

Voices from the Field

Engaging Employers to Connect Young Adults to Good Fit Employment

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The Aspen Institute Economic Opportunities Program

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The **Aspen Institute Economic Opportunities Program** (EOP) advances strategies, policies, and ideas to help low- and moderate-income people thrive in a changing economy. We recognize that race, gender, and place intersect with and intensify the challenge of economic inequality and we address these dynamics by advancing an inclusive vision of economic justice. For over 25 years, EOP has focused on expanding individuals' opportunities to connect to quality work, start businesses, and build economic stability that provides the freedom to pursue opportunity.

As a national partner to the [Annie E. Casey Foundation's Generation Work™ initiative](#), we are exploring new ways that workforce service providers are connecting young people—particularly young adults of color—with the knowledge, experience, and relationships necessary to succeed in today's job market. Partnerships in five communities—Cleveland, Ohio; Hartford, Connecticut; Indianapolis, Indiana; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Seattle, Washington—are engaged in a multiyear effort to develop, test, and scale cross-system strategies created by public and nonprofit education, training, and human service agencies to help ensure the following:

1. Young adults have the education, skills, and connections with employers to access quality training and employment.
2. Employers hire and invest in the career development of young adults.
3. Practitioners and public agencies adopt, scale, and sustain a demand-driven young adult employment approach through their networks.

This report provides information about workforce development practice based on responses to a survey conducted in fall 2019 and winter 2020 in three Generation Work communities: Cleveland, Indianapolis and Philadelphia. Responses from 210 professionals, who shared information about the questions they ask business representatives, help us understand the types of conversations about job opportunities and workforce management practices that are taking place.

Voices from the Field: Engaging Employers to Connect Young Adults to Good Fit Employment

America's youngest workers are facing the most dire employment prospects since the Great Depression. In the early months of 2020, an estimated 4.6 million youth and young adults, ages 16-24, were neither enrolled in school nor working. Today, their unemployment crisis has been greatly exacerbated by the pandemic. Significantly more young adults are experiencing unemployment and financial hardship. Recent reports estimate that more than 7 million young adults are disconnected from both school and work.¹

Based on pre-pandemic data, Black, Latinx, and young adults from Indigenous communities are severely impacted by the health and economic impacts of COVID-19. Before the pandemic, the percentages of young adults disconnected from school and work were 17.4% for Black, 12.8% for Latinx, and 23.4% for Indigenous populations. Disconnection rates for these groups were significantly higher than the rate experienced by white young adults (9.2%).² Although public labor market data have not caught up to new employment realities, we know that pre-pandemic, young adults—especially Black and Latinx workers—held about a quarter of all jobs in low-wage service sector occupations. Many of these jobs no longer exist.³

Across the country, workforce development and education providers are scrambling to meet the needs of more and more young adults who are experiencing disruptions in employment, education, and training. As the economy and labor markets change (and hopefully begin to recover), providers will be continuing to facilitate young adults' connections to employment. They are navigating a changed and frankly more dangerous work environment. Thus now more than ever, service providers and the young adults they work with need information that will help them understand the nature of available employment: what jobs pay, whether they offer health insurance and paid time off, how scheduling works, and, among other things, how safe they are.

Our 2019-20 survey asked workforce professionals about the types of questions they ask employers. We took this approach to get a sense of the types of conversations respondents were having with employers to learn about their workforce and workplace practices—questions that would help them vet opportunities relative to young adults' employment needs and open up conversations about workplace practices with employers. The survey asked workforce professionals about the questions they ask employers that cover a range of topics, related to:

- hiring
- wages and benefits
- scheduling
- onboarding and performance feedback

¹ Lewis, Kristen. *A Decade Undone: Youth Disconnection in the Age of Coronavirus*. New York: Measure of America, Social Science Research Council, June 10, 2020. <https://measureofamerica.org/youth-disconnection-2020/>

² Lewis, Kristen. *Making the Connection: Transportation and Youth Disconnection*. New York: Measure of America, Social Science Research Council, April 25, 2019. <http://measureofamerica.org/youth-disconnection-2019/>

³ Kochhar, Rakesh, and Amanda Barroso, "Young workers likely to be hard hit as COVID-19 strikes a blow to restaurants and other service sector jobs," Pew Research Center, March 27, 2020. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/03/27/young-workers-likely-to-be-hard-hit-as-covid-19-strikes-a-blow-to-restaurants-and-other-service-sector-jobs/>

- training and development
- career advancement
- workforce composition and diversity

Although we conducted this research before the pandemic, the questions in the survey are increasingly relevant and important today. Systemic and longtime inequities in workforce, public education, and criminal justice systems disproportionally affect the educational and employment outcomes for young adults of color. Workforce leaders in Generation Work communities are working on strategies to address systemic issues at the root of this crisis. A critical component is expanding their networks of employers that provide “good fit” jobs for young adults, particularly young adults of color. Good fit jobs are defined differently based on young adults’ priorities, but generally they are found in companies where management practices support young adults’ ability to retain employment, help employees learn and advance at work, use scheduling practices that support a young adult’s need to balance work, school, and family care responsibilities, and pay family-sustaining wages.⁴

Finding and cultivating good fit job opportunities and matching young adults and employers is a time- and resource-intensive activity for workforce professionals. Some young adults prioritize a job with a schedule that permits them to attend classes in an education program. Others’ highest priority is a job that provides a steady and family-sustaining level of earnings. The most important thing some young people need to get a foot in the labor market is a job where they receive on-the-job coaching and training. And of course, employers have priorities too. Some have very specific technical skills that they need workers to bring on day one to the job. Many employers describe their needs more in terms of dependability and willingness to learn.

To gather the information they need to prepare young people and make appropriate matches between jobseekers and good fit jobs, workforce professionals spend time cultivating relationships with employers. Over the years in our research, we have seen that providers who serve workers most effectively have wide-ranging and ongoing conversations with hiring and workplace managers. For providers, these conversations can help them gain a better understanding of a business, its workplace environment, and whether a job opportunity would be a good fit for a young adult participant. For employers, conversations may help them reflect upon and identify ways their workplace practices and environment affect retention, business operations, and equity and inclusion in the workplace. These types of conversations can both strengthen relationships with businesses and provide insights about labor demand, hiring and employment practices, and work environments. Providers describe the information they glean from conversations as being more nuanced and timely than what they can learn from labor market analysis alone.

⁴ Jain, Ranita, Maureen Conway, and Vickie Choitz. “Connecting Young Adults to Employment.” Aspen Institute Workforce Strategies Initiative, December 2015. https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/2016/01/YAemploy.pdf?_ga=2.40264546.1940479398.1572277356-132288397.1533057549.

Survey Background

The survey queried workforce development professionals in Cleveland, Ohio, Indianapolis, Indiana, and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. It was designed to help local leaders learn about the state of current practice related to staff conversations with employers.

Survey Objectives

1. Learning about the types of conversations workforce professionals have with business representatives
2. Seeding interest among survey respondents to have more learning-focused conversations with business representatives
3. Exploring contextual factors that may shape or drive workforce professionals' conversations with employers (e.g., previous work experience, performance targets that guide their work, etc.)
4. Informing strategies and the types of resources needed to support and build capacity for effective employer-facing work

The Business Engagement survey was informed by many years of Aspen EOP research on employer engagement practices that support workers' employment stability and career advancement, as well as advance equity and inclusion in the workplace. In recent years, we have been learning about how workforce professionals in Generation Work communities engage with employers to identify and cultivate good fit jobs for their young adult clients. In cases where we have observed especially deep or longstanding engagement, both workforce professionals and employers describe the value of ongoing learning-focused conversations that highlight and unpack information about companies' management practices and workplace culture that affect employees' experiences. Through our research, we also learned that capacity for this type of engagement is difficult to develop and varies across and within workforce development organizations. Having learning-focused conversations can be difficult for frontline staff who do not believe they have the standing or expertise to engage business representatives on topics related to workplace practices, environment, and equity and inclusion in the workplace. Another challenge is the fact that much of workforce development programming is funded, and its performance is assessed, in ways that incentivize providers to prioritize referrals to employment, job placement, and short-term retention over deeper engagement with business to promote longer-term worker stability and mobility.

Following high-level discussion of survey findings, this report concludes with information about strategies that Generation Work local partners are implementing to build the capacity of workforce professionals in their communities to engage employers in discussions designed to identify and promote good fit employment opportunities for young adults, particularly young adults of color. An appendix offers more detailed analysis of survey findings.

Highlights of Survey Findings

Survey Response

The Business Engagement survey was fielded to workforce professionals in Cleveland, Indianapolis and Philadelphia. We received 210 responses from individuals who reported that they interact with employers for some or all of the following purposes:⁵

- to learn about employers' hiring needs
- to inform workforce program development
- to help companies stay and/or expand their operations in the local community

Most of the respondents work in community-based organizations, including organizations that operate WIOA-contracted programs and union membership organizations that provide training and education services. 89% of respondents work for an organization that offers programs focused on helping young adult participants ages 18-29 to connect to employment. In addition to organizations with a primary focus on workforce development, Generation Work partnership leaders in Cleveland invited representatives from economic development organizations (chambers of commerce, industry associations, and manufacturing extension partnerships) whose staff engage in workforce discussions with employers.⁶

Survey respondents include professionals new to the field as well as many with years of experience.

Experience, Education and Demographic Characteristics of Survey Respondents

Survey respondents include professionals new to the field as well as many with years of experience. About a quarter (26.3%) have less than three years of experience. More than a third of respondents (35.8%) have between three and 10 years of experience. And 37.9% reported having 10 or more years of experience. A large majority of respondents (85.5%) reported having attained a bachelor's, master's, or higher degree.

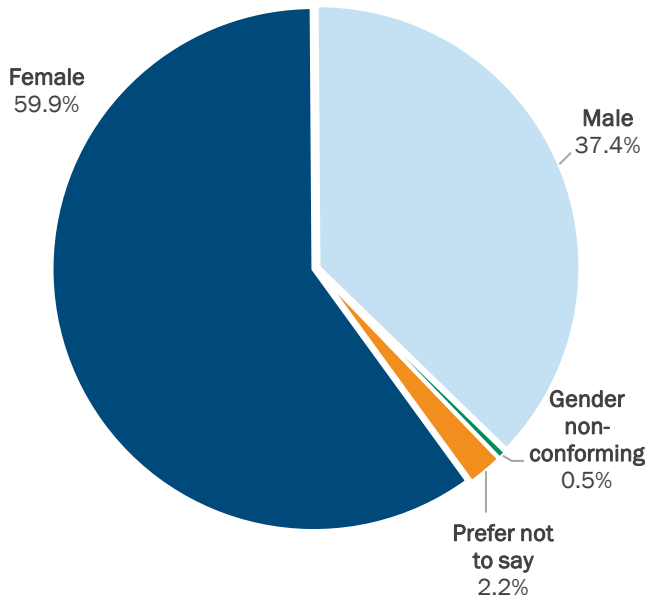
Less than half of respondents (41.5%) are people of color. One third identify as Black, 6.8% identify as Latinx, and less than 5% identify as Asian, Native American, or another race and ethnicity. 58.5% of respondents identify as white. More than half of respondents (58.3%) are at least 45 years old. A small group of respondents (1.1%) are 18-24 years old, and 40.6% are between the ages of 25 and 44. A little more than half of the respondents (59.9%) identify as women; 37.4% identify as men. Respondents who identify as gender non-conforming made up 0.5% of the group, and 2.2% of respondents chose not to self-identify by gender.

⁵ We worked with Generation Work partnership leaders in Cleveland, Indianapolis and Philadelphia to design a web-based survey. Each respondent spent approximately 20 minutes answering up to 45 questions, depending on skip patterns. Individuals' responses are confidential, and they were therefore not asked to report their organizational affiliation. Results are reported only in aggregate. Local partnership leaders helped us identify local respondent populations, which included both Generation Work and other workforce development service providers. We received responses from 64 workforce professionals in Cleveland, 79 in Indianapolis, and 67 in Philadelphia.

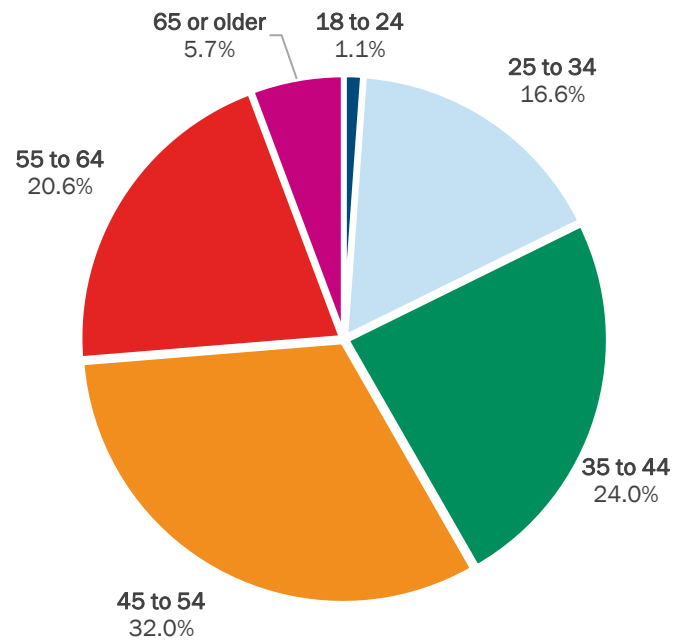
⁶ Twenty-five of the 210 survey respondents, 39% of the respondents from Cleveland, were affiliated with economic development organizations.

Characteristics of Respondents, n=175-198

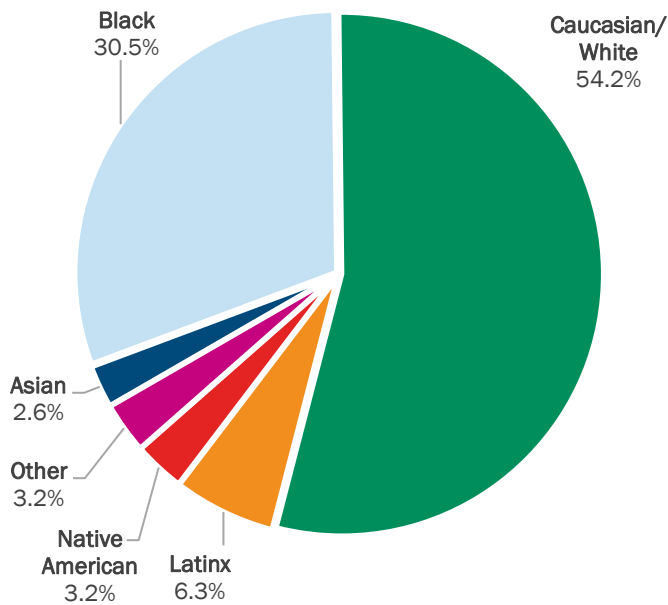
Gender



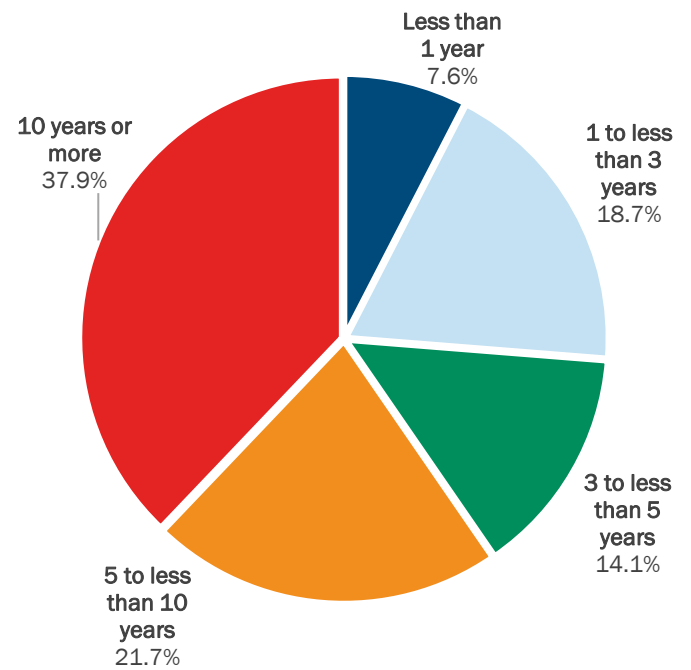
Age



Race and Ethnicity



Years Worked in Workforce Development



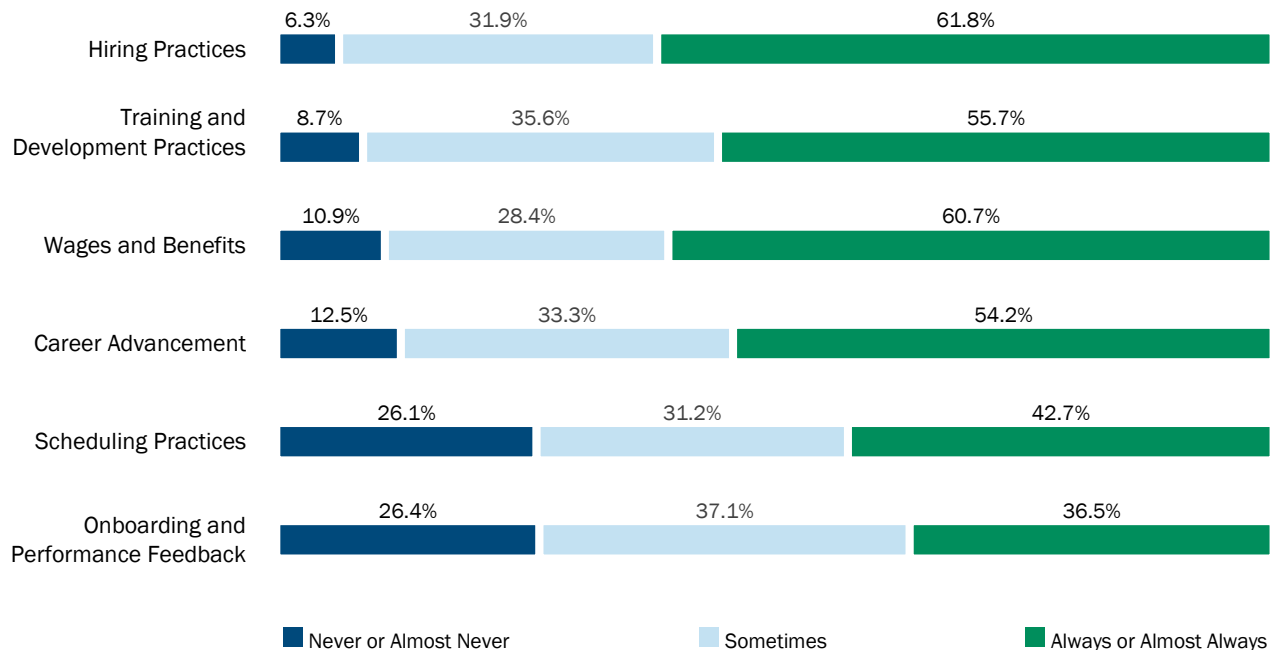
Conversations with Employers

As described previously, the survey asked respondents to note how consistently they have conversations (at any point in the course of their relationship with business representatives) related to broad areas of employment practice, including:

- Hiring
- Wages and benefits
- Scheduling
- Onboarding and performance feedback
- Training and development
- Career advancement
- Workforce composition and diversity

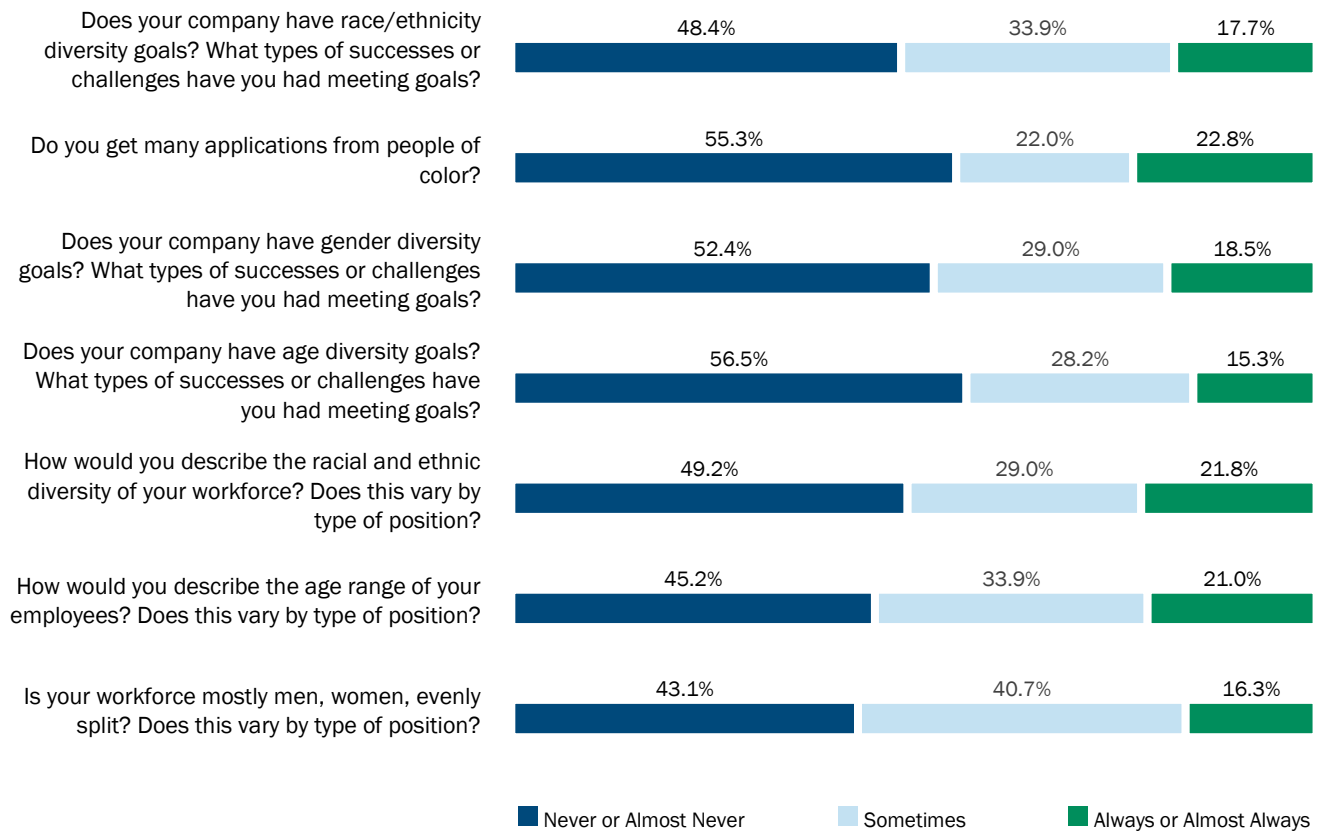
The figures that follow depict how often respondents reported having conversations about these broad areas of employment practice.⁷ Follow-up questions gathered more information about how frequently respondents asked employers specific questions that relate to each of the areas. Responses to follow-up questions are detailed in the appendix.

Frequency of Conversations about Employment Practices, n=192-204



⁷ This report provides information about data collected from workforce composition and diversity questions included in surveys fielded in Indianapolis and Philadelphia. Based on learning from our first survey, fielded in Cleveland, we worked with local partners in Indianapolis and Philadelphia to refine survey questions. Because different questions were posed, data collected on related questions fielded in Cleveland are not included.

Frequency of Questions about Workforce Composition and Company Diversity Goals, n=123-124



Overall, survey findings reveal that the types of questions workforce providers ask employers may not drive learning-focused conversations. For example, most respondents reported that they ask questions about numbers and types of job openings, skills and certifications required, and wages and benefits. To a lesser extent, survey respondents reported having conversations with employers about their operations, management practices, and workplace culture. Data detailing how frequently workforce professionals report asking a wide range of questions is included in the appendix to this report.

Some of the learning-focused questions that low numbers of respondents noted asking regularly include:

- Does your company have diversity goals? What types of successes or challenges have you had with meeting goals?
- What can you tell me about why employees leave the job?
- Do you use online tools to recruit talent?
- Do you know how your wages and benefits compare with other local companies?
- Is flexible scheduling an option to support someone going to school?
- How do you provide feedback about performance to employees? Can you tell me about the timing and approach?
- How and when is information about what it takes to qualify for a raise or promotion communicated to employees?

Why Having Learning-Focused Conversations is Important

Learning-focused conversations can be mutually beneficial for both workforce professionals and employers. For workforce professionals, conversations help them gain a better understanding of a business, its workplace environment, and whether a particular job opportunity would be a good fit for a young adult participant. For employers, conversations may help them reflect upon and identify ways their workplace practices and environment affect retention, business operations, and equity and inclusion in the workplace.

Assessing the Fit of a Job Opportunity

Individual jobs, even when they're in the same occupation and sector, can vary a lot from business to business. The majority (more than 80%) of survey respondents report regularly asking for basic information about a job opening, such as the starting wage, benefits, and schedule. However, fewer respondents noted that they engage employers around questions that would help them understand a company's employment practices and how new employees are supported at work:

- The majority of respondents reported never, almost never, or sometimes asking questions about the composition of businesses' workforce in relation to gender (83.7%), age (79.0%), and race or ethnicity (78.2%).
- 58.6% of respondents reported never, almost never, or sometimes asking questions about whether employers can support scheduling so that young workers can attend classes and complete an education program.
- 51.1% of respondents reported never, almost never, or sometimes asking questions about how long employers typically retain workers in a particular occupation.
- 56.3% of respondents reported never, almost never, or sometimes asking questions about ways that new workers are mentored or coached at work.

These are just a few examples of questions that could be helpful in opening discussions that would help workforce professionals assess the fit of job opportunities for their participants.⁸ An employer's responses to these types of questions can provide insight into the workplace culture and the ways in which it is positioned to support young adult workers to be successful.

⁸ The appendix at the end of this report includes the complete list of questions, as well as data detailing respondents' answers about the frequency with which each question is asked.

Encouraging Employer Reflection

Engaging employers in conversations about their workplace environment, practices, and employees' experiences may give them an opportunity to reflect on how and why these affect their ability to build and retain a diverse, inclusive, and engaged workforce. For example, questions about practices such as pre-hire questionnaires and skills assessments can open up conversations about whether and how assessment format and criteria are aligned to the skills needed for a job. They can also help employers reflect on whether recruitment and application processes inadvertently screen out a qualified pool of applicants, present unintended barriers for some applicants, or extend the length of time it takes for an employer to make hiring decisions.

Asking employers what they know about why workers leave a job could encourage follow-up reflection on management practices.

Similarly, asking employers what they know about why workers leave a job could encourage follow-up reflection on management practices—such as scheduling, on-boarding, training, performance feedback, and advancement practices—that could be contributing to positive or negative employee engagement and retention. Survey responses indicate that asking questions about management practices is not common among workforce professionals.

- 65.5% of respondents reported that they never, almost never, or sometimes ask employers what they know about why employees leave.
- 68.2% of respondents reported that they never, almost never, or sometimes ask employers about how their wages or benefits compare to other local companies.
- 68.5% of respondents reported that they never, almost never, or sometimes ask employers how and when information about what it takes to qualify for a raise or promotion is communicated to employees.
- 60.4% of respondents reported never, almost never, or sometimes asking employers about how much notice employees are provided about their schedules.
- 51.4% of respondents reported never, almost never, or sometimes asking questions about whether work schedules factor in information about public transportation schedules.

Through our research, we've learned of instances where employers, through reflection with a workforce provider partner, have made changes that are beneficial to both their workers and the business. For example, one workforce provider shared that a health care employer operating clinics in multiple locations made changes to work assignments so medical assistants could work at the clinic closest to home or school, giving the worker an easier commute and reducing tardiness and absenteeism. In another example, a manufacturing employer considered the race, gender, and age of new young adult employees and made changes to whom he assigned as supervisors, improving retention and employee engagement.

Providing Problem-Solving Support to Employers

By having more learning-focused conversations with employers, there may be opportunities for workforce providers to lend their expertise, provide problem-solving support, and, in turn, help shape good fit job opportunities. Workforce service providers typically know the skills, aptitudes, goals, and motivations of their young adult constituents. And providers understand the types of challenges that affect successful transition from unemployment to work and employment retention over time. We have seen cases in which employers engage workforce organizations to provide ongoing support services for newly placed employees or to train managers of young workers on ways to support their growth and advancement. Some of these supports include training managers on how to break down tasks, conduct regular check-ins and provide constructive feedback, and coach young adults on how to apply their skills on the job.

Through our research, we've learned of instances where employers, through reflection with a workforce provider partner, have made changes that are beneficial to both their workers and the business.

The survey findings bring to light that capacity for this type of engagement is likely uneven among respondents. Many workforce professionals have shared with us that they struggle to build these types of relationships with business representatives, feeling that they lack business knowledge and confidence to ask questions that would help them learn more about a firm or industry and propose services and strategies that could help both employers and workers. In the concluding section of this report, we provide information about strategies that Generation Work local partners are implementing to build the capacity of workforce professionals to engage employers in discussions designed to identify and share the value they and their young adult participants can provide to businesses.

Question Bank

In 2019, we developed a [Question Bank tool](#)⁹ to help workforce development professionals craft learning-focused conversations with hiring managers, supervisors, human resources staff, owners, and other business representatives to understand workplace operations, management practices, experiences of workers, why workers leave, diversity goals, and the types of challenges that supervisors struggle with.

⁹ Blair, Amy, Jenny Weissbourd, and Amanda Newman. *Question Bank for Workforce Service Providers: A Tool for Working with Retailers*. Washington DC: The Aspen Institute Economic Opportunities Program, March 2019. <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/question-bank-for-workforce-service-providers-a-tool-for-working-with-retailers/>

Conclusion & Opportunities for this Work

We developed this survey to give partners engaged in the Generation Work initiative a window into the current state of practice in their communities and to help them identify ways to support approaches to employer engagement that advance economic stability and mobility for young adult workers. This is increasingly important work given that young adults, and in particular young adults of color, constitute the fastest growing segment of the US labor pool.¹⁰ However, workforce professionals are operating within a challenging context that can make learning-focused engagement with employers difficult. One reason for this is that public workforce funding (and a lot of private funding as well) incentivizes providers to focus primarily on referrals to employment and short-term job placement and retention, making it difficult to procure resources for the amount of staff time it takes to develop deeper and longer-term relationships with employers. Additionally, workforce professionals are working in a field in which education and training programs designed to help professionals build skills can be difficult to find.

Capacity-Building Strategies

Generation Work partners are using employer engagement survey results to inform capacity-building strategies to help workforce professionals, especially those who are new to the field, develop an understanding of how and why having learning-focused engagement with employers is important. An objective of this work is to equip workforce professionals to build standing and confidence for deeper engagement with employers about their workplace environment, workplace practices, and employees' experiences. The following are highlights of strategies that Generation Work partners are taking to build new capacity in their communities.

Race Equity and Inclusion Trainings

Across all the Generation Work partners, an objective of their work is to equip staff at workforce organizations to develop an understanding of the systems and structures that perpetuate racial inequity or that foster equity. This work is especially important given that workforce professionals are positioned to play an important role in helping both their young adult constituents and employers address diversity, equity, and inclusion challenges.

More than 80% of survey respondents noted that promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion represents an important area of work both for their organization overall and for them in their individual roles. They also noted that this is an area where they would benefit from professional development. Some respondents noted that it would be helpful to participate in training about employment law to gain a better understanding of the factors that affect how employers think about sharing information related to diversity. Other respondents noted that it would be helpful to have guidance on how to lead conversations with employers that are explicitly about diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Generation Work partners are in the process of implementing a range of professional development activities for workforce staff in the area of race equity and inclusion. Partnership leaders participated in a series of

¹⁰ Turner, Ani. "The Business Case for Racial Equity." Altarum Institute. W.K. Kellogg Foundation, October 24, 2013.
https://altarum.org/sites/default/files/uploaded-publication-files/WKKellogg_Business-Case-Racial-Equity_National-Report_2018.pdf

race equity capacity-building activities that were designed to provide foundational knowledge to support design and implementation of strategies in their communities. Building off this, Indianapolis partners have engaged an anti-racism organization to provide a series of workshops for frontline staff at community-based organizations on topics including developing critical cultural competencies, understanding implicit bias, and analyzing and understanding systemic racism. Indianapolis partners have also used Generation Work funding to support scholarships for staff to attend national conferences. In Philadelphia, Generation Work partners and other local and regional workforce organizations are participating in a three-year Racial and Social Equity Workforce Benchmarking Network designed by Generation Work partner JOIN and facilitated by the Corporation for a Skilled Workforce and Race Forward. As part of the network, workforce organizations have been disaggregating program participant data by race, ethnicity, and gender and applying a racial equity tool to assess institutional practices, programs, and policies.

With foundational knowledge in place, Generation Work partners have been testing new strategies to engage with employers to create a more diverse, inclusive, and equitable workplace. For example, Generation Work partners in Philadelphia have designed trainings for employers on trauma-informed management with a racial equity lens. In Cleveland, Generation Work leaders are collaborating with their local chamber of commerce to engage with business members in discussions related to racial disparities in jobs, income, and wealth.

Developing Tools to Guide Conversations with Employers and Facilitate Information-Sharing among Organizations

Local partners in Cleveland, Indianapolis and Philadelphia have shared local survey findings with survey respondents as well as with leaders of workforce and economic development organizations in their communities. In addition to reviewing survey findings, participants in survey review meetings have engaged in discussions about what survey results mean in relation to their strategic efforts to work with employers to hire, retain and advance young adults, especially young adults of color. These conversations, along with respondents' experiences taking the survey, are building a shared understanding about why learning-focused engagement with employers is important. And they are spurring ideas about ways that local leaders can support professional development opportunities for front-line workforce staff.

Generation Work partners have been testing new strategies to engage with employers to create a more diverse, inclusive, and equitable workplace.

In Cleveland, Generation Work local partners convened a group of employers to explore their appetite for engaging in workforce-related topics. They asked how employers would respond if a workforce professional asked them the types of questions asked in the survey about their management practices and workplace culture. Overall, employers reported that they would not be turned off by being asked these types of questions, and they expressed interest in engaging further with the workforce community. This response from the business community guided Cleveland partners' next steps. Local partners have built on EOP's work in this area and developed a [Question Bank](https://www.towardsemployment.org/wp-content/uploads/QuestionBank_8.5.20.pdf)¹¹ tool adapted for use with local employers. Cleveland

¹¹ Generation Work / Cuyahoga County. *Employer Engagement Question Bank: Generation Work in Northeast Ohio*, August 2020. https://www.towardsemployment.org/wp-content/uploads/QuestionBank_8.5.20.pdf

partners are hosting a series of professional development meetings where workforce professionals will have opportunities to use the tool and role-play conversations with employers.

In Indianapolis, Generation Work partners are supporting a range of training and professional development opportunities for workforce professionals. The partners developed a coaching institute, and practitioners from community-based organizations are invited to attend monthly workshops hosted at various partner locations. Training related to having learning-focused conversations with employers is an ongoing workshop topic. Local partners also developed a learning management system (LMS), which is housed at EmployIndy. The LMS hosts learning modules with videos and online content to support flexible capacity-building that accommodates practitioners' schedules and other responsibilities. Finally, partner organizations have access to scholarship funds that provide resources for workforce professionals to attend external trainings and conferences.

In Philadelphia, local leaders plan to support capacity-building efforts of the Generation Work Practitioner Learning Community. The learning community consists of more than 50 direct service staff representing seven workforce organizations. Each year, the group identifies strategic areas that they would like to work on together. In 2018, they jointly developed a job quality definition for young adults that is guiding their job placement efforts. The definition specifies attributes such as opportunities for advancement, a supportive work environment, access to benefits, a living wage, reliable scheduling, and access to transportation. Many of the questions on the survey are aligned with job quality attributes and are helping to inform elements in assessment tools that local partners are developing. This approach represents a new approach for staff to collect and share information about employers' practices, to identify areas where more information is needed, and to help local partners develop the information they need to determine for whom an employment opportunity may be a good fit.

Appendix – Detailed Summary of Survey Findings

In this appendix, we describe results of the survey we designed collaboratively with workforce leaders in three Generation Work communities: Cleveland, Indianapolis, and Philadelphia.¹² The survey queried 210 workforce development professionals, was informed by our research on practices related to employer engagement, and was designed to help local leaders learn about the state of current practice related to staff conversations with employers. Survey responses help us understand the types of conversations about job opportunities and workforce management practices that are taking place in these communities.

Objectives for the survey included:

1. Learning about the types of conversations workforce professionals have with business representatives
2. Seeding interest among survey respondents to have more learning-focused conversations with business representatives
3. Exploring contextual factors that may shape or drive workforce professionals' conversations with employers (e.g., previous work experience, performance targets that guide their work, etc.)
4. Informing strategies and the types of resources needed to support and build capacity for effective employer-facing work

¹² We worked with Generation Work partnership leaders in Cleveland, Indianapolis, and Philadelphia to design a web-based survey. Each respondent spent approximately 20 minutes answering up to 45 questions, depending on skip patterns. Individuals' responses are confidential, and they were therefore not asked to report their organizational affiliation. Results are reported only in aggregate. Local partnership leaders helped us identify local respondent populations, which included staff affiliated with both Generation Work and other workforce development service providers. We received responses from 64 workforce professionals in Cleveland, 79 in Indianapolis, and 67 in Philadelphia.

Overview of Survey Respondents

A total of 210 workforce professionals from Cleveland, Indianapolis, and Philadelphia responded to the survey and reported that they interact with employers for some or all of the following purposes:

- to learn about employers' hiring needs
- to inform workforce program development
- to help companies stay and/or expand their operations in the local community

Most of the respondents work in community-based organizations, including organizations that operate WIOA-contracted programs and union membership organizations that provide training and education services. 89% of respondents work for an organization that offers programs focused on helping young adult participants ages 18-29 connect to employment. In addition to organizations with a primary focus on workforce development, Generation Work partnership leaders in Cleveland invited representatives from economic development organizations (chambers of commerce, industry associations, and manufacturing extension partnerships) whose staff engage in workforce discussions with employers.¹³

Survey respondents include professionals new to the field as well as many with years of experience. About a quarter (26.3%) have less than three years of experience. More than a third of respondents (35.8%) have between three and 10 years of experience. And 37.9% reported having 10 or more years of experience. A large majority of respondents (85.5%) reported having attained a bachelor's, master's, or higher degree.

Less than half of respondents (41.5%) are people of color. One-third identify as Black, 6.8% identify as Latinx, and less than 5% identify as Asian, Native American, or another race or ethnicity. A majority of respondents (58.5%) identify as white. More than half of respondents (58.3%) are at least 45 years old. A small group of respondents (1.1%) are 18-24 years old, and 40.6% are between the ages of 25 and 44. A little more than half of the respondents (59.9%) identify as women; 37.4% identify as men. Respondents who identify as gender non-conforming made up 0.5% of the group, and 2.2% of respondents chose not to self-identify by gender.

¹³ Twenty-five of the 210 survey respondents, (comprising 39% of the respondents from Cleveland), were affiliated with economic development organizations.

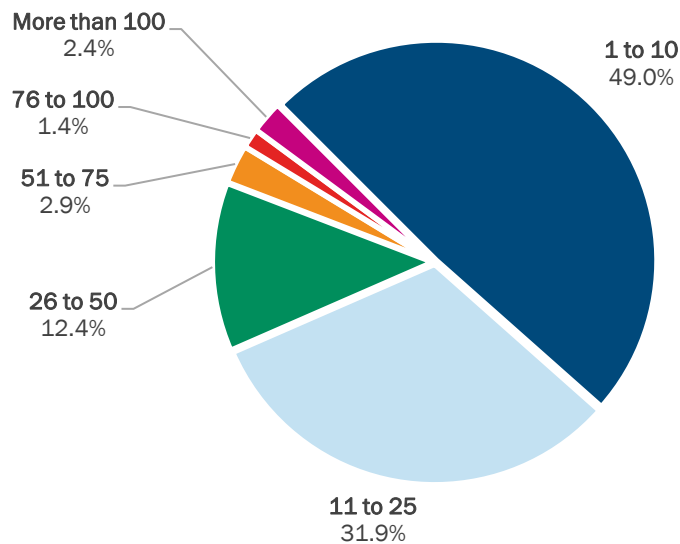
Characteristics of Respondents' Engagement with Employers

The survey asked respondents a series of questions to learn more about their work experience and responsibilities. This contextual information can help inform our understanding of the factors that may shape differences in how different workforce professionals engage with employers.

Level of Employer Engagement Activity

The survey asked respondents about the number of employers they interacted with (via email, phone calls, or in-person contacts) during the month prior to the survey. A large majority (80.9%) of respondents reported engaging with 25 or fewer employers during the month. Almost half (49.0%) engaged with between one and 10 employers. Not surprisingly, many respondents (51.0%) noted in a separate question that the amount of time per week spent engaging with employers was 10 or fewer hours. Only 12.9% reported they spent more than 20 hours per week. Taken together, these two findings indicate that, for most respondents, employer engagement represents a small portion of their work.

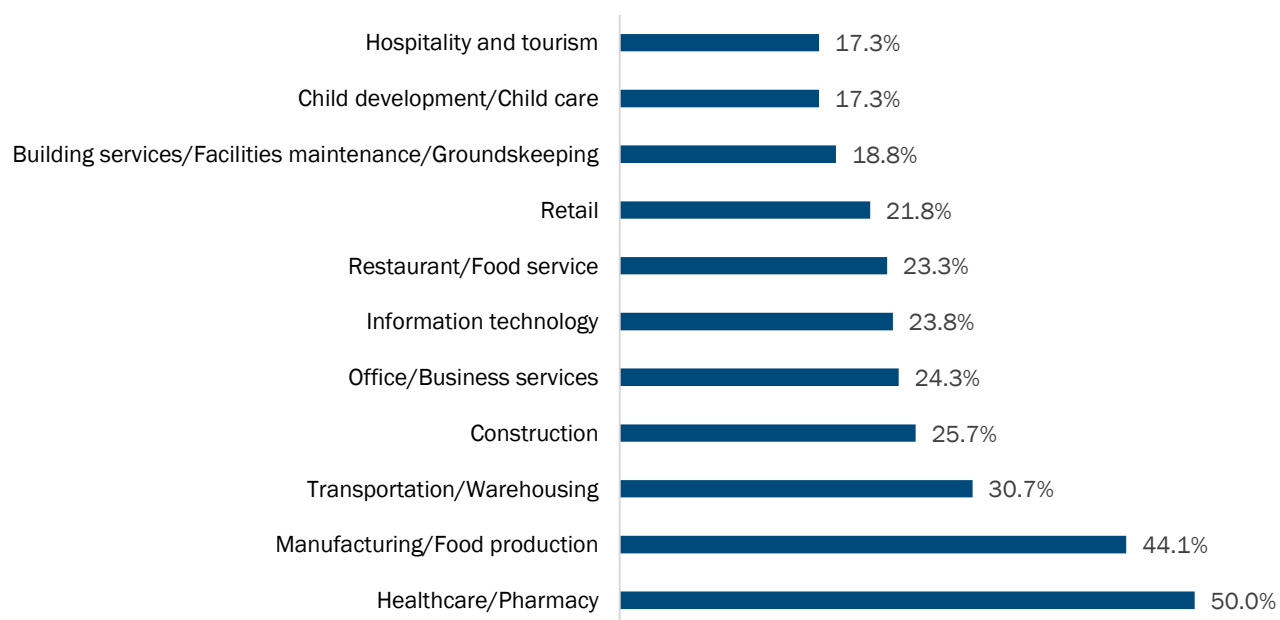
Figure A1 – Number of Employer Interactions During Month Prior to Survey, n=210



Sectors Engaged

Respondents were asked to select the top three sectors they generally engage with the most. Healthcare and pharmacy (50.0%), manufacturing and food production (44.1%), and transportation and warehousing (30.7%) were reported most frequently among respondents' top three sectors. But results indicate that most respondents engage with employers across a number of sectors. More than half of respondents (61.9%) reported that they have experience working in one of the sectors in which they are developing employer relationships.

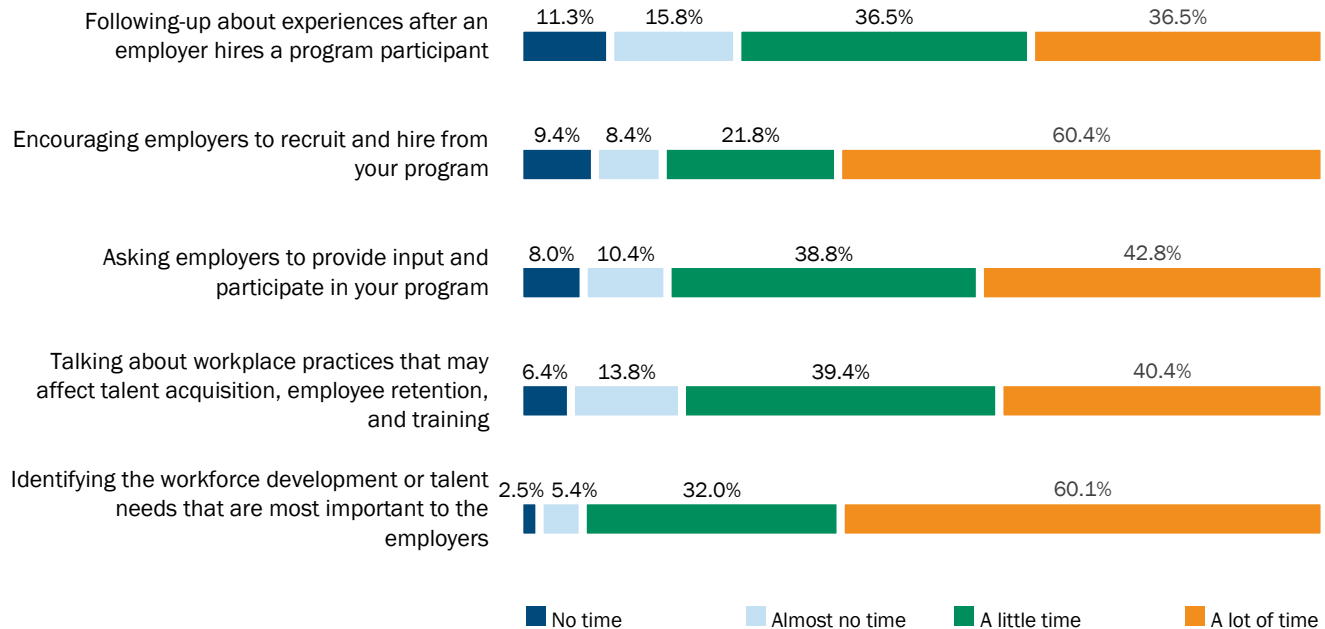
Figure A2 – Sectors Reported as Among Respondents' Top Three Engaged, n=202



Objectives for Engaging with Employers

Respondents were asked to report their main objectives for interacting with employers and to specify the amount of their time that is dedicated toward different objectives. They reported spending a lot of time developing employer relationships that focused on hiring needs. A majority reported spending a lot of time encouraging employers to recruit and hire from their program and identifying workforce and talent needs that are most important to different employers (60.4% and 60.1% respectively). Following these, respondents reported spending the most time asking employers for their input and to participate in their workforce programs (42.8%). Close behind this, 40.4% of respondents reported that talking with employers about policies related to hiring, retention, and training was a main objective. More than a third (36.5%) of respondents reported that they spend a lot of time in conversations related to following up about experiences after a job placement.

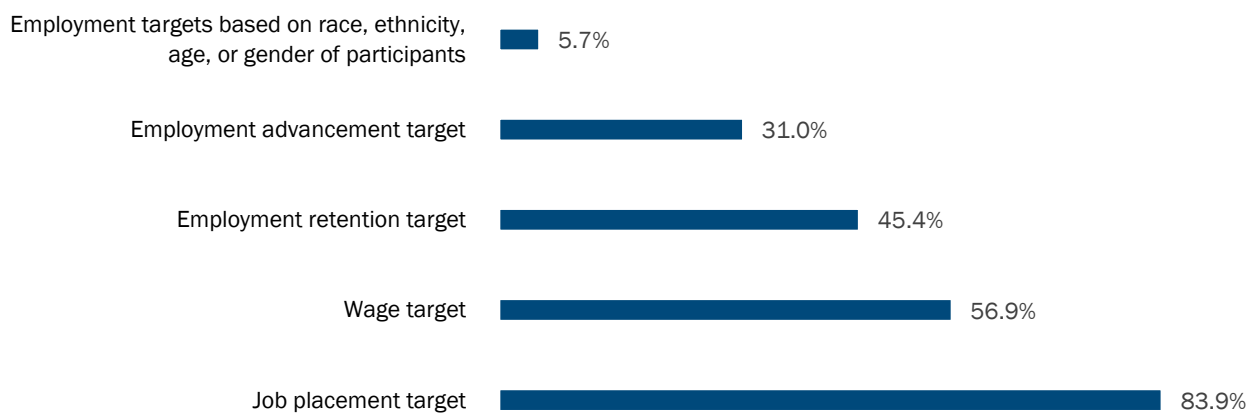
Figure A3 – In your interactions with employers, how much of your time is spent in work toward any of these objectives? n=201-204



Performance Targets

The majority of respondents (75.7%) reported that their organization expects them to meet at least one performance target related to: job placement, wage, employment retention, employment advancement, or based on demographic characteristics (e.g., age, race, ethnicity) of participants. Most (83.9%) are accountable to a job placement target. A majority (56.9%) are expected to achieve targets based on wage rates. Almost half (45.4%) reported employment retention performance targets. Less than a third of respondents (31.0%) are accountable for metrics related to their participants' employment advancement over time. 5.7% of respondents reported performance targets related to achieving employment outcomes for participants based on race, ethnicity, age, or gender.

Figure A4 – Performance Targets, n=174



Questions Workforce Professionals Ask Employers

We asked survey respondents how frequently they ask a range of questions related to a number of different areas related to employment. The following sections detail these results.

Hiring, Wages and Benefits

Respondents were asked about their conversations to learn about hiring. More than 70% of respondents always or almost always ask employers what kinds of positions they are hiring for, if they have job openings, and if positions require credentials, such as a high school diploma, industry credential, or a post-secondary credential. To a much lesser extent, survey respondents reported asking questions to learn about why certain positions may be difficult to fill or what employers know about why employees leave.

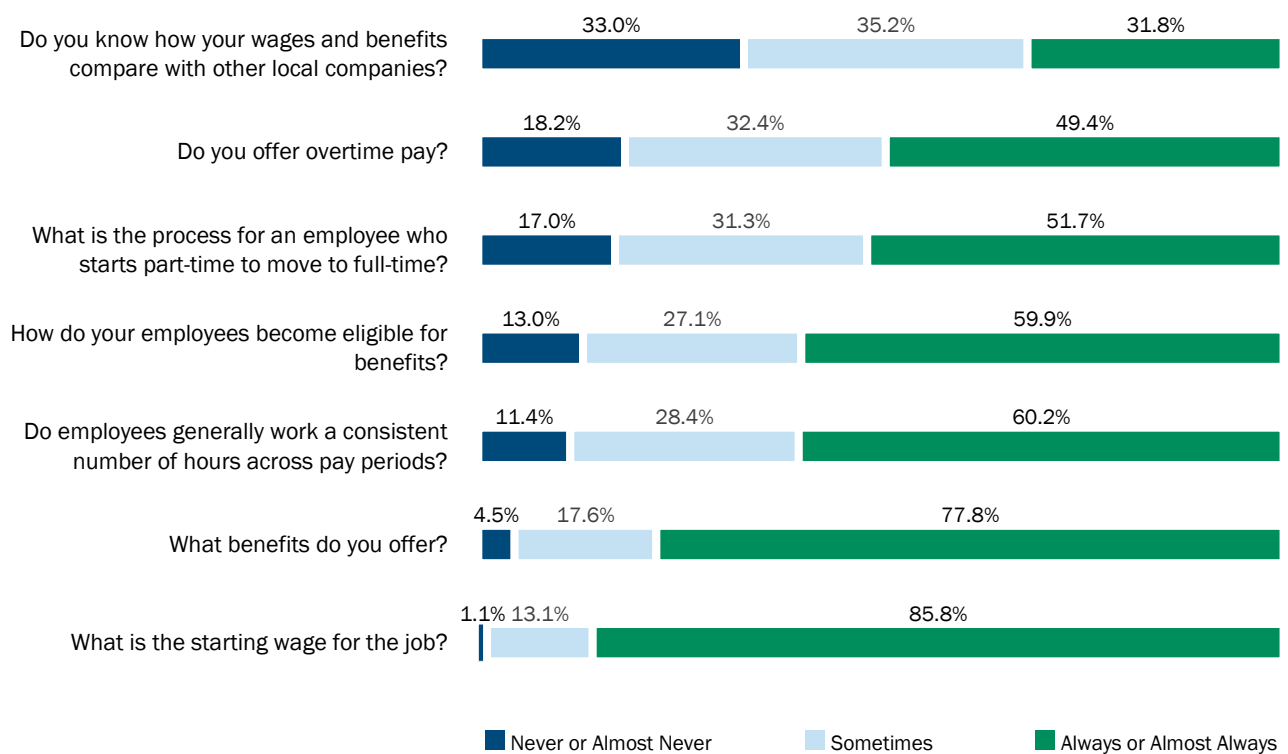
Survey responses also highlighted another area in which conversations were less likely to occur: employers' recruitment and application practices. Between 51.1% and 61.3% of survey respondents said they never, almost never, or sometimes ask employers about their recruitment sources, if they use online recruitment tools, or if they require applicants to take pre-hire assessments. This is important because asking about recruitment and application practices can open up conversations about whether and how assessment and hiring criteria are aligned to the skills needed for a job, confidence about how well assessments predict success on the job, who may be screened out and why, and can provide insights about whether employers' practices support recruitment of a diverse pipeline of talent.

Figure A5 – Questions Related to Hiring Practices, n=180-187



The majority of survey respondents reported that they always or almost always ask about the starting wage and benefits associated with a job opportunity (85.8% and 77.8% respectively). Between 49.4% and 51.7% of respondents noted that they always or almost always ask employers if overtime pay is offered or what the process is to move from part-time to full-time employment, and almost a third of respondents report sometimes asking these questions. Having this type of information can help a young adult participant determine whether a job opportunity is of interest and can help workforce professionals coach participants about strategies for positioning themselves to advance. Fewer than a third of respondents noted that they always or almost always ask employers how their wages and benefits compare to those of other local companies. Whether a labor market is tight, as it was when this survey was fielded, or more challenging for job-seekers, as it is in the current moment, this question can open the door to conversations about retaining workers and job quality in relation to other opportunities in the labor market.

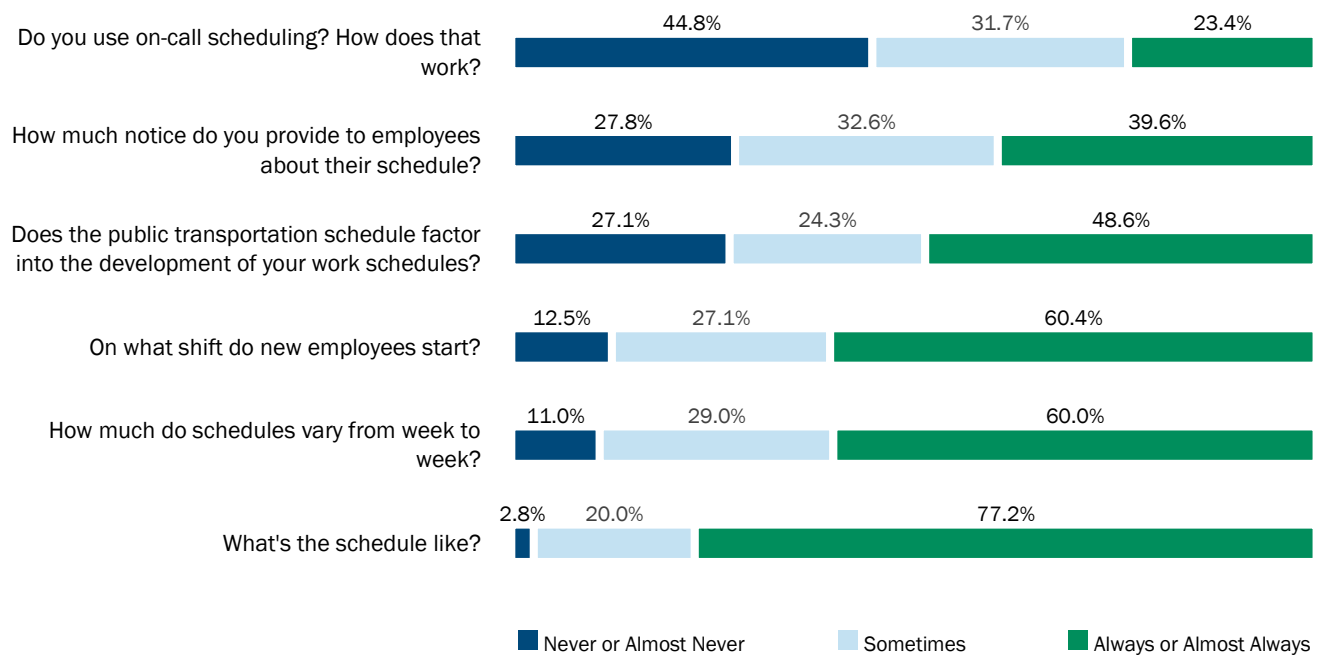
Figure A6 – Conversations about Wages and Benefits, n=176-177



Scheduling

Most workforce professionals reported that they ask employers general questions about job schedules. 77.2% noted that they always or almost always ask what a job's schedule is like, and about 60% reported that they always or almost always ask what shift new employees start on and how much schedules vary from week to week. However, 44.8% reported never or almost never asking employers if they use on-call scheduling, and a majority (60.4%) responded that they sometimes, never, or almost never ask about how much notice is given to employees about their schedule.

Figure A7 – Conversations about Scheduling, n=144-145



Onboarding and Performance Feedback Practices

Respondents were asked questions about the conversations they have with employers pertaining to onboarding practices for new employees and practices related to employee performance management. Between 62.0% and 68.3% of respondents reported always or almost always asking about what the orientation and onboarding process is for new hires, policies related to attendance, new employee probationary periods, and if a company has formal job descriptions. Respondents reported sometimes, never, or almost never asking questions about topics such as timing and approach for providing performance feedback (60.6%), how dress code is communicated (52.1%), and whether an employer provides mentoring or coaching (56.3%).

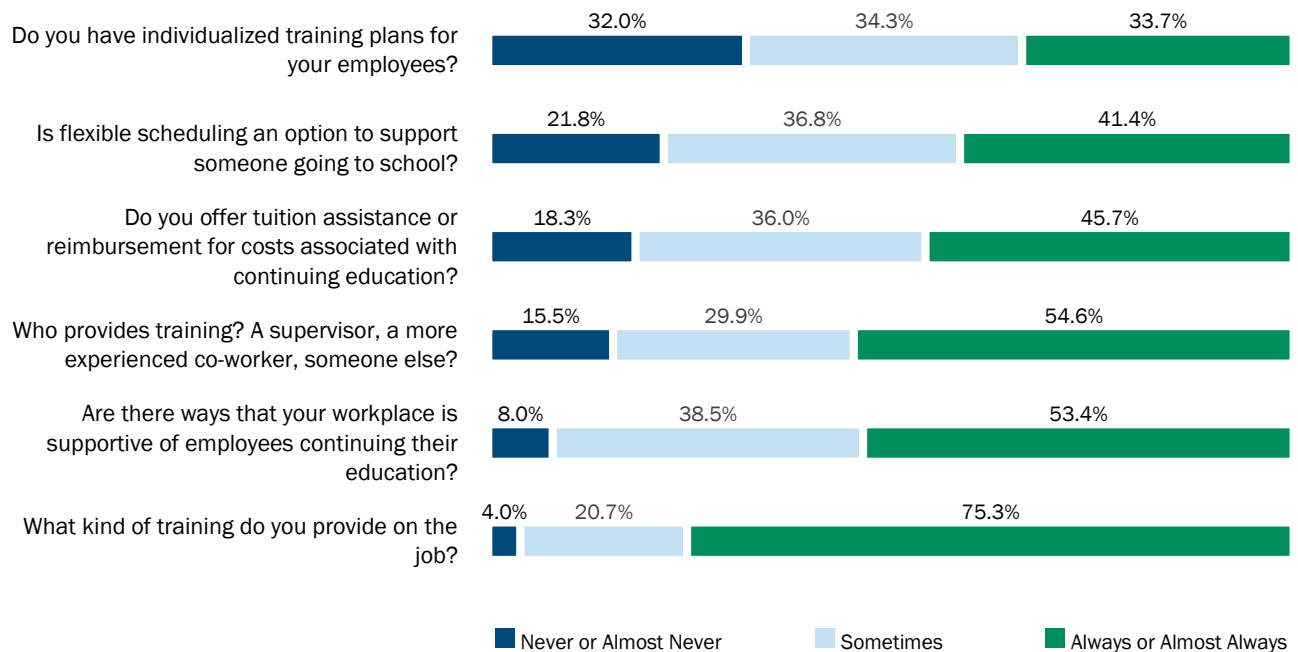
Figure A8 – Conversations about Onboarding and Performance Feedback, n=142



Training and Development and Career Advancement Practices

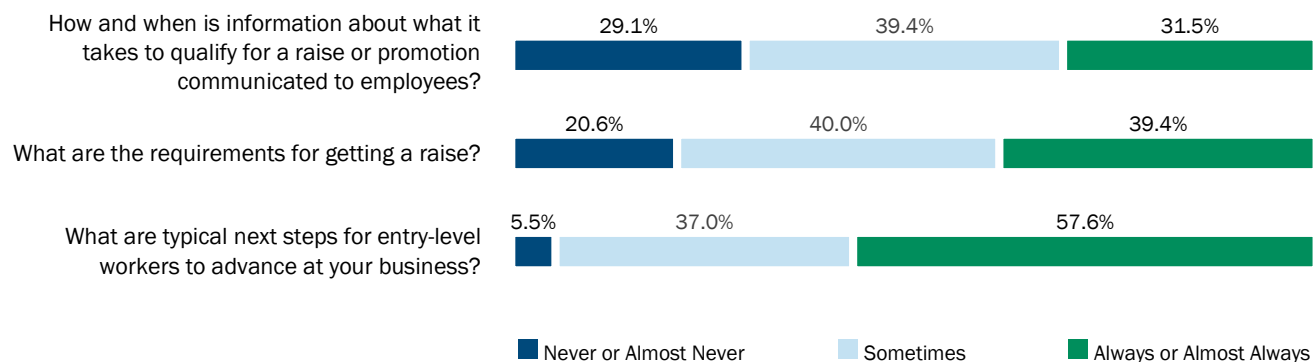
Three-quarters of respondents (75.3%) reported always or almost always asking employers what kind of training they provide on the job. A little more than half of respondents said that they always or almost always ask employers about who on staff provides training to new hires (54.6%) and how the employer supports workers who are trying to continue their education (54.6%). Many respondents (45.7%) report that they always or almost always ask if an employer provides financial assistance for tuition. One-third of respondents (33.7%) said they almost always or always ask employers if they develop individualized training plans for their employees.

Figure A9 – Conversations about Training and Development, n=172-175



The survey also asked questions about how employers support workers' career advancement. 57.6% responded that they always or almost always ask employers about the steps entry-level employees must take to advance in the organization. To a lesser extent, respondents reported asking questions around related topics: 39.4% reported always or almost always asking what the requirements are for getting a raise. 31.5% reported that they always or almost always ask how information about what it takes to qualify for a raise or promotion is communicated to employees.

Figure A10 – Conversations about Career Advancement, n=165

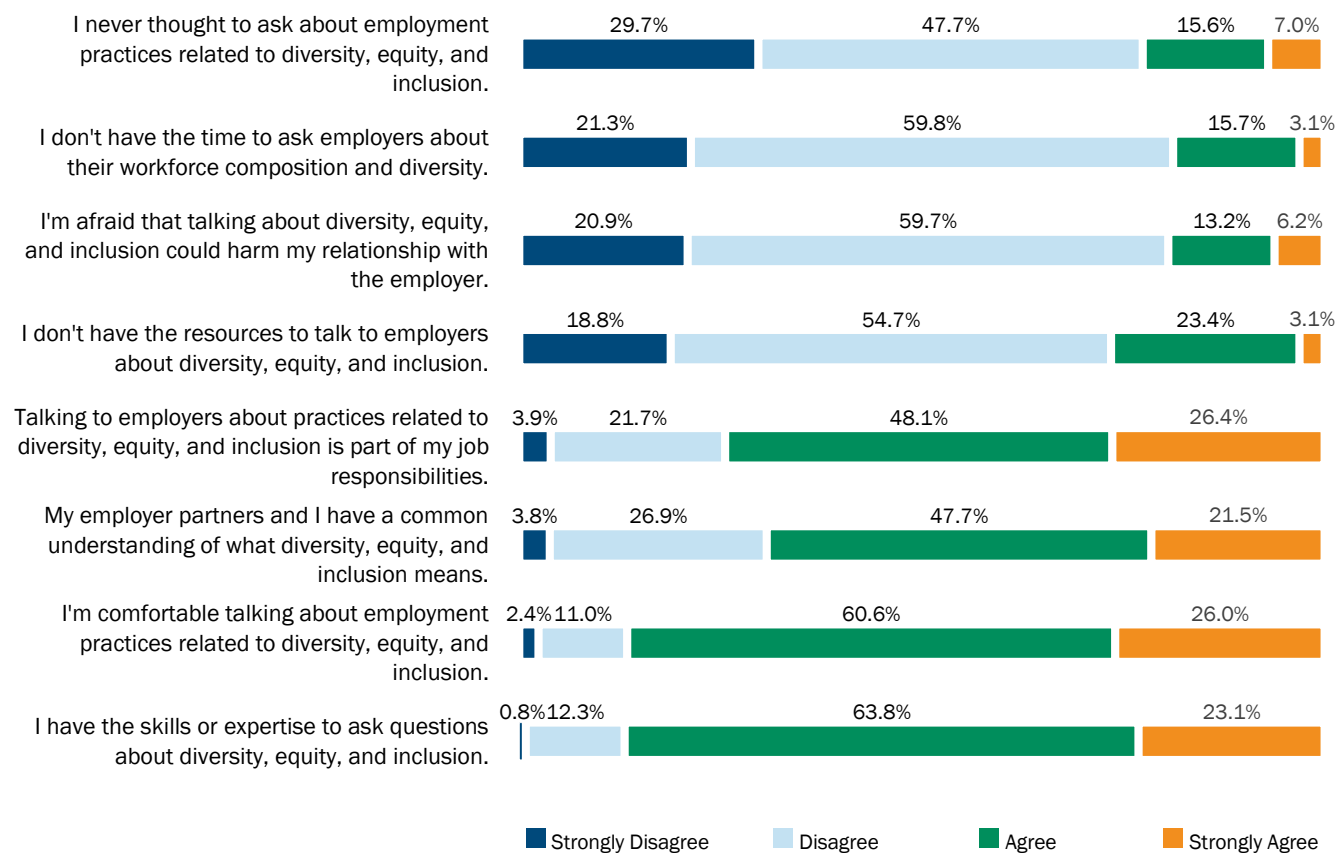


Workforce Composition and Diversity ¹⁴

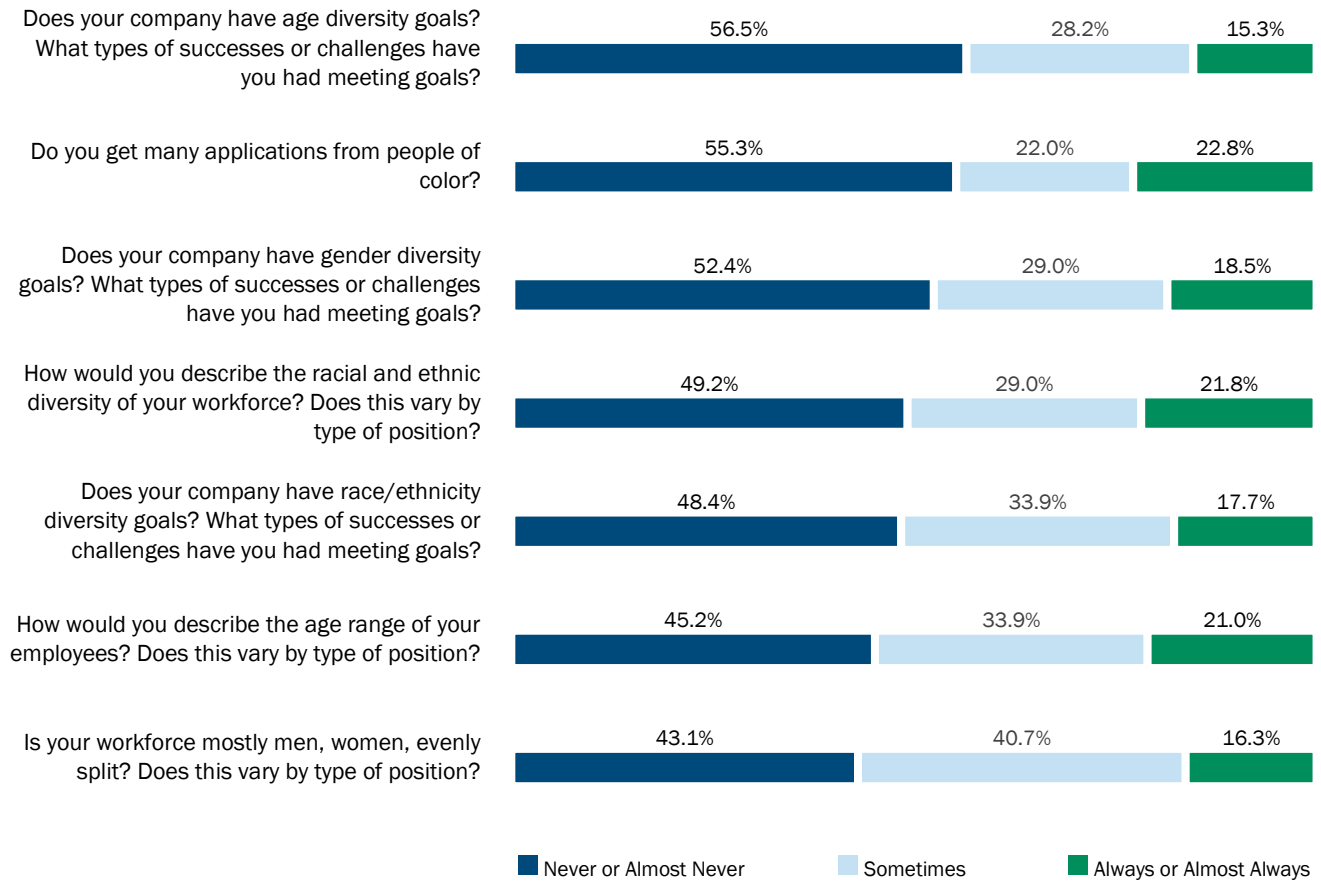
The survey included questions about respondents' work engaging with employers on practices related to workforce composition, diversity, equity, and inclusion. We asked survey respondents how comfortable and prepared they are to have conversations about diversity, equity, and inclusion with employers. A large majority (74.5%) agreed or strongly agreed that talking to employers about practices related to diversity, equity, and inclusion is part of their job responsibilities. Most responded that they have the resources they need to talk with employers about diversity, equity, and inclusion. And most reported not being afraid that talking about diversity, equity, and inclusion could harm their relationships with employers.

Yet fewer respondents reported always, almost always, or sometimes asking if companies have age, gender, or race/ethnicity goals (43.5%-52.0%, depending on diversity category). And a little more than half of respondents (between 50.8% and 57.0%) reported that they sometimes, almost always, or always ask employers questions to learn about the age, gender, or racial and ethnic composition of a company's workforce.

Figure A11 – Conversations about Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, n=127-130



¹⁴ This report summarizes the responses workforce composition and diversity questions from the surveys that were fielded in Indianapolis and Philadelphia. We worked with local partners in Indianapolis and Philadelphia to refine the diversity questions that were fielded in an earlier survey in Cleveland. Because different questions were posed, Cleveland's responses are not included.

Figure A12 – Conversations about Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, n=123-124

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