

# Collaboration, Growth, and Equity: A Holistic, City-Wide Approach to Economic and Workforce Equity for Philadelphia

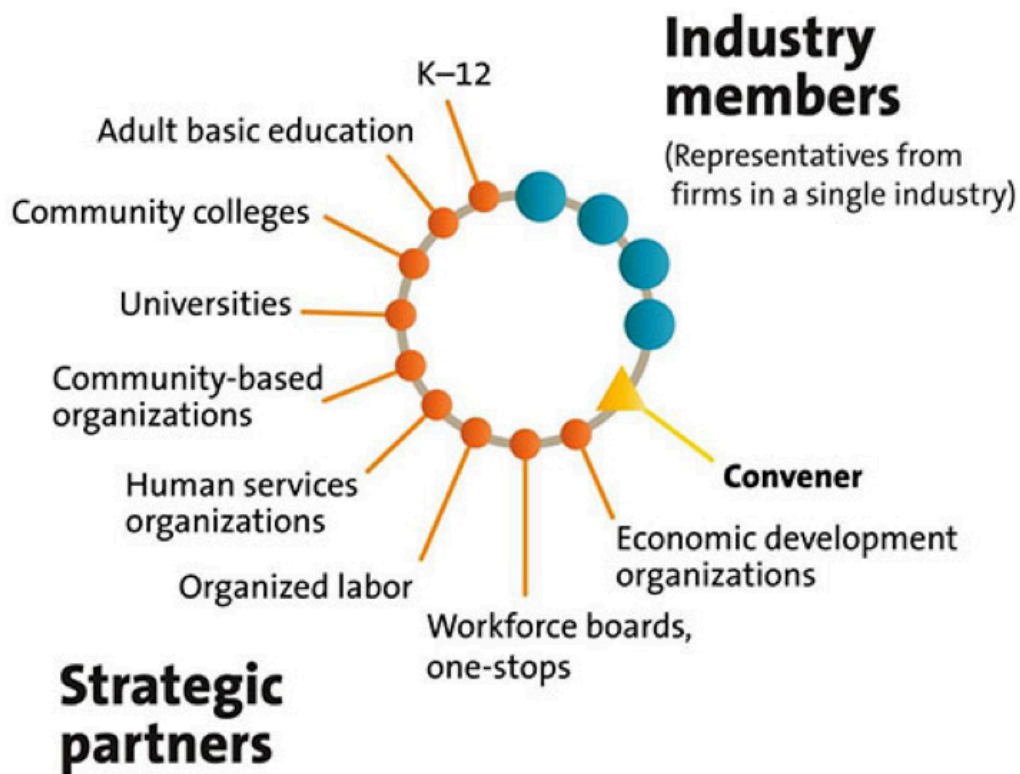
Heloise Jettison & Mitchell Little 20 February 2018

In Philadelphia, the statistics heard everyday are stark. We are the nation's poorest large city. We have an unemployment rate of 9.6 percent (about two percentage points higher than the national average), a poverty rate of 25.7 percent, and an astounding deep poverty rate of 12.3 percent.<sup>1</sup> With a population of 1.56 million, we are a majority-minority city also experiencing low educational attainment, with 16.2 percent of residents never graduating high school and nearly one-third only attaining a high school diploma or GED<sup>2</sup>. The confluence of poverty, race, education, and employment underscores the magnitude of the city's economic challenges.

*Shared Prosperity Philadelphia* was launched in 2013 as the City's response to the crisis of poverty. The charge was to focus efforts across city government to alleviate the immediate effects of poverty, but also to spur systems-level change. Under the Kenney Administration, there is a renewed energy and focus to create more

pathways out of poverty. For the first time, the City has pulled together key stakeholders, partners, and private entities to apply their expertise in promoting a business-driven training and employment agenda to create career pathways to family-sustaining employment. The City has worked in collaboration with these public and private sector partners to develop an ambitious and aggressive plan to both connect residents to high-quality employment opportunities and advance economic and workforce equity.

“Collaboration,” “growth,” and “equity” are critical for creating an effective alliance between city government, private sector businesses, and the education and training institutions in Philadelphia. While the workforce, education, and training systems have been disjointed for years, the present moment offers a striking (and troubling) contrast between the visible evidence of poverty and the inequity of access to opportunities and inclusion and prosperity for many residents, which can no longer be ignored. Quality, well-paying, and career-oriented jobs are the key to reversing poverty, however, local employers have expressed a need to grow the talent pool for middle-skill jobs. The driving force bringing stakeholders and partners together is a shared belief that the city’s labor force is ripe to be trained and prepared to meet local employers’ needs.



[Sector Strategies Coming of Age: Implications for State Workforce Policy Makers, National Governors Association](#)

Collaboration is the centerpiece of the City's strategic process for promoting workforce equity. In July of 2016, a table of public and private stakeholders was convened that included the City's Commerce Department and Managing Director's Office, the School District of Philadelphia, Community College of Philadelphia, Philadelphia Works, Peirce College, Job Opportunity Investment Network, and Philadelphia Youth Network, as well as private sector businesses, members of the Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce, and employment training providers. The composition of the table was itself a significant innovation in that these partners had never been assembled in an intentional manner for the task of breaking down the existing silos within the workforce development landscape and constructing a common

strategy for the city. Over the past 16 months, these partners have been working together, reviewing existing strategies, bringing new partners to the table, and combining their diverse interests into a cohesive set of recommendations and goals to specifically address the city's workforce challenges.

## **Growth**

Growth of a world-class workforce requires that skills developed in our academic careers, as well as certification and training programs, match those demanded and anticipated by employers. Employers, education providers, and training providers must work in concert to ensure these skills are formed in educational settings and to increase the scale of opportunities such as apprenticeships, internships, and work-based learning -- specifically, opportunities directly geared to "earning and learning" in an inclusive, fair, and upwardly mobile environment. Efforts captured in the strategy that embody this approach include standout programs like Power Corps PHL and Philadelphia Future Track, amongst others across the city.

## **Equity**

The word *equity* is not simply a buzzword for partners and stakeholders convened at the table. It goes deep into the root of the issues of poverty and economic opportunity in Philadelphia. People of color, specifically African

Americans and Latinos, have the least access to opportunity, and have not seen gains in employment for either entry-level or mid-level skill positions. Demographic trends indicate that Philadelphia's impoverished residents are increasingly Latino and of working age<sup>3</sup>. To address issues of equity, the proposed city-wide workforce goals are founded on the principle of building pathways to careers for *all* individuals in the labor force and ensuring equal access to economic opportunities for *all* Philadelphians. The equity imperative is embedded in the City's strategies to meet the needs of our employers by building a world-class workforce, as well as in our plans to align resources, systems, and policy efforts to drive a workforce agenda that is fair, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of marginalized job-seekers.

Inequity is reflected not only in measures of poverty and economic disparity, but in specific workforce outcomes, such as the historic lack of diversity in the city's building and construction trades. This lack of diversity means that women and people of color are not gaining access to the opportunities for apprenticeships and union memberships that can open doors to employment on the large-scale, prime construction projects that are on the rise in Philadelphia. Proactive leadership to address barriers that are present in the building trades is being provided by the City's Deputy Mayor for Labor. Equity can also be achieved by moving away from a framework that simply seeks to connect people to jobs, and instead, provides all

residents with opportunities to embark on a career pathway that leads to growth in income, skills, and job quality over time. The career pathway approach has gained significant momentum and support at the federal level, as evidenced by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which expands the definition of career pathways to align with the skill needs of specific occupations or growth-industries.<sup>4</sup> Philadelphia's sector-based approach to workforce development sees career pathways to viable long-term employment and higher wages as integral to the success of the unemployed and underemployed labor force, regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender.

City as Model Employer Career Advancement Project (C.A.P.) is the City's innovative pilot program to grow a world-class workforce by "walking the walk." In this program, individuals with barriers to employment will work along a pathway to permanent employment within City government or with City employer partners. The goal is to transition 200 City seasonal/temporary low-wage workers to permanent employment in City government or with City employer partners over three years. This project focuses on disconnected youth and young adults aged 16 to 29; formerly incarcerated and justice-involved individuals; and adults lacking the necessary workforce skills and credentials. Seven Philadelphia City departments will participate in the pilot year, offering a continuum of career exposure opportunities, from pre-apprenticeship to

apprenticeship, with permanent employment as the end goal. The first cohort of 40 C.A.P participant apprentices began in June 2017. The most significant win to date is the system change that occurred when the Civil Service Commission approved the new job specification which opened the opportunity to provide the C.A.P. apprentices 24 months of paid training that solidifies the pathways created to permanent employment.

Now is the time to capitalize on this significant win. The City, as an employer, will be authentic and affect change through its workforce strategy and authorize a sub-committee to apply a racial equity lens to the C.A.P. apprentice cohort. The data obtained will be applied to assess and unpack the barriers to seasonal workers gaining access to civil service employment, passing the civil service exam, and being hired within City government departments. Applying a dual demographic and literacy-based approach to analyze race and class disparities within seasonal workers in civil service positions, is a different approach to assess the root cause of any inequities. Further analysis of the data may also reveal additional inequities or disparities in hiring and promotion opportunities in civil service positions. The results will provide remedies that can be applied to positively impact and reduce barriers for seasonal and lower skilled workers, and aid in determining how these remedies can be applied to career pathway programs in other City departments. Philadelphia's city government as the model

employer can lead the way for real change, real solutions, and reform.

This concerted effort to create, develop, and launch the City as Model Employer program, and take a hard look at racial equity, is indicative of the City's commitment to making an impact for the populations we must up-skill and employ, starting with city government, as the largest employer, to lead the way and implement systemic change through collaboration, growth, and equity.

## **Author bios**

**Heloise Jettison** is the Senior Director for Talent Development for the City of Philadelphia Department of Commerce. A native Philadelphian, with more than 25 years of experience in the field of health and social services, K-12 education management, administration, law, and policies in alternative education options for students. She transitioned into the field of workforce development in 2013 at Philadelphia Works, Inc. In 2016 she joined the Department of Commerce as the Senior Director of the newly formed Talent Development unit. Heloise and her team work city-wide with public and private partners, academic institutions, employers, and workforce training agencies to develop and strengthen the labor force and opportunities of pathways to employment for all Philadelphians. With this intention, and by assisting in the development and the design of a city-wide plan to aggressively raise the level of efficiency of

our systems and workforce talent, Philadelphia will continue to be competitive and attract and retain businesses that will innovate, thrive, and grow.

**Mitch Little** is the Executive Director of the Mayor's Office of Community Empowerment and Opportunity (CEO). He previously served as Deputy Executive Director for the organization through an appointment by Mayor Michael A. Nutter in 2013. The same year, CEO released "Shared Prosperity Philadelphia, Our Plan to Fight Poverty" and Mitch is charged with its implementation. As the Community Action Agency for the city and county of Philadelphia, CEO seeks to align the city's efforts to lift individuals and communities out of poverty and increase opportunities for low-income individuals and families using a "collective impact" model. The agency also acts as a convener, funder, and evaluator contracting with a wide-variety of grantees to advance CSBG supported initiatives in benefit access, housing security, learning preparedness, financial security, and workforce development. Mitch serves as a Boards of Director for several organizations including YesPhilly, an alternative school for out-of-school young adults, and as a member of the African-Americans in Government Mentoring Program where he mentors young African-American professionals.

## **Works Cited**

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2016

1-year estimates.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Pew Charitable Trusts, Philadelphia's Poor (2017).

Accessed at: [www.pewtrusts.org](http://www.pewtrusts.org)

<sup>4</sup> [www.congress.gov](http://www.congress.gov)