthand.

  > Create and update training that fits current employer needs.

  > Get a detailed understanding of the job requirements, and send candidates who are a good fit.

  > Understand why employers reject particular candidates; respond to and refine fulfillment based on employer feedback. Continuously request feedback from employers regarding matching efforts, and refine those efforts based on what is learned.

  > Provide continuous service to the employer customer: Smoothly transfer employer accounts from one job developer to the next, possibly assigning two to each account at all times.

Show staff members the value of orienting themselves toward serving the employer-customer. Satisfied employers-as-customers lead to more and better job opportunities for young adult clients.

- Instill in the organization a culture of serving business needs.

  > Show staff members the value of orienting themselves toward serving the employer-customer. Satisfied employers-as-customers lead to more and better job opportunities for young adult clients.

  > Build the provider's brand with employers so that they associate quality services with the organization, not with an individual account manager.

  > Take what strong account managers are doing well and spread that throughout the culture. Help strong account managers enhance their own skills and train others, giving them motivation to grow and stay with the organization.

- Learn the specific skills (soft and hard) that employers require and communicate this understanding back to employers. Be conscious of differences in skill requirements for similar positions with different employers. Instruct account managers to probe for this with each employer.

- Respond to real employer demand for entry-level workers by understanding the sectors and occupations that are in high demand.

Foster Good Work Practices in Young Adults

- Ensure that young adults understand the proper mindset or approach to the workplace. Work with them to develop their motivation and initiative. Building this understanding is a process and learned over time and often best learned through modeling and direct experience.

  > Help young adults be more comfortable with taking risks, accepting negative feedback when they fall short, and learning from their more senior colleagues. Give them specific tactics to use on the job.

- Show young adults how first entry-level jobs can lead to bigger and better things. "For-now" jobs have a valuable role in the learning and career exploration process, but young people need ongoing support post-hire and in rehiring should a specific job not work out.

Emphasize that all young adults have the ability to have positive early work experiences.

  > Employers see young workers as highly likely to leave jobs after short tenures.

  > Make young adults aware of the value that employers see in them, and help them clearly define success on the specific job.

  > Coach young adults on the appropriate length of tenure for "starter" jobs, and on what they can expect to learn and gain from initial work experiences.

  > Emphasize that all young adults have the ability to have positive early work experiences.

- Focus on soft skills training.

  > Employers most consistently requested that providers' services include better training on soft skills, although they also acknowledged how hard it can be to teach these skills to young people who may not have been exposed to or acquired them at a younger age.

  > Teach basic employment practices, such as notifying employers of an absence or late arrival and giving two weeks notice before quitting.

  > Teach respectful communication, such as acknowledging managers and co-workers with eye contact.

  > Model and integrate strategies to teach young adults to both receive and give effective feedback. This may be the most crucial soft skill young adults must master to be successful in a work setting.

- Use innovative approaches to training and apply best practices, focusing especially on life at work after the interview. Some techniques include:

  > Role play.

  > Simulated work environments.

  > Team-based approaches, to leverage both young adults' ability to learn from each other and their sense of responsibility to the group.

Provide Support on the Job

- Help young adults with the workplace acculturation process.

    > Put more resources into post-placement services to help employers support their young adult workers, and help young adult workers meet a new set of workplace expectations.

    > Many employers recognized the challenge that young adult workers face when transitioning to workplace environments and would like for providers to support them in making this transition a successful one.

- Train and support direct supervisors.

    > Young workers interact most with their direct supervisors, who are often only one step up from entry-level themselves.

    > Helping supervisors to understand and better manage young workers will improve retention and morale.

- Partner young workers with mentors, such as supervisors, other workers, more experienced peers, or case managers from the provider.

    > Train the mentors to play their role well, which can raise job satisfaction for mentors and all employees.

- Assist employers to adopt promising management practices, which support their efforts to hire and retain young adults. Direct assistance to the employer will also help the provider build the relationship. This effort will support all entry-level workers at that business, not just those placed by the provider. Promising practices include:

    > Giving young adult employees the opportunity to provide input on deadlines and performance targets where possible.

    > Scheduling internal meetings before customer interactions, to help young workers be on time; for example, scheduling a 15-minute staff meeting prior to the morning opening of a retail store.

    > Team-based learning and goals.

    > Action-oriented and experiential learning.

> **Employers recognized the challenge that young adult workers face in transitioning to the workplace, and would like provider support to make this transition successful.**

Sell Employers on the Strengths of Young Adult Workers, and Sell Young Adults on the Positives of Early Career Steps

- Be positive and honest with employers about young adult workers, and focus on the strengths that our research participants articulated.

- Train to young adults' strengths, such as their high energy and affinity for working in teams.

- Do not present young adult workers as adults, because they will fall short needlessly, and employers may not capitalize on the real strengths they bring.

- Consider the attributes that enable a young adult to become a really valuable employee. Use the attributes to guide retention and other services.

Understand and Articulate the Actual Value of Your Services to Employers

- Recognize that young adults often present with personal or other issues beyond the control of the workforce provider, focus on the tangible services workforce providers can offer.

- Articulate to employers what those services mean in terms of saved time and resources.

Recommendations for the Field

Youth workforce development funders and intermediary organizations have a role in improving practices and outcomes for young adults. We encourage those institutions supporting the development of this field to consider the following recommendations.

- Support youth-centered models and efforts that integrate holistic, supportive social, educational and work supports that all young people need to be successful.

- Integrate a youth development approach into workforce services. Early work experiences can provide a tangible

context for young adults to continue their development, provided they receive support to help them learn and take on new challenges. The two together can help young adults increase their sense of self-worth and ability to contribute positively to their employer, their family, and their community. Providers and young adults will then be better able to serve employer needs.

- Invest in areas that will help move providers to a more employer-service orientation, such as giving account managers time to research and understand employers' specific needs, providing for simulated work environments during job preparation, and supporting more opportunities for both providers and young adult clients to interact with employers and learn from what they do.

- Provide more funding for post-placement supports, especially for young adults new to the workplace and for supervisors new to working with young adults.

SECTION III:
BACKGROUND RESEARCH AND METHODOLOGY

Research Goals and Approach

JFNYC commissioned Public Works Consulting to conduct this research in an effort to understand how young adult employees can be best prepared to meet employers' needs. We started from the assumption that there is an as-yet-unexploited opportunity for workforce development providers to engage employers in new and creative ways, to better meet their business needs and thereby to place more young people in employment. To identify those needs, we targeted employers in key sectors to learn how they use workforce providers and other sources for employees, and what skills or characteristics they find most important in a successful employee. In order to frame and prepare the employer research, we engaged stakeholders including workforce providers and researchers. We conducted additional background research to identify sectors, occupations, and particular employers that provide job opportunities for young adults. Our initial research allowed us to develop a list of employers to engage through focus groups, interviews, and an online survey in order to learn about their experiences and needs. This final report presents the results of these efforts to JFNYC and to workforce service providers, researchers, and funders.

This work explicitly focuses on current employers in New York City who hire significant numbers of young adults, in positions that do not require a high school diploma. There has been excellent research on related issues, but none that have gathered the feedback from the employers that are hiring our young adults in near-real time. This report adds to the larger body of research, such as *The Economic Value of Opportunity Youth* aby the White House Council for Community Solutions, and *Pathways to Prosperity* by the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Sector Research

To identify industry sectors and employers appropriate for meaningful entry-level young adult employment, we reviewed literature on workforce development that identified sectors with particular opportunities for entry-level young adult employment and labor market reports that identified sectors expecting job growth in the near term.[5] We synthesized this research and produced the following list of nine sectors or occupation clusters to define targets for our outreach and provide broader economic context for the findings and recommendations.

Sector	Sector Size—Total NYC Employment[6]	Notes
Healthcare (Ambulatory)	592,000	– Healthcare is still growing, but targets should be chosen wisely. Hospital unionization and experience requirements raise the bar for entry for occupations beyond Home Health Aides and Certified Nursing Assistants. – Healthcare sector added 1,000 jobs from Dec '10–Dec '11
Professional Services (Computer-Related Occupations)	341,000	– Good prospects, but need to be mindful of rising skill requirements – Professional Services sector added 15,000 jobs from Dec '10–Dec '11

(Table continued on next page.)

[5] Sources:

Fischer, David. Chance of a Lifetime. Center for an Urban Future, May 2006.

Fischer, David. Second Chance of a Lifetime—Transition Memo. Center for an Urban Future, February 10, 2010.

Von Nostitz, Glenn. Telephone interview. August 15, 2011.

Significant Industries: A Report to the Workforce Development System. New York State Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Market Information, Division of Research and Statistics, January 2011.

NYC Current Employment Report. New York State Department of Labor, December 2011.

The State of Working New York City 2011: Scant Recovery for Workers—Some See Gains but Recession Conditions Persist for Most. Fiscal Policy Institute, July 20, 2011.

[6] Sector Size—Total NYC Employment is current as of December 2011.

Sector (cont'd)	Sector Size—Total NYC Employment (cont'd)	Notes (cont'd)
Retail	327,000	– Low wages and few growth opportunities, but an important first step for base-level employment – Strong growth in Food and Beverage Stores subsector in recent years; these businesses usually perform better than others during recessions – Retail sector added 14,000 jobs from Dec '10–Dec '11
Accommodation & Food Services (Hotels)	268,000	– Hotel subsector has performed well during downturn – Above-average job growth predicted – Accommodations & Food Services sector added 7,000 jobs from Dec '10–Dec '11
Accommodation & Food Services (Restaurants)	268,000	– Food Services subsector has performed well during downturn – High job growth predicted, but low wages will persist – Accommodations & Food Services sector added 7,000 jobs from Dec '10–Dec '11
Admin & Support (Pest Control/ Building Maintenance)	202,000	– Pest control is a niche but growing field – Admin, Support, Waste Management, and Remediation Services sector added 7,000 jobs from Dec '10–Dec '11
Admin & Support (Temporary Office Help)	202,000	– Administrative and Support Services subsector is expected to grow rapidly as the economy expands and businesses turn to temp firms to fill gaps prior to making new hires – Administration, Support, Waste Management, and Remediation Services sector added 7,000 jobs from Dec '10–Dec '11
Transportation (Automotive Maintenance)	106,000	– Many older mechanics are aging out of the workforce, and there is a scarcity of younger mechanics to take their place. – Transportation sector had no net job gain or loss from Dec '10–Dec '11
Transportation (Commercial Driving)	106,000	– Low entry requirements beyond obtaining a Commercial Drivers License, for which there are many free or low cost training options. – Transportation sector had no net job gain or loss from Dec '10–Dec '11

Additional sector research information can be found in the appendix of this report.

Background Research from Workforce Development Providers

To gain an understanding of current job placement and employer engagement practices, Public Works spoke to the members of the JFNYC Community Advisory Council, which is comprised of leaders of young adult workforce and youth-service organizations in the City, as well as policy experts and leadership from intermediaries focused on young adults. Members who represent direct service organizations indicated that a majority of job placements in their organizations are occurring in retail and food service, and the nature of positions is trending away from full-time toward part-time jobs or internships. The current economic downturn has resulted in several changes in hiring practices. Employers are increasingly using group interviews, possibly to screen more candidates before

making hiring decisions, and streamlining the process by requiring online applications and aptitude assessments. Many service providers referenced that young adults' preferences for work often do not align with the available opportunities; young people would prefer full-time positions in the healthcare sector or in office jobs, for example. Some felt that they also may not recognize the importance of establishing work history, even in suboptimal positions, in order to become a more credible candidate for later positions.

Providers identified specific challenges to building and maintaining more fruitful contacts with employers. For example, strong job developers who have established personal relationships with employers' hiring managers can generate the greatest opportunities for placements, but providers often lose those relationships—and those opportunities— when job developers leave their positions. Often, job development remains practitioner-to-employer at the transactional level, rather than workforce provider (as an institution)-to-employer. Overlap and competition with counterpart organizations who work with the same employers also frustrate relationship-building efforts for employers and providers alike. Providers called for an intermediary that could help broker relationships with large, multi-location employers and coordinate efforts among providers.

There were a few providers who also articulated a need for an organization-wide strategy for targeting and working with employers to offer services beyond job placement, such as orienting and training new employees and assisting with human resources when large numbers of employees are hired.

Employer Research Methodology & Demographics

To capture employers' opinions on young adult workers and young adult workforce service providers, we engaged 33 hiring managers in focus group discussions or one-on-one interviews. These hiring managers came from businesses in our target sectors and employed significant numbers of young adult workers. We supplemented the research with an online survey, which received 65 complete responses from hiring managers who had at least five young adults working in their organizations.

The hiring managers who participated in focus groups and interviews represented 13 different sectors and a mix of business sizes.[7] The top three sectors represented were Accommodation and Food Services, Manufacturing, and Retail, each with five participants. Business sizes were almost equally divided among small (2–49 employees), medium (50–249 employees), and large (250 or more employees). Hiring managers acted in a diversity of roles for their businesses, including as presidents, HR managers, and direct supervisors of line staff. Online survey respondents were more likely to come from the Professional Services sector (44% of respondents) and from large businesses (39% of respondents).

Even with the distribution of participants across sectors and business sizes, there was a high level of agreement among the responses and findings; we therefore present the findings as applicable across sectors and business sizes.

Additional employer demographics can be found in the appendix of this report.

[7] *Businesses are classified into sectors according to the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS).*

SECTION IV:
APPENDICES

Appendix A: Sector Research Sources

We began the research with *Chance of a Lifetime*, a commonly cited report in the literature on young adult workforce development in New York City, published by the Center for an Urban Future (CUF) in May 2006.[8] The report described specific growth sectors in which young people could attain jobs with career-ladder potential, and without significant barriers from training or education: Healthcare, Construction, Automotive Maintenance, Commercial Driving, Science & Technology, Aviation, and Manufacturing.[9] However, there have been drastic changes to the New York City economy since 2006; the Construction sector, for example, has yet to recover from steep job losses and is not considered a bright employment prospect for anyone, much less young adult workers. CUF was able to provide subsequent research from 2010 that constituted a partial update to *Chance of a Lifetime*, with updated data on several of the originally identified sectors.[10] We also spoke to CUF researcher Glenn von Nostitz, who is continuing the effort to update the *Chance of a Lifetime* report. He shared preliminary research findings in late 2011 and spoke to general trends in young adult employment that he had observed from labor market research and from speaking to workforce development providers.[11]

We turned to labor market research to obtain more recent indicators of growth sectors. Sources included the 2011 Significant Industries report for New York City[12] and the December 2011 NYC Current Employment report[13] by the New York State Department of Labor, and *The State of Working New York City 2011* report by the Fiscal Policy Institute.[14] Although these reports covered the broader New York City economy and did not have young adult employment as their focus, *The State of Working New York* did note that the recent post-recession employment picture for young adults has improved at a rate significantly higher than for their older counterparts:

In the recovery's first year in New York City, the largest labor market gains were recorded by youth (ages 16–21) and young adults (22–27). In fact, almost all of the city's labor market improvement has been concentrated among young workers. Both groups of young workers experienced sharp unemployment increases during the recession but the 16–21 group has now returned to its pre-recession 18.8-percent level. The 22–27 age group made up more than half of its recession unemployment rise.[15]

We also reviewed recent target sector and occupation lists used by New York City's Workforce1 Career Centers: the "Target Sectors for Large Businesses"[16] and "In Demand Occupation List."[17] Both lists used labor market data to identify jobs that are in high growth sectors, have minimal entry requirements, and have career-ladder potential.

[8] Fischer, David. *Chance of a Lifetime.* Center for an Urban Future, May 2006.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Fischer, David. *Second Chance of a Lifetime—Transition Memo.* Center for an Urban Future, February 10, 2010.

[11] Von Nostitz, Glenn. Telephone interview. August 15, 2011.

[12] *Significant Industries: A Report to the Workforce Development System.* New York State Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Market Information, Division of Research and Statistics, January 2011.

[13] *NYC Current Employment Report.* New York State Department of Labor, December 2011.

[14] *The State of Working New York City 2011: Scant Recovery for Workers—Some See Gains but Recession Conditions Persist for Most.* Fiscal Policy Institute, July 20, 2011.

[15] *The State of Working New York City 2011.*

[16] "Target Sectors for Large Businesses." NYC Department of Small Business Services, August 2011

[17] "In Demand Occupation List." NYC Workforce Investment Board, December 2009, in use by Workforce1 Career Centers as of August 2011.

Appendix B: Detailed Employer Research Methodology

Focus Groups and Interviews

To recruit employers to contribute to this research, we focused on firms in the identified target sectors that had significant numbers of young adult workers. Staff members from Public Works, JFNYC, and JFNYC service providers invited hiring managers from among their business contacts to participate in a focus group or interview, pitching these as opportunities to help providers better serve the needs of their businesses.

A professional market research firm also recruited a control group of hiring managers from businesses without affiliation to either Public Works or JFNYC service providers. The firm used its proprietary contact lists to recruit participants from a mix of businesses based on sector, size, and experience with public, nonprofit, and for-profit recruitment providers.

Consultants from Public Works facilitated three focus groups over two days in November 2011 at the market research firm's facility in Midtown Manhattan. Each session lasted approximately 1.5 hours. A total of 28 hiring managers from 27 businesses participated; they were offered an honorarium and a meal for their participation. We conducted one-on-one interviews in November 2011 with five additional hiring managers who were unable to participate in the focus groups. These interviews included the same questions used in the focus groups and lasted approximately 30 minutes each.

Online Survey

To solicit a wider range of responses, we disseminated an online survey through HR/NY, the New York chapter of the Society for Human Resource Management, in January 2012. The survey was open for three weeks, with periodic reminders sent to encourage recipients to complete the survey. As an incentive, an iPad2 was awarded to a randomly selected participant who completed the survey and provided contact information.

Of the 128 respondents to the survey, 73 met our threshold for participation: That they be a hiring manager in their organization, and that they generally employ at least five young adults. Sixty-five respondents completed the battery of questions.

Of those, 21 indicated that they had worked with outside hiring organizations and answered additional questions about their experiences. Because this subgroup was relatively small, their responses might be more appropriately treated as those from an online focus group rather than as a representative sample of all employers of young adults. However, they surface valuable ideas that can inform and improve providers' relationships with employers.

Detailed Employer Research Demographics

Focus Group and Interview Participants

SECTOR DISTRIBUTION

Sector	Number of Participants	% of Total
Accommodation and Food Services	5	15
Manufacturing	5	15
Retail	5	15
Administrative & Support and Waste Management & Remediation Services	4	12
Healthcare and Social Assistance	3	9
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	3	9
Finance and Insurance	2	6
Wholesale Trade	2	6
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	1	3
Construction	1	3
Other Services (except Public Administration)	1	3
Public Administration	1	3

SIZE DISTRIBUTION

Business Size	Number of Participants	% of Total
2–15	7	21
16–49	5	15
Small Businesses (2-49)	**12**	**36**
50–99	4	12
100–249	7	21
Medium Businesses (50-249)	**11**	**33**
250–499	2	6
500–749	1	3
1000+	7	21
Large Businesses (250+)	**10**	**30**

Online Survey Participants
62 of the 65 respondents provided demographic information.

SECTOR DISTRIBUTION

Sector	Number of Participants	% of Total
Retail	5	8
Hotel / Accommodations	2	3
Restaurant / Food Svc	3	5
Building Maintenance	2	3
Transportation / Manufacturing / Construction	3	5
Technology / Information	2	3
Healthcare	6	10
Professional Services	27	44
Government / Nonprofit	10	16
Other	2	3

SIZE DISTRIBUTION

Business Size	Number of Participants	% of Total
2-15	1	2
16-49	10	16
Small Businesses (2-49)	**11**	**18**
50-99	4	6
100-249	5	8
Medium Businesses (50-249)	**9**	**15**
250-499	10	16
500-749	5	8
750-999	3	5
1,000 or more	24	39
Large Businesses (250+)	**42**	**68**

Appendix C: Research Instrument

Introductions / Ice Breaker

1. Welcome & Introductions

2. Icebreaker: Say a bit about your hiring of young adults now.

   a. Do you have many on staff?

   b. In what types of roles?

   c. How do you find candidates for these roles?

      i. Which routes have been successful for finding candidates? Which less so?

      ii. Ask about experiences in the public / non-profit WFD system

Young Adults in the Workplace

1. What are the benefits of hiring young adults for the positions you hire them for? What are the assets that you can leverage?

   Probe for:

   a. Cost

   b. Easier to train in new skills

   c. Better technical skills

   d. Better for customer connections

2. What are the challenges in hiring young adults?

   Probe for:

   a. Technical / computational / literacy skill issues

   b. Soft skills issues, such as communication, timeliness, proper dress

   c. Attitudinal issues

   d. Rates of turnover

   e. Logistical challenges?

3. What do you look for as warning signs—or as positive signs—during the application or interview process?

Working with the Workforce System

4. Have you worked with nonprofits that help you fill jobs? Have you worked with the City or State to help you fill jobs?

5. What are some pluses and minuses of working with these partners?

Supporting Companies in Employing Young Adults with Complications

6. When you hire/have hired young adults with challenges and complications in their lives (such as: out of school, child care, maturity issues), how do their challenges affect your organization? Especially if they are challenges that persist into the job tenure, how do you deal with them?

7. What are your experiences with nonprofit or government organizations that send you such young adults? Do they then provide services and support after placement?

8. What would make employing younger workers easier and better? What services do you want from community organizations?

   a. Examples: filling jobs, finding financial incentives, training employees, helping employees deal with outside issues

   b. How could organizations like the members of JFNYC better prepare young adult workers for jobs in your businesses?

Detailed Questions if there is time:

9. What are your pain points in HR?

10. What educational levels are needed (or are they preferred?) in the young adults you hire? What about required experience?

11. Where are there skills barriers currently that other organizations could help solve for you?

12. What do you believe your organization should do to train new hires versus what you want new hires to arrive prepared to do?

    a. Obviously, it's great if someone comes fully prepared and trained to do the work that you want them to and they need only learn your organization's culture and approach. But what do you realistically expect to be responsible for with respect to training?

13. How do people learn best to execute their job responsibilities? Formal/informal OJT? Training with credentials? In-house training?

Appendix D: Online Survey Questions

Thank you for taking a few minutes to complete this survey to assist JobsFirstNYC, a nonprofit with the mission of connecting out-of-work young adults to the workforce. This survey will help JobsFirstNYC to understand how to best serve businesses' employment needs.

As an incentive, participants who complete the survey fully will be able to enter a drawing for a free iPad 2, to be awarded to a HR/NY member when the survey concludes in a few weeks.

For the purpose of this survey, YOUNG ADULT is defined as someone 18-26 years old.

In respect of your time, these introductory questions will ensure that your participation is appropriate for our survey. Thank you again!

1. Are you involved with hiring decisions at your company?

   a. Yes

   b. No

2. Does your company currently employ 5 or more young adults (ages 18-26) in entry-level positions? (For this survey, entry-level means a position that requires only a high school education and does not require a high degree of skill or experience.)

   a. Yes

   b. No

3. What are the greatest assets that young adult workers bring to your workplace? (Choose all that apply)

   a. Inexpensive source of labor

   b. Flexible schedules

   c. Eager, enthusiastic, good energy

   d. They are trainable / learn quickly / pick up technology easily

   e. They match the demographic we're working with or marketing to

   f. Other (please describe)

4. What are the biggest challenges to having young adult workers on your staff? (Choose all that apply)

   a. Lateness/absenteeism

   b. Poor work etiquette, dress, or language use

   c. Low productivity

   d. Distractions: texting/social media/friends

   e. Poor response to corrections/criticism

   f. High turnover

   g. Require a lot of training

   h. Other (please describe)

5. Which one of the following statements best describes your approach to helping young adult workers adjust to the workplace? (Choose one)

   a. Strictly and consistently enforce rules and regulations to ensure accountability

   b. Build connections that allow you to relate to young adult employees in order to build trusting relationships

   c. Combination of the two approaches

   d. Treat young adult workers the same as any other worker

   e. Other (please describe)

6. What support could you use to help you better manage young adult workers? (Choose all that apply)

   a. Better training before they are hired

   b. More opportunities for on-the-job training

   c. Identifying mentors for the young adult workers

   d. Training for supervisors in strategies to more effectively manage young adult workers

   e. Other (please describe)

7. Has your company ever used outside organizations to assist with recruiting and hiring YOUNG ADULT workers? (For example, private recruiting firms, government services such as Workforce1 or NYC Business Solutions, or nonprofit organizations that help to place young adult workers.)

   a. Yes

   b. No

8. Which types of outside organizations has your company worked with to hire young adult workers? (Choose all that apply)

    a. A recruiting firm

    b. A government-sponsored service (e.g. Workforce1, NYC Business Solutions, One-Stop, Department of Labor)

    c. A nonprofit organization that helps to place young adult workers

    d. Other (please describe)

9. In thinking about your experiences with outside organizations, were they:

    a. Mostly positive?

    b. Mostly negative?

    c. Neutral / No opinion?

10. In a sentence or two, please describe what was POSITIVE (if anything) about your experience with outside organizations.

11. In a sentence or two, please describe what was NEGATIVE (if anything) about your experience with outside organizations.

12. Which of the following services, if any, did the outside organization provide after the initial hiring assistance?

    a. Help with non-work issues (child care, housing, etc.) for the young adult

    b. Providing strategies to supervisors to help the young adult workers be more effective

    c. Workshops or training classes

    d. Financial counseling

    e. I am not aware of any services that were provided

    f. Other (please describe)

13. What is your opinion on the effectiveness of these services, in terms of supporting young workers to be better employees? (Choose one)

    a. Not effective at all

    b. Somewhat ineffective

    c. Neither effective nor ineffective / no opinion

    d. Somewhat effective

    e. Highly effective

14. What could the outside organization have done differently to be more effective in helping you find the right young adult candidate, or retain the young adult employees you hired through them?

15. If the following resources were offered to you online, please rank how helpful you would find each in recruiting, hiring, training, and upgrading the skills of young adult workers.

    a. Best practices or how-to guides for recruiting, hiring, training, and upgrading young adult workers.

    b. News on hiring and labor market trends.

    c. Links to government programs offering subsidies or other supports for hiring and training young adult workers.

    d. Links to labor market statistics (labor market information services such as those provided by states' departments of labor).

    e. Information on legal or technical aspects of hiring/human resources.

16. Which category describes the number of employees your company employs enterprise-wide (including all branch offices, if any)? (Choose one)

    a. 2 – 15 employees

    b. 16 – 50 employees

    c. 51 – 99 employees

    d. 100 – 249 employees

    e. 250 – 499 employees

    f. 500 – 749 employees

    g. 750 – 999 employees

    h. 1,000 or more employees

17. Which category best describes your company's industry? (Choose one)

    a. Retail

    b. Hotel or other Accommodations

    c. Restaurant or other type of Food Services

    d. Building Maintenance

    e. Transportation

    f. Technology/Information

    g. Healthcare

    h. Professional Services

    i. Other (please describe)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In addition to all the employers who generously gave of their time and experience, we thank the following organizations and individuals who were instrumental in planning and research for this report:

Funders

– Altman Foundation

– Clark Foundation

– The New York Community Trust

JobsFirstNYC

– Board of Directors

– Lou Miceli, Executive Director

– Evelyn Fernandez-Ketcham, Deputy Executive Director

JobsFirstNYC 2011/12 Community Advisory Council

– Joel Copperman, Chief Executive Officer, CASES

– Bettina Damiani, Director, Good Jobs New York

– Sandra Escamilla, Executive Director, Youth Development Institute

– Suzanne Foran, Regional Director for Workforce Development, Henkels and McCoy

– David Garza, Executive Director, Henry Street Settlement

– Courtney Hawkins, Vice President for Education and Youth Services, FEGS Health and Human Services System

– Howard Knoll, Senior Director, Casey Family Programs

– Amy Landesman, Executive Director, Workforce Professionals Training Institute

– Jim Marley, Assistant Executive Director for Bronx Community Programs, Good Shepherd Services

– Michelle Neugebauer, Executive Director, Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation

– Jeanette Nigro, Vice President for Economic & Workforce Development, Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce

– Laurie Parise, Executive Director, Youth Represent

– Randy Peers, Executive Director, Opportunities for a Better Tomorrow

– Julie Shapiro, Executive Director, The Door

– Sierra Stoneman-Bell, Deputy Director, Neighborhood Family Services Coalition

– Lazar Treschan, Director of Youth Policy, Community Service Society

Other Organizations and Individuals

– Pam Bradley, Human Resources Consultant, ITAC

– CK Chung, Director, NYC Business Solutions, Lower Manhattan Center

– Heather Evans, Executive Director, Human Resources Association of New York

– Focus Pointe Global

– Angie Kamath, Deputy Commissioner, Workforce Development, NYC Department of Small Business Services

– Megan Keenan, Senior Policy Advisor, NYC Department of Youth and Community Development

– Jackie Mallon, Executive Director, NYC Business Solutions, NYC Department of Small Business Services

– Linda Mellon, LaGuardia Community College

– Sandi Rosenthal, Senior Director, Workforce Development, FEGS Health and Human Services System

– Marlowe Paraiso, Director, Young Adult Internship Program, NYC Department of Youth and Community Development

– Lenny Rodriguez, Director of Business Solutions, Per Scholas

– Jeanie Tung, Director of Employment Services, Workforce Development Center, Henry Street Settlement

– Andrea Vaghy Venyola, Managing Director of Career and Education Services, The Door

– Joanna West, Director of Business Development & Work Ventures, The Doe Fund

Researchers

– Jonathan Bowles, Director, Center for an Urban Future

– David Fischer, Senior Director for Career and Technical Education, NYC Department of Education

– Blake Foote, Board Member, Center for an Urban Future

– Glenn von Nostitz, Sr. Fellow in Policy Research and Development, Center for an Urban Future

Readers

We want to especially thank the following individuals who read earlier drafts of this report in development and provided invaluable insights, suggestions, and editorial review.

– Bret Halverson, Consultant

– Chuck Hamilton, Consultant

– Sheila Maguire, Senior Vice President, Program Effectiveness, Public/Private Ventures

– Alan Momeyer, Senior Vice President of Human Resources, Loews Corporation

Accelerating opportunities to successfully connect out-of-work and out-of-school
young adults to the economic life of New York City.

JobsFirstNYC