

A young man with short dark hair, wearing a blue t-shirt and a grey apron, is looking down at a tablet computer he is holding. He is in a restaurant or cafe setting, with a chalkboard menu in the background that has the word "SPECIALS" visible. A woman is blurred in the background behind him. The lighting is warm and focused on the man.

How Young Adults Can Advance in a Turbulent Economy

AT A GLANCE

Millions of young adults who lost jobs in the pandemic are still either unemployed or working in low-wage jobs that don't cover their basic needs. This report highlights four strategies to guide talent developers to navigate the rapidly changing labor market, so they can support young adults to secure higher-paying jobs with opportunities for advancement.

AUTHORS

Lili Allen
Associate Vice President, JFF

Sara Lamback
Director, JFF

Laura Roberts
Director, JFF

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About JFF

JFF is a national nonprofit that drives transformation in the American workforce and education systems. For nearly 40 years, JFF has led the way in designing innovative and scalable solutions that create access to economic advancement for all. www.jff.org

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Introduction

The COVID-related unemployment crisis for young adults has been devastating, but there's an employment crisis that demands action, too: Millions of young people who have recently found work are laboring in low-wage jobs that don't pay enough to cover basic needs.¹ Now community organizations and training providers, which have long been a lifeline for unemployed and out-of-school youth, face a daunting new challenge. They must figure out how to navigate an unpredictable and rapidly changing labor market, so they can support young adults to leapfrog from low-wage work into higher-paying jobs with opportunities for advancement.

The alternative is unacceptable. Even as the U.S. economy starts to recover from the pandemic and ensuing recession, young adults are in danger of suffering lifelong impacts from the disruption to their schooling and employment. One of the disastrous aspects of a recession is that the short-term impact on young workers often turns into long-term damage to their economic prospects. They lose access to training and work experiences at a critical moment in their career development, which lowers future earnings.² Pre-pandemic research shows that higher wages at age 23 predict higher wages as older adults.³

So, how can community-based talent development organizations working with young people make a difference? This report describes four strategies to guide talent developers to navigate a fluctuating economy and help young adults secure higher-wage jobs that can lead to careers:

- Use up-to-the-minute labor market data to target high-wage, high-growth jobs in your region.
- Design career pathways based on transferable skills rather than long periods of education or training.
- Improve relationships with employer partners.
- Advocate for public policies that support the economic advancement of young adults.

First, we explore key economic indicators that paint a picture of how the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuing recession, and fragile recovery have disrupted the lives of young people nationally.

Who Are Young Adult Talent Developers?

Young adult “talent developers” are community organizations and training providers that prepare young people ages 16 to 24 for jobs and careers. They offer employment readiness skills, occupational training, and educational advancement to young adults who face significant barriers in the labor market, including opportunity youth.¹ Many serve as a “front door” for disconnected young people to access a range of support services that help them reengage onto a pathway to economic stability.

Impact of the COVID Recession on Young Adults

In the first five months of the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020, the number of young people ages 16 to 24 neither working nor going to school more than doubled—to over 10 million.⁴ College enrollment, which usually grows during a recession, also declined—by almost 3 percent in the fall of 2020. And in June 2021, the unemployment rate for young adults was still high: close to 10 percent, compared to a national rate of 5.9 percent.⁵

One reason for the disproportionate impact on young people is that many—around one in four—worked in the leisure and hospitality industry or retail, the sectors that laid off the most workers during the pandemic.⁶ Black and Latinx youth, who are overrepresented in these fields compared with other demographic groups, experienced the highest job losses—raising significant equity concerns. Black youth have been hit the hardest; 3 out of 10 reported in 2021 that they weren't working due to COVID-related unemployment or illness.⁷ While many employees have been able to work from home during office closures, young adults are about half as likely to hold roles that are telework feasible when compared with workers 24 and older.⁸

Pandemic-related unemployment and underemployment have had the worst financial impact on young adults of color, especially Black and Latinx young people. Slightly over half of Black young adults faced difficulty paying bills—more than their peers of other races and ethnicities. And young Black women faced more significant financial challenges than women or men of other groups. More planned to use their 2020 federal stimulus payment to cover expenses instead of saving or repaying debt.⁹

What the Fragile Recovery Means for Young Workers

In the summer of 2021, the employment picture for young adults remained decidedly mixed. While young adult employment increased in tandem with the reopening of the leisure and hospitality sector, most growth has been in low-wage jobs.

First, some good news: As overall job trends indicated a strengthening economy, teen employment grew.¹⁰ In May 2021, slightly over 30 percent of 16- to 19-year-olds were employed—the highest May employment figure for teens since 2008.¹¹ In addition, wages increased over the summer as employers struggled to fill certain positions, though this may have been a one-time summer “spike.”¹² Further, JFF interviews with employers indicate that as they grapple with racial equity in their workforce, they are looking for opportunities to build a more diverse and representative talent pipeline. Increasingly, employers see investing in young talent as a way to drive progress.

Now the tough news: Young adults who are working are concentrated in low-paying occupations in fields such as food service and retail.

Table 1 shows occupations with the highest proportion of workers ages 14 to 24 and their median hourly wage.¹³ The largest group is among the lowest paid; nearly half of the 1.7 million fast-food and counter workers are 14 to 24. Their median hourly wage is \$11.47. The second largest group earns slightly more; cashiers have a median hourly wage of \$12.03.¹⁴

Table 1. Occupations with the highest number of workers ages 14 to 24, July 2021.

Occupation	Number of young workers	Percentage of young workers	Percentage of nonwhite workers*	Median hourly wage
Fast-food and counter workers	1.7 million	48%	41%	\$11.47
Cashiers	1.2 million	37%	45%	\$12.03
Retail salespersons	1.1 million	27%	36%	\$13.02
Waiters and waitresses	850,000	41%	38%	\$11.42
Laborers and freight, stock, and material movers, hand	560,000	20%	49%	\$14.96

* The percentage of nonwhite workers provides a rough measure of the racial and ethnic diversity of workers in an occupation. It describes the share of individuals within a particular occupation that identify as part of one or more of the following U.S. census groups: Hispanic/Latino, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, American Indian or Alaska Native.

Source: Emsi 2021.2

Guidance for Young Adult Talent Developers

Community organizations and training providers that serve young adults face many difficult questions in today's turbulent economy: How is the recovery affecting various industries and regions? Which job openings have the potential to lead to careers? Which educational and training credentials do employers value most? And what incentives are employers responding to?

This section details four strategies to guide young adult talent developers in their work.

1. Use Up-to-the-Minute Labor Market Data to Target High-Wage, High-Growth Occupations

Certain high-wage, high-growth occupations have great potential to serve as solid labor market entry or advancement points for young people. JFF identified a subset of these occupations nationally, based upon the labor market metrics listed below, as a foundation on which young adult talent developers can build. As the economy continues its uneven recovery, these occupations hold potential for young people seeking career on-ramps to stable employment at a living wage. We recommend that organizations that serve young adults integrate these positions into career advising and, for roles that require some postsecondary training, into workforce development.

We used the following key metrics to identify high-potential occupations:

- **Wages**—Median hourly earnings of at least \$20¹⁵
- **Growth**—Jobs that are projected to experience growth in the next five years
- **Accessibility**—Jobs that typically require no more than a high school diploma, some college, or a postsecondary non-degree award
- **Experience**—Jobs that do not require significant work experience
- **Automation Risk**—Automation index less than 100, indicating that the role has a less than average risk of automation
- **Annual Openings**—Average annual openings of at least 10,000 nationwide

Table 2 summarizes the 15 potential target occupations that emerged from our analysis. They include a wide range of positions, including sales representatives, police officers, bus drivers, massage therapists, and flight attendants.

Table 2. Potential career on-ramps for young adults, July 2021

Occupational Group	Occupation	Average Annual Openings	2021 Jobs	2021-2031 % Change	Median Hourly Earnings	Typical Entry Level Education	Work Experience Required
Sales	Sales Representatives, Wholesale and Manufacturing (<i>Except Technical and Scientific Products</i>)	128,172	1,312,639	4%	\$29.84	HS diploma	None
	Sales Representatives of Service (<i>Except Advertising, Insurance, Financial Services, and Travel</i>)	120,798	1,018,591	8%	\$28.25	HS diploma	None
	Real Estate Sales Agents	18,250	185,338	10%	\$23.58	HS diploma	None
Health Care	Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses	59,320	715,343	10%	\$23.47	Postsecondary non-degree award	None
	Medical Dosimetrists, Medical Records Specialists, and Health Technologists and Technicians, All Other	27,907	333,173	10%	\$21.20	Postsecondary non-degree award	None
	Massage Therapists	13,544	98,352	25%	\$20.97	Postsecondary non-degree award	None
Protective Service	Police and Sheriff's Patrol Officers	54,654	711,555	7%	\$31.51	HS diploma	None
Computer and Mathematical	Computer User Support Specialists	54,920	684,377	10%	\$25.33	Some college, no degree	None
Business and Financial	Insurance Sales Agents	59,594	614,626	7%	\$25.08	HS diploma	None
Office and Admin Support	Production, Planning, and Expediting Clerks	38,719	378,175	6%	\$23.86	HS diploma	None
	Information and Record Clerks, All Other	18,321	165,543	5%	\$20.59	HS diploma	None
	Eligibility Interviewers, Government Programs	13,814	144,328	5%	\$22.65	HS diploma	None
	Cargo and Freight Agents	10,156	103,469	6%	\$21.04	HS diploma	None
Transportation	Bus Drivers, Transit and Intercity	22,553	175,958	7%	\$22.07	HS diploma	None
	Flight Attendants	15,993	117,685	16%	\$28.39	HS diploma	< 5 years

Source: Emsi 2021.2 Class of Worker data extracted by S. Lamback in July 2021.

Adapt target occupations to local conditions

The target occupations are examples of roles that may be well suited to support young adults' entry into or advancement in the labor market. JFF used a national approach (based on the six metrics described above), which offers a template that young adult talent developers can apply within their local context. Each organization must adapt the model to local conditions to ensure that it meets the needs of its target population.

For example, a youth-serving organization in a large metro area such as San Francisco or New York City may want to use a slightly higher wage threshold to ensure that the target roles identified offer a living wage in its region. Regardless of location, organizations will benefit from choosing companies with a footprint (number of new hires a company typically makes for a certain role in a year) that reflects the overall level of job openings within the area.

Organizations can access the local labor market information described here through state labor market agencies. They regularly publish state and regional reports on labor market trends and can often provide customized reports or analyses.

Young adult talent developers can also explore collaborations with local workforce boards or community colleges, which may have access to proprietary labor market research tools. These include Emsi, which aggregates a range of federal and state data sources, and Burning Glass Technologies, which offers online job posting data, including skills, credentials, and other aspects of employer demand.

As local talent developers apply and adapt this approach, JFF recommends that organizations vet findings with local employers to ensure that the data captures key opportunities for young adults in the region. Potential questions to explore with employers include:

- **Wages**—Are these wages reflective of what typical new hires make in your company and industry? What type of wage growth is realistic in one, three, and five years?
- **Growth**—What level of job growth do you expect in the next three to five years? In your experience, is this typical of the industry?
- **Accessibility**—What is the typical education profile of workers in this role? Are short-term credentials or non-degree training beneficial for young adults preparing for this role?
- **Experience**—Is there a specific level of work experience you are seeking for this role? Are you open to candidates who have gained experience through work-based learning opportunities such as internships or co-ops? Do you have any suggestions for how we should structure work-based learning to position young people for work in this area?
- **Automation Risk**—Is this a role that is currently being automated? Do you envision this occurring in the short- or medium-term?

- **Footprint**—How many new hires does your company typically make for this role in a year?

Gathering this more detailed information is particularly important for certain jobs. For example, sales representatives are characterized as not requiring work experience, but they might require deep knowledge of industry products.

2. Design Career Pathways Based on Transferable Skills

Young adult talent developers need a clear, concrete strategy to support young people in moving from the low-wage, entry-level occupations where they are clustered into jobs with higher pay and more advancement potential. In determining the best approach, young adult talent developers can work through two potential avenues: (1) transfer from low-wage, entry-level occupations into better-paying jobs with advancement potential in different career areas, and (2) advancement within a specific company or industry.

In either case, talent developers should consider helping young people gain two types of skills: baseline skills and specialized skills. Baseline skills—sometimes called “foundational” skills—are defined here as the common, non-specialized skills that cut across a broad range of job types. They include communication, problem-solving, detail-orientation, and creativity, as well as basic computer literacy that increasingly represents a minimum qualification for even low-wage jobs.¹⁶ Many talent developers already integrate these skills into training. They should also consider expanding opportunities for work-based learning, which enable young adults to apply these skills in targeted opportunities in the workplace, in a specific occupation or career area. For example, a computer user support specialist often needs creativity to solve a technical problem.

Specialized skills are defined here as skills specific to a particular occupation or industry. Examples of occupation-specific specialized skills include customer service and business development for sales representatives; patient care, CPR, and treatment planning for licensed practical and vocational nurses; and technical support, customer service, and repair for computer user support specialists. Young adult talent development organizations that do not offer training in specialized skills can find a community college or other organization that does. Key questions to ask potential training partners include which specific skills they help young adults develop, how they ensure that employers are seeking these skills, and how the skills map to growing occupations that pay a living wage.¹⁷

Seek better-paying jobs with advancement potential in different career areas

One promising method is to take a skills-focused approach to help young adults translate initial low-wage employment experience into a more promising occupation. Burning Glass

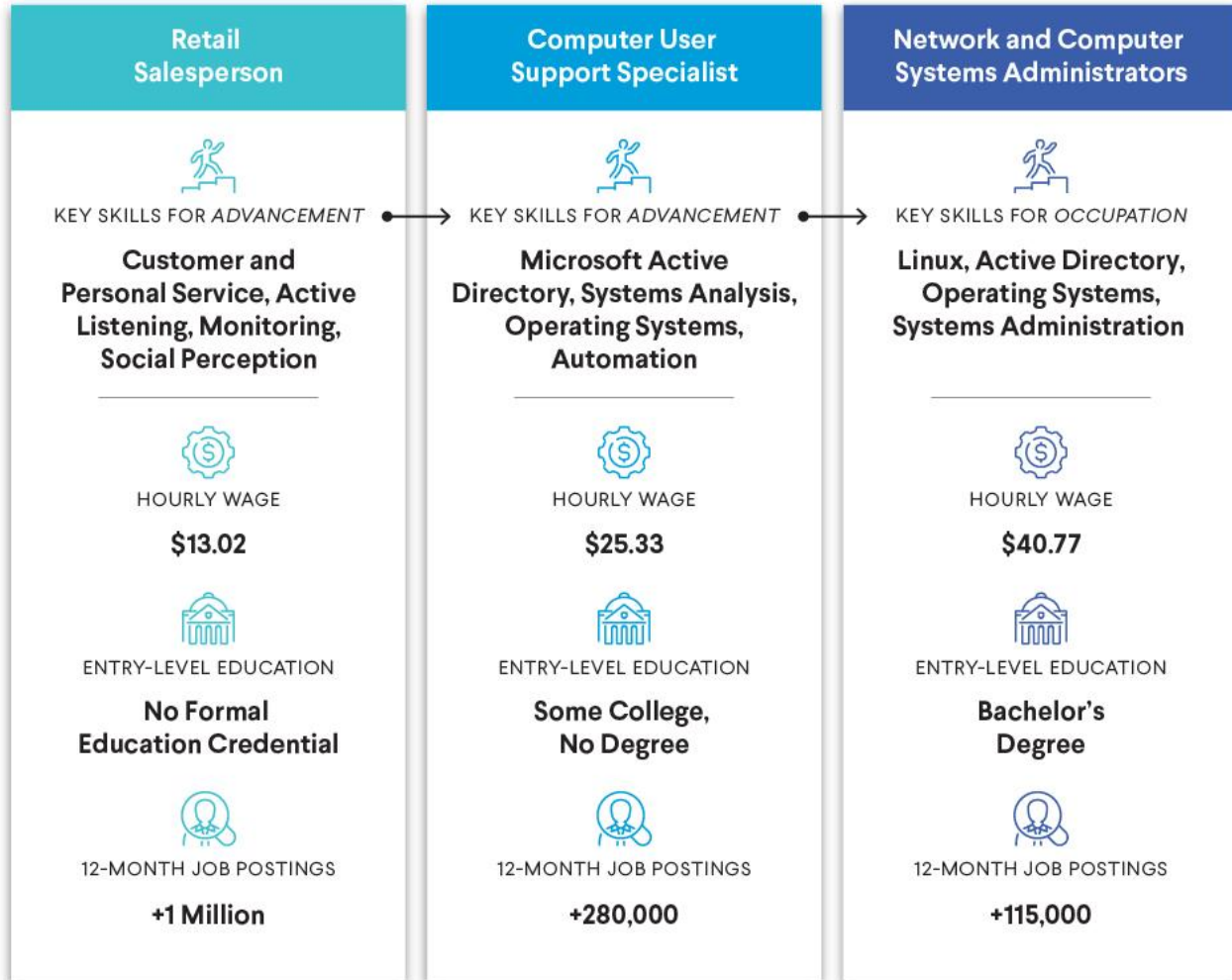
Technologies provides one example of a similar approach in a 2020 report about economically viable “lifeboat” jobs, which were in demand during the pandemic, and “next-step” jobs, which were in high demand and offer progressively stronger wages. The report identified the skills learners would need to develop to move from low-wage, entry-level jobs into lifeboat jobs and then to next-step jobs.¹⁸

Young adult talent developers can take a similar approach. By conducting interviews with local employers, they can identify specific skills that support advancement from an initial job to a higher-wage position with opportunity for career advancement. While each local labor market is unique, the Burning Glass research provides a model for young adult talent developers to begin to develop pathways that articulate clear advancement patterns based upon skills. If they are unable to provide this training in-house, they can seek outside partners such as other community-based training providers or community colleges that can deliver these skills.

Labor market information also can provide insight into common career advancement patterns (via job profiles data, which is data gleaned from online resumes or online profiles on sites such as LinkedIn) or whether related jobs require similar skills (via O*Net or online job posting data). This information can enable talent developers to build more robust pathways that illustrate meaningful movement from entry-level positions to more advanced opportunities. The Burning Glass research is national, so local talent developers can benefit from applying this approach to identify locally relevant occupations and skills data that reflect their labor market context.

Figure 1 highlights how young adult talent developers can create connections between jobs with related skills and competencies to support growth along a career pathway. For example, a retail salesperson employed at an hourly wage of about \$13 typically may gain several key skills to support their career advancement, including customer service, active listening, and social perception. These skills are also required to succeed as a computer user support specialist, who earns nearly twice as much per hour, or \$25.33. Young adult talent developers can help young people understand the skills they have developed in an entry-level job, such as retail, and how those skills translate to higher-paying employment, such as computer user support specialist. They can also incorporate skills that lead to advancement into the overall design of their training. Once a young person has experience as a computer user support specialist, they can advance further—to become a network and computer systems administrator—by gaining additional specialized skills through a short-term college program such as the A+ certification or Google IT Support Professional Certificate.

Figure 1. Sample pathway for young adults, with skills that support advancement



Source: Emsi 2021.3 and Burning Glass Technologies¹⁹

Youth-serving organizations should also pair training opportunities with paid work-based learning or other forms of on-the-job training to help young people demonstrate baseline skills and specialized competencies. In JFF's research on implementing short-term credential training, including the [Google IT Support Professional Certificate](#), employers said they would be more likely to hire candidates without a bachelor's degree if they had work-based learning experience.²⁰

In addition, young adult talent developers can work closely with employers to support [ethically offboarding](#) employees when they are downsizing, as many did in the pandemic. JFF has identified various strategies in play in companies ranging from Amazon to Starbucks to Disney, including helping employees bridge to new opportunities.²¹ Strategies include credentialing

workers' skills and abilities and investing in “outskilling”—helping employees develop in-demand skills in fast-growing sectors of the economy.

Seek opportunities for internal advancement

Some employers are increasingly focusing on [worker development](#) as they strive to fill openings in the recovering economy.²² Programs can leverage this inclination by working with employers to unpack the baseline and technical skills needed for the occupations identified in this report, removing any extraneous job requirements that may lock young people out of early opportunities. Programs can also work with employers to identify mechanisms for internal advancement to support retention. JFF has completed a [market scan](#) of technology tools to support the retention and advancement of young adults in the workplace.²³

3. Improve Relationships With Employer Partners

Positive, productive partnerships between community organizations, training providers, and employers are critical to creating better outcomes for young workers. Based on the labor market insights above, combined with research from JFF's community of corporate leaders, we believe youth-serving organizations can take four core steps to initiate or improve their relationships with local employer partners, as outlined below. Whether your organization has many employer relationships or you're just getting started, we've found these steps are critical to ensuring partnerships begin and remain healthy and mutually beneficial.

- **Think broadly about what partnerships can look like**

Both employers and community organizations can benefit from being creative about shaping their partnerships, particularly when it comes to cross-sector collaboration. Community organizations bring employers a tremendous resource in their networks of potential employees, other service providers, and community leaders. Rather than each working alone, they may be able to form a network of employers, collaborate with the local government, or involve several community organizations to provide a full suite of wraparound support services, such as transportation assistance and child care. These partnerships are only possible when organization leaders openly discuss their goals, needs, and resources with employers and adopt a collaborative stance to finding solutions. Think about your community: what's an ideal setup for employer-community organization partnerships broadly? What role might your organization play in developing these partnerships?

- **Understand how each employer is approaching hiring and retaining young people**

Is a business need driving youth hiring and retention as a priority? Young adult talent developers can research the practices of their employer partners, such as any hiring incentives they may provide. Ask HR leaders if they track the number of young people they hire and

retain and whether they have specific goals. If the answer is yes, ask what's driving those targets. If the answer is no, there might be a broader opportunity to advocate for considering young people as an invaluable talent pool.

It's important to know that the business case for many employers to hire and retain young people is not static; it changes with the market, CEO mandates, and the desire to remain competitive. Even if you think you know the state of youth investment of your existing employer partners, it is worth revisiting from time to time to make sure you're still helping to solve their current needs and challenges.

- **Make a case for how you can help**

Clearly articulate what you can bring to a partnership, linking it to the company's business needs. What does your organization offer, and how does that solve a problem for the company—whether that's finding the right people for open roles or helping people be successful once hired? If you have a positive track record working with other employers, share who you have worked with in the past and what results were achieved, such as placement and retention rates and employer testimonials. Transparency and openness are critical, both at the beginning of a partnership and throughout. Be clear about what you can offer an employer in a partnership and expect from them in return. Make sure your value proposition is also shifting with the company's own needs and investment priorities. What proved valuable to them five years ago may have changed, just like your own services and programs.

- **Decide where to focus**

Work with key decision-makers within a company to help them design and deploy specific evidence-based practices to hire, retain, and advance young people. This could include using partnerships to develop more diverse talent pipelines; aligning on the skills needed to perform well and advance in a job; and offering training opportunities that develop these skills, with a company commitment to preferential hiring of program graduates. Another priority may be connecting young people with wraparound support services they need to be successful through networks of community organizations and other local partnerships. Depending on the needs of the company and the young people you're working with, the focus area may change over time.

4. Change Policy to Support Young Adult Economic Advancement

Changes to public policy are also needed to help support young peoples' advancement in today's economy. Community organizations are uniquely positioned to influence policy conversations and decisions because they have a commitment to equity and the ability to connect with a diverse set of partners and young people. Below is a list of policy and advocacy ideas that community organizations and young talent developers should consider adding to their national

and local policy and advocacy agendas. This is particularly important as federal and state policymakers seek to support youth in COVID-19 recovery efforts and look to reauthorize the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), the primary federal program serving out-of-school and out-of-work youth and which provides formula funding for state and local programs.

- **Increase investments in programs serving young adults facing barriers in the labor market, including opportunity youth**

At the federal level, an increase of \$10 billion would serve an estimated additional 1 million to 1.5 million young people in need of assistance. (Estimate is based on investment levels comparable to those for traditional students under the Pell Grant program.)

- **Establish a new competitive grant program to serve local areas that have high concentrations of out-of-school and unemployed youth**

Policymakers should develop a new competitive grant program that aligns multiple programs and partners through collective impact strategies for serving youth at risk of leaving school and out-of-school youth at risk of unemployment. In addition, it should expand evidence-based strategies for helping low-income young adults, including opportunity youth, to succeed. The program must also focus on solutions that address the education and employment needs of youth underrepresented in higher education and the workforce—including Black, Latinx, and Indigenous populations—with particular attention to racial equity. These grants should be awarded to partnerships of workforce systems, secondary schools, community colleges, community-based organizations, employers, and other key stakeholders. They should incorporate flexibility similar to that provided in Performance Partnership Pilots for Disconnected Youth grants to allow creative solutions to the complex challenges faced by opportunity youth and other young adults.

- **Strengthen AmeriCorps**

Policy should strengthen AmeriCorps to ensure that all AmeriCorps programs are stepping stones to advancement and that AmeriCorps participants have the opportunity to develop marketable skills while completing their service. AmeriCorps programs should provide education, skill training, leadership development, and post-service job placement, and members should earn a living wage rather than a small stipend. Young adult talent developers can join other advocacy groups and partners to advocate for integrating workforce development into service opportunities.

- **Develop a Career Advising Corps**

Policymakers should support the Biden administration's efforts to create a national Career Advising Corps through the Corporation for National and Community Service that leverages

emerging technology platforms.²⁴ The new program should use a corps of trained career advisors to provide high-quality career counseling to high school students, college students, workers, and those disconnected from work and learning.

- **Expand work-based learning opportunities**

Policymakers should also champion initiatives to expand work-based learning opportunities for young adults from low-income backgrounds. This initiative should include developing standard principles for high-quality work-based learning, including pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs, and encourage employer commitments to expand work-based learning participation.

- **Expand job creation and subsidized employment opportunities**

Further policy change should focus on job creation and federally subsidized employment opportunities for youth and young adults. In upcoming federal job creation initiatives, including infrastructure, green energy, and health care workforce initiatives, ensure that young adults from low-income households, including opportunity youth, have access to such opportunities. Skills training for these jobs should be a priority, with not less than 1 percent of funding for these initiatives dedicated to job training for unemployed and underemployed individuals, including out-of-school and out-of-work youth.

- **Expand local summer jobs programs**

Policymakers should expand locally based summer jobs programs to extend throughout the year and provide dedicated slots to opportunity youth. Combining subsidized jobs with training opportunities can pay off for workers and their families.²⁵

- **Expand access to more flexible student aid**

Make student aid more flexible through skills accounts to expand funding for skill development, short-term Pell Grants, and other financing mechanisms that remove cost as a barrier to postsecondary credentials.²⁶ These accounts also would allow individuals to access more modern postsecondary options that meet their career and personal needs. There is currently a movement underway to make short-term training programs Pell-eligible. This would open up opportunities for young adults who need financial support to complete training leading to industry-recognized credentials.

- **Provide incentives for inclusive outreach, recruiting, support, and hiring practices**

Provide incentives to employers that encourage them to recruit, hire, and support more people from populations underrepresented in higher education and living-wage jobs, including Black, Latinx, and Native American young people and young adults from low-income backgrounds.

- **Appoint a cabinet-level position and establish an interagency task force on youth policy**

A cabinet-level position and interagency task force should reestablish federal policymakers' commitment to youth populations. This would include coordinating efforts across youth-serving programs, finding solutions to help young adults, including opportunity youth, attain in-demand credentials and family-supporting careers. The initiative should include establishing standard performance metrics across youth programs, building on performance measures in WIOA.

For additional policy and advocacy ideas, visit JFF's [Recommendations to the Biden Administration for Youth Employment Policy](#).

Conclusion

In the past 18 months, young people suffered interruptions to their schooling and employment with potential long-term impacts on their careers. The community organizations that serve as the “front door” for young adults facing barriers in the labor market must act to help them regain ground in this volatile economic recovery. They need both training and support to have a chance for advancement.

As we have shown, while the data indicates that young adults are gaining in employment rates, we have an urgent need to ensure that they advance into occupations that pay a living wage and offer opportunities to progress in their careers. Now more than ever, young people will be best positioned to recover if young adult talent developers (1) hone their skills in labor market analysis to understand the changing economy in a time of flux, and (2) make common cause with employers around the need to recruit, retain, and advance this population, and (3) advocate for policy change to improve the state and federal systems serving young adults.

Endnotes

¹ The authors define “low-wage job” as a position whose earnings don’t cover an individual’s basic needs for food, housing, energy, and other essentials. According to 2019 Brookings Institution research, 7 million young people who were not in school and did not have a college degree were working in low-wage jobs. Brookings Institution, Metropolitan Policy Program, “53 Million U.S. Workers Are Making Low Wages, Despite Low National Unemployment,” press release, November 7, 2019, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/201911_Brookings-Metro_Pressrelease_lowwageworkforce.pdf.

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¹⁰ Patricia Cohen, “U.S. Added 559,000 Jobs in May but Road to Recovery is Bumpy,” *The New York Times*, June 4 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/04/business/economy/jobs-report-may-2021.html>.

¹¹ Drew DeSilver, “During the Pandemic, Teen Summer Employment Hit Its Lowest Point Since the Great Recession,” Pew Research Center blog, June 7, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/06/07/during-the-pandemic-teen-summer-employment-hit-its-lowest-point-since-the-great-recession/>.

¹² Cohen, “U.S. Added 559,000 Jobs in May but Road to Recovery is Bumpy.”

¹³ Data comes from Emsi, which groups the following ages together: 14-18, 19-21, and 22-24. It’s not possible to disaggregate the data to calculate values for ages 16-24, the age group commonly used by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and other labor market data sources.

¹⁴ Emsi 2021.2 Class of Worker Data extracted by Ray Barbosa in July 2021.

¹⁵ JFF chose a wage threshold of \$20 per hour to target roles that provide a living wage, enabling young adults to meet their basic needs for food, housing, energy, and other essentials. We recognize that young adult talent developers may want to choose a higher or lower wage threshold to reflect their local economic context.

¹⁶ According to Burning Glass Technologies, “Baseline skills aren’t limited to ‘people skills.’ Certainly skills like customer service and organizational skills appear across the board in job postings, but so do skills like writing, as well as knowledge of specific software packages like Microsoft Word and Excel.” Additional information on baseline skills is available here: <https://help.burning-glass.com/en/articles/5094443-labor-insight-skill-classifications>.

¹⁷ Burning Glass Technologies, “*Labor Insight: Skill Classifications. What are the Different Skill Types?*” 2021, <https://help.burning-glass.com/en/articles/5094443-labor-insight-skill-classifications>.

¹⁸ Burning Glass Technologies, *Filling the Lifeboats: Getting Americans Back to Work in the Pandemic* (Boston: Burning Glass Technologies, May 2020), https://www.burning-glass.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Lifeboat_Jobs_Burning_Glass.pdf.

¹⁹ To identify these advancement patterns, JFF used data on the occupational “gain and drain,” which indicates the most common job transitions based upon job profile information. To ensure that these transitions are based on compatible skills (and that these transitions are feasible for workers), JFF selected occupational progressions with a compatibility index* of at least 80, indicating a high level of compatible skills between the two roles. After identifying the occupational transitions, JFF examined data from O*Net that was aggregated by Emsi and reviewed the most-requested skills from online job postings available from Burning Glass Technologies. Data is drawn from Emsi 2021.3 Class of Worker data, extracted by S. Lamback in September 2021. 12-month job posting data is from Burning Glass Technologies, extracted by S. Lamback in September 2021.

*Compatibility Index: This number is used by Emsi and is intended to score the compatibility of two occupations in terms of the knowledge, skills, and abilities they require: a score of 100 means complete compatibility, while a score of 0 means no compatibility. The compatibility index is a synthetic number generated by a proprietary algorithm that uses O*NET’s data on the required [Levels](#) and [Importance](#) of competencies. Additional information on this metric is available at <https://kb.emsidata.com/glossary/occupational-compatibility-index/>. These are the compatibility levels for the selected occupational pathways: Retail Salesperson and Computer User Support Specialist, 81; Computer User Support Specialists and Network and Computer Systems Administrators, 89.

²⁰ Vanessa Bennett and Sara Lamback, *Transforming IT Trainings to Successful Career On-Ramps* (Boston: JFF, July 2020), <https://www.jff.org/resources/transforming-it-programs-successful-career-ramps/>; Felicia Sullivan and Dristi Adhikari, *Google IT Support Professional Certificate: January 2021 Evaluation Report*, internal JFF report for Grow with Google and Google.org, January 2021.

²¹ Catherine Ward and Jon Kaplan, *A Better Approach to Layoffs* (Boston: JFF, May 2020), <https://jfforg-prod-new.s3.amazonaws.com/media/documents/Brief-Ethical-Offboarding-052020.2.pdf>.

²² Steve Lohr, “Workers, in Demand, Have a New Demand of Their Own: A Career Path, *The New York Times*, August 18, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/18/business/workers-in-demand-have-a-new-demand-of-their-own-a-career-path.html?smid=tw-share>.

²³ JFF, *Thrive@Work: Employee Experience Technology That Empowers Low-Income Young Workers for Success* (Boston: JFF, March 2021), <https://jfforg-prod-new.s3.amazonaws.com/media/documents/JFFLabs-ThriveWork-Market-Scan-040921.1.pdf>.

²⁴ Mary Gardner Clagett et al, *How to Achieve an Equitable Economic Recovery for America: A Blueprint for the Biden Administration*, (Boston: JFF, November 9, 2020), <https://www.jff.org/resources/how-achieve-equitable-economic-recovery-america-blueprint-biden-administration/>.

²⁵ Kali Grant, Julie Kerksick, and Natalia Cooper, *Lessons From New Hope: Updating the Social Contract for Working Families*, (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Law Center, Center on Poverty and Inequality, August 24, 2021), <https://www.georgetownpoverty.org/issues/lessons-from-new-hope/>.

²⁶ JFF, *America’s Opportunity Youth Deserve an Equitable Economic Recovery: Recommendations to the Biden Administration for Youth Employment Policy* (Boston: JFF, April 2021), https://jfforg-prod-new.s3.amazonaws.com/media/documents/Youth_Recommendations_for_Biden_Administration_04-13-21.pdf.