

**RESHAPING
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT IN
BALTIMORE**

*Ensuring Community Voice
and Expertise Guide Us*



THE ANNIE E. CASEY
FOUNDATION

ABOUT THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private philanthropy that creates a brighter future for the nation's children by developing solutions to strengthen families, build paths to economic opportunity and transform struggling communities into safer and healthier places to live, work and grow. For more information, visit the Foundation's website at www.aecf.org.

introduction

THE BALTIMORE CIVIC SITE

Investing in Casey's Hometown

Baltimore is one of two civic sites, along with Atlanta, where Casey has a special connection and long-term commitment to child and family well-being. Since moving to the city in 1994, the Foundation has been working to improve education, job opportunities, health and neighborhoods for Baltimore's kids and families.

The uprising following Freddie Gray's death in April 2015 was a response to the vast disparities families in Baltimore City have faced for decades. It exposed deeply rooted inequities that have left thousands of young people like him disconnected from quality educational and employment opportunities that would allow them to realize their full potential.

Several public and private partners, including the Annie E. Casey Foundation, saw this as an opportunity to strengthen investments in the city's young people and begin focusing more intentionally on teens and young adults ages 16 to 29 who are neither in school nor working — a population often referred to as “opportunity youth.” Within months, several organizations launched innovative programs, including the One Baltimore for Jobs initiative, which is part of the Baltimore City Mayor's Office of Employment Development,¹ to connect young people with the knowledge and skills necessary to secure well-paying jobs, and ultimately a greater sense of purpose and hope for the future.

As these programs were implemented, challenges recruiting and retaining youth began to emerge. Many of the direct service providers sought to gain a better understanding of young people's needs and interests to develop more effective strategies for reaching them.

In response, the Casey Foundation's Baltimore Civic Site team invested in a participatory research pilot to help internal staff and other local partners engage the authentic voices and the experiences of young people in Baltimore within the context of workforce development. The Foundation recruited seven young-adult community leaders as consultants to plan and implement this work. These consultants were given considerable freedom to set the scope of the project and design an engagement process they felt would genuinely connect with young Baltimoreans.

With their guidance, Casey sought to answer several questions.

*“What strategies are most effective for
REACHING YOUNG PEOPLE
with the greatest barriers to employment?”*

*“What do young people need in order to
STAY ENGAGED
with training and work opportunities once connected?”*

*“What would
INCENTIVIZE AND SUPPORT
their engagement?”*

*“What careers do young people
ASPIRE TO?”*

“How does this compare to the range of opportunities available to them and what the market can bear? And what does this tell us about how we should think about the future of training

DESIGN AND DELIVERY?”

The Foundation hoped this pilot would help develop effective workforce interventions by enabling youth and young adults to respond openly and express their concerns, hopes and dreams.

A second and equally important goal was to demonstrate the feasibility of bringing young adults and other community voices into the institutional decision-making process — not just for this project, but as a standard practice for Casey and other peers in the field. Many young-adult community leaders were already sharing their perspectives and advising local institutions after the uprising — often for free — and the Casey Foundation wanted to explore ways of helping these leaders build their capacity to effectively monetize, cultivate and sustain their consultative skills.

This report provides an overview of the feedback Casey gained from young people — both the interviewees and the consultants — as well as a road map for implementing similar research and engagement models. Many of the findings were consistent with existing research,² including the importance of paid work experiences, the need for youth engagement from a wide variety of sectors and the need to improve employer perceptions of, and capacity to work effectively with, youth and young adults.

By talking directly with young people, however, we gained new

insights about the resources they rely on when searching for work, the barriers they feel are stopping them from obtaining jobs and building a career and their ambitions and aspirations for the future:

- Insufficient information about job openings and job support and a lack of reliable access to phone, internet and transportation were some of the most commonly cited barriers to employment.
- Job prospects for young people with prior criminal convictions are minimal, and the expungement process is difficult to navigate.
- While young people in Baltimore understand the long-term advantages of education for building a career, many are limited by the immediate need to make money.
- Many teens and young adults — more than a third of those the consultants interviewed — crave entrepreneurship and resources to build businesses that benefit their communities, and that free them from the discriminatory practices, policies and workplace cultures that participants reported facing in traditional employment settings. For them, a career is not only a means to escape financial woes, but to create opportunity for the people around them and build a life free from violence and poverty.

It is the Foundation's hope that this information can help leaders in Baltimore and in communities across the country develop strategies to engage young people in educational, workforce development and employment opportunities. The goal of this report is to influence the way local stakeholders, including service providers, agency officials and funders, think about youth engagement and that it will encourage them to tailor workforce and small-business development approaches to respond to the needs and genuine desires of young people in Baltimore, rather than resting on interpretations or assumptions.

The Casey Foundation recognizes that there is substantial work to be done to set all of the city's youth on a pathway to opportunity and lifelong success. But engaging young people to record and disseminate the voices of their peers is an important step to take in charting the right course, and in adapting our own ways of working to respond.

The Consultant Team

KIRSTEN ALLEN

Allen is an East Baltimore native and a graduate of Coppin State University, where she majored in political science. She founded Meraki Community Uplift, an organization based in East Baltimore's Oliver community that bridges core life skills with progressive ideas and initiatives to transform the neighborhood.

HUEY BLAKE

Blake grew up in many neighborhoods throughout Baltimore and currently lives in Mondawmin. He is a former leader for Youth Unlocked, a program designed by the Ingoma Foundation to reduce the number of young people arrested in Baltimore, and has studied psychology at the Community College of Baltimore County.

IMANI VICTORIA BRYAN

Originally from Boston, Bryan is the health and policy analyst in the Office of Youth Violence Prevention at the Baltimore City Health Department. She previously worked at the Center for Urban Families and holds a bachelor's degree in anthropology from Davidson College and a master's of public health from Morgan State University.

SHAWN BURNETT

Burnett, who was born in Washington, D.C., but raised in West Baltimore, is the founder of Walks of Art, a community organization that aims to positively influence the cognitive development, emotional health and social lives of underserved youth in Baltimore City. He is a fatherhood specialist at the Center for Urban Families and holds a bachelor's degree in nonprofit management from Coppin State University.

IDENTIFYING THE RIGHT TEAM

The Casey Foundation engaged Frontline Solutions, a black-owned national consulting firm that specializes in research, analysis and strategic planning for the philanthropic and nonprofit sectors, to help identify and coach the consultants and serve as the administrative anchor for the project.

During recruitment, Casey and Frontline sought consultants who were actively working in various community leadership capacities throughout Baltimore. To ensure they would be able to effectively engage youth populations whose voices are often excluded from traditional research methodologies, we looked for young people who possessed the following core competencies:

- demonstrated commitment to community empowerment and racial equity and inclusion;
- strong track record of grassroots organizing;
- capacity to represent and directly engage a diverse range of youth and young adult perspectives; and
- availability and willingness to commit to an intensive, five-month research process.

Despite these common characteristics, the seven consultants come from a wide variety of social, educational and professional backgrounds and represent a cross-section of Baltimore neighborhoods. They range in age from 23 to 29 and identify themselves as black or African American. Their synergy as a group and their collective experiences not only contributed to the research findings, but also resulted in deeper relationships and camaraderie among a group of leaders working to engage and support Baltimore youth. "I could tell that these people wanted the same things I wanted," reflected one consultant on meeting his colleagues for the first time. "It was a blessing being with like-minded people."



All seven consultants are active community leaders and have continued their work to improve outcomes for young adults throughout Baltimore City. Shown left to right, top row: Lamontre Randall and Kirsten Allen, bottom row: Dejuan Patterson, Imani Victoria Bryan, Shawn Burnett, Huey Blake and Dayvon Love.

While Casey and Frontline helped structure and facilitate group planning sessions, consultants were encouraged to thoughtfully explore different research paths and determine the process for engaging other local youth. Some consultants became primary voices in the research and planning processes, while others emerged as leaders in the focus group outreach and facilitation.

At times, disagreement seemed to impede decision making, but structure in meetings and sticking to a set agenda kept the project moving. Differences in perspectives led to rich, thoughtful conversations that deepened the group's understanding and analysis of workforce development issues. Including personal interactions before meetings and meals afterwards encouraged deeper connections among the group.

Throughout the project, Frontline provided mentorship and coaching, helping the group navigate business matters, such as contracting, invoicing and time management.

DAYVON LOVE

Love grew up in West Baltimore's Howard Park community. He is a graduate of Towson University and the founder and director of research and public policy for Leaders of a Beautiful Struggle, a Baltimore-based, grassroots think tank that advances the public policy interests of black people.

DEJUAN PATTERSON

Patterson is an East Baltimore native. He is an entrepreneur, community organizer and consultant with the BeMore Group, which he co-founded, and has developed a passion for gun violence prevention and community empowerment. Patterson received a bachelor's in psychology and a master's of public administration in public policy and management from Bowie State University.

LAMONTRE RANDALL

Randall grew up in East Baltimore, where he still resides. He is co-founder of the BeMore Group, where he bridges the gap between institutions and those who need their services. Randall holds a bachelor's degree in criminal justice and a minor in Asian-American Studies from the University of Maryland at College Park.

DESIGNING THE PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH PROCESS

The project began in August 2016 with a two-month learning phase. The consultants reviewed research³ and data on a range of health, workforce and economic indicators and met with local stakeholders, including funders, workforce practitioners and policymakers, to gain a better understanding of Baltimore's workforce development landscape and perceptions about young people's access to work. During this exploratory phase, the consultants also visited the Under Armour complex at Port Covington to gain a local industry partner's perspective. The team reviewed findings from these discussions and identified areas to explore further, including research methodologies, the history of various workforce strategies in Baltimore — particularly from the lens of African-American workers — and trends in economics and community well-being. The team also engaged seasoned consultants of color in conversations about the practical realities of working in both a national and local consultative capacity.

At the end of these two months, the team traveled to Detroit to compare that city's youth workforce landscape with Baltimore's. Consultants toured multiple sites and spoke with small business owners, local government officials, practitioners and professors about a range of workforce and economic

development issues. Based on this information, the consultants saw a relationship between black-owned small businesses and a sense of connectedness and decreased crime in a community. During the Detroit trip, the team also participated in a group coaching session facilitated by social-justice expert adrienne maree brown to help them strengthen their consulting skills and identify professional opportunities in areas they are passionate about.

These experiences were instrumental in helping the consultants gain a better understanding of their professional aspirations and strengths, bond as a group and understand youth employment issues from a variety of angles. Traveling outside of Maryland allowed them to learn and grow together, and the trip informed the structure and content of focus group questions.

Following the site visits and a series of guided planning sessions, the consultants began the formal research process in October. They identified youth and young adult populations to engage, paying careful attention to areas of the city and populations that are often absent from participant data collected from local workforce efforts. The team then designed custom engagement strategies for each area of the city, deciding on "corner conversations" as the core method of data collection. Throughout the design process, it

was clear that this type of approach would not only effectively identify youth perspectives, but also serve as an effective, community-driven approach for a wide range of research efforts.

CORNER CONVERSATIONS

Corner conversations were structured as small, intimate focus groups hosted in trusted, youth-accessible community settings. This was an intentional decision by the consultants and a departure from more traditional methods, like hosting meetings at the Foundation's headquarters or an offsite office location in one of Baltimore's more traditional business districts. The team felt this would be a more accessible approach to reaching young people who may not have had previous experience in formal program settings.

As they went about scheduling the conversations, the consultants had difficulty securing meeting space in some neighborhood restaurants and shops and observed a pattern of dismissiveness from owners that they felt potentially reflected the negative perceptions of young job seekers of color. This highlighted a need for further engagement to understand the perspective of local businesses in relation to hiring young people from the same neighborhood.

In planning each corner conversation, the consultants designed a customized outreach strategy that involved visiting the neighborhoods they identified through their research as having a large proportion of youth who are disconnected from educational and employment opportunities. They sought out popular hangout spots in these areas and began engaging and recruiting young people up to two weeks in advance of the meeting. For approximately every 100 young people approached in high-traffic areas of the target neighborhoods, one or two attended the corner conversations.

The consultants attribute these rates, which other outreach workers report as being consistent for the field, to the limited time, resources and bandwidth they could devote. Many young people were skeptical of the project, and there was not always time to develop the trusting relationships that are needed to encourage greater buy-in. Given the constraints, the consultants prioritized youth who were eager to participate, and they acknowledge that there are many other perspectives they were unable to capture.

Along with the corner conversations, consultants planned three other focus group sessions at YO! Baltimore Westside and the Center for Urban Families with participants who were already involved in workforce development-related programs through the host organization. One hybrid focus group was held at the Men and Families Center, which incorporated both program participants and young people engaged through neighborhood outreach.

Table 1 outlines the venue and type of meeting held in each location.

TABLE 1: FOCUS GROUP TYPES AND NEIGHBORHOODS

| GROUP TYPE | VENUE | NEIGHBORHOOD |
|---------------------|--|----------------------------|
| Corner Conversation | Baltimore Community Mediation Center | Greenmount |
| | Chick Webb Recreation Center | Somerset and Monument East |
| | Shareef’s Grill | Belair-Edison |
| | Safe Streets Eastside | Milton-Montford |
| Focus Group | YO! Baltimore Westside | Harlem Park |
| | The Center for Urban Families-STRIVE | Greater Mondawmin |
| | The Center for Urban Families-Responsible Fatherhood Project | Greater Mondawmin |
| Hybrid | Men and Families Center | Middle East |

The size of these focus group sessions ranged from three to 16 participants. All 82 participants were African American and over 65 percent were male — which the consultants attributed to having encountered more young men than women in the neighborhood hangout spots they visited. It also stands in parallel to the disproportionate number of young black men who are disconnected from the workforce and traditional workforce discourse.⁴

Participants typically ranged in age from 16 to 29, although a few individuals as old as 41 participated in discussions. Older participants were most often a community mentor or neighborhood leader who assisted with outreach and

hosting the discussion. The participants had a range of educational and work experience. Most had obtained a high school diploma or GED equivalent, some participants did not complete high school and a few had college degrees. Most were unemployed, some were employed with minimum wages, some were temporarily employed and a few were in jobs with living wages. Their experiences mirror the realities of many other youth across the city: More than 20 percent of young people ages 16 to 24 in Baltimore are neither in school nor working. Of this population, 38 percent lack a high school diploma or GED and hold, on average, a seventh-grade reading level and fifth-grade math ability.⁵

The consultants shared characteristics that inspired trust and rapport with focus group participants. The young people who chose to attend the corner conversations reported that they did so because they had been directly invited, because they wanted to contribute and because they were comfortable with the consultants facilitating the groups.

“The fact that we were all black had a huge impact,” said one consultant. Another explained, “The level of trust that people gain from this project and the team of consultants was due to the ability to convey shared experience, empathy and adaptability; that’s important when we are engaging people who have a deep mistrust of institutions and systems.”

FIGURE 1: FOCUS GROUP LOCATIONS IN BALTIMORE CITY



VOICES OF BALTIMORE YOUTH

Why Work Matters

Young people in Baltimore want to work for a variety of reasons: Some work to save for college, pay their phone bill or gain the experience needed to build a career. For others, financial responsibility begins at a young age.

Consultants heard from participants who said they have been acting as the primary providers for children, siblings or even their parents from as early as 11 years of age. Many young people work to pay for rent, food, transportation and the significant costs of raising children — any personal savings, college tuition or trade school fees would be prioritized only after family responsibilities have already been met.

“I am a senior in high school. The money I get is put towards rent and food, until I make my career. I want to go to college, but I need to be able to still provide for my family.”

“I’ve got to sacrifice my life to make sure that my mother and family are taken care of. I can’t see them out on the streets.”

Some of the young people interviewed expressed a desire to volunteer, particularly within specialized fields in which they would like to pursue careers; for

others, volunteering was seen as a luxury they could not afford.

“I would even volunteer if I had to. I just need experience, but no one wants to take that chance on me.”

The participants’ ages, backgrounds and family responsibilities affected their reasons for working as well as their job and salary requirements. When asked about their salary needs, young people who identified themselves as the primary providers in their home were looking for wages ranging from \$15 to \$21 an hour — far above the city’s current \$9.25 minimum wage. Some younger participants indicated that \$10 per hour would be sufficient to cover their needs, while others were willing to work for less than \$10 per hour.

“Minimum wage is better than nothing.”

Others highlighted a very real tension that exists for young people, noting that wages below \$15 per hour cannot compete with income from selling drugs or other participation in the informal economy.⁶ One participant reported selling drugs from a very young age and another, a single mother, shared that she started selling in order to avoid being evicted every six months. Participants emphasized that living wages can prevent young people from choosing such pathways to support their families.

Career Goals

Young people are interested in a diverse array of fields and are driven by ambition, passion and the desire to build opportunity for their families and communities.

The young people we spoke with in Baltimore saw a career much differently than they did a job. Careers were associated with passions, aspirations and lifelong pursuits — “something you love to do” and “something you can build on, look back on.” Careers were linked to a better salary, benefits and retirement opportunities, and most participants viewed them as being family sustaining. By contrast, jobs were described as “just something temporary.”

The participants had a wide array of aspirations and career goals. When asked what type of work they would choose if they could make a living from any activity, participants responded with everything from social work to fashion.

“I can build stuff. I want to do everything — as much as I can do. I want to be big. I want to own everything. If I’m a boss, I’m still going to support the people who work for me.”

Table 2 lists the sectors and professions focus group participants were interested in.

The focus group participants saw a career as a means not only to escape

financial woes, but also to create opportunity in their communities and build a life free from violence and poverty.

“I want to learn more than just the job,” said one young person. “I would love to see more of a spiritual connection with work,” said another, summarizing a desire for a supportive and uplifting work environment that surfaced in a number of focus groups.

The theme of helping others also was consistent throughout focus groups: Better income would allow young people to provide for their families, and better jobs would provide influence and power to hire others within their neighborhood. Several young people mentioned trying to connect their friends with jobs or bringing them to workforce development programs. Young people expressed a strong desire to share knowledge within the community — whether that knowledge is a life skill or a lead on a job.

“Everything that I learn I pass on to someone.”

Education and Trade Schools

While young people in Baltimore understand the long-term advantages of education for building a career, many are limited by the immediate need to make money.

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Architecture | Drawing and animation |
| Building maintenance | Engineering |
| Carpentry | Fashion |
| Child care | Hospitality |
| Communications | Mechanics |
| Community development | Mortuary science |
| Computers/IT | Music |
| Construction, flipping houses | Retail |
| Cooking and restaurant management | Training and grooming dogs |
| Cosmetology | Transportation |
| Counseling, social work | Veterinary science |
| Cyber security | |

Participants knew that college, trade school and even volunteering were important steps in building a career, but many explained that more pressing life and family needs require them to work in whatever job they can find to pay the bills. Lack of information, finances and other resources were the primary barriers to attaining a career — not lack of ambition. Even those linked to workforce development and job-placement programs felt that temporary job placements were far more abundant than career-building employment opportunities. In the words of one of the focus group facilitators, “Every single participant had a plan that they wanted to put in motion. They just didn’t know how to.”

Several participants were in school while working to support a family. One high schooler described

going directly to a housekeeping job at Johns Hopkins after school every day and returning home at midnight. Another dropped out of community college because it was too exhausting to balance studies with work. For most, building a career meant juggling multiple work and school engagements. This was not always manageable for young people who also had family responsibilities and struggled with access to reliable transportation.

The Dream of Entrepreneurship

Young people in Baltimore crave entrepreneurship and resources to build businesses that are free from discrimination and benefit their communities.

“I want to be an entrepreneur because then I can put others on, too. My goal

is being able to take care of myself, get housing, move around like I want, live a stress-free life and help everyone else. Once I make it — I'm not playing — I'm an uplifter. Give me two dollars to my name, I'm giving half of it away."

"The white guys spread their wings, why wouldn't I?"

More than a third of focus group participants saw entrepreneurship as a priority. Many young people were working on projects but didn't have the resources to develop these into full-fledged businesses. One participant already has a YouTube channel dedicated to dog grooming, helps people train their dogs and makes organic dog food. Another enjoys taking computers apart and rebuilding them as a hobby. Prior to the focus group, it had not occurred to him that he could make money doing so.

Participants were interested in starting their own businesses for many of the reasons other young people pursue entrepreneurship — control of the work environment, job flexibility and the opportunity to "be your own boss." For these young people, entrepreneurship also offers an alternative to many of the discriminatory practices, policies and workplace cultures they reported facing in traditional employment. Focus group participants said they had experienced injustices in traditional workplaces, such as withheld wages and inconsistent work hours. Others talked

about overtly racialized work environments where racial slurs were used. Furthermore, participants described employers who discriminated not only against applicants who have criminal records, but also against those with addresses in violent neighborhoods. "Even the store in my own community won't hire its own people," said one participant. Several female participants reported being criticized for hair, clothing and style choices on the job. When speaking about the often all-white auto body shops he has worked in, one mechanic noted that he's faced barriers and discrimination at every stage in his career — from training to securing apprenticeships and proper credentials. "They think less of me and my capabilities." Several participants expressed a desire for more information about their rights as workers and to know which agencies they could contact to report discrimination.

Young people saw business ownership as a way to avoid workplace abuses. "If you are the boss, you don't have to worry about someone being racist, cutting your hours or cutting pay," explained one participant. Many wanted to employ others in their community fairly, securely and without discrimination.

However, entrepreneurship comes with its own barriers. Startup fees and business taxes can be prohibitively high for most low-income young people in Baltimore, and

poor credit ratings make it difficult to access loans. Participants said they needed help learning how to start a business, and many expressed a desire for high school classes that build tangible entrepreneurship and financial planning skills. Some participants were also interested in information about federal grants targeting minorities.

These issues are part of a broader set of challenges black business owners of all ages face throughout the city:

- only 3.3 percent of black-owned firms have paid employees, compared with 26.3 percent of white-owned firms;
- black-owned firms without employees generate lower revenues than white-owned businesses with no employees (\$15,165 compared with \$48,494, respectively); and
- black-owned businesses with employees also generate disproportionately lower annual revenues than white-owned firms (\$789,222 compared with \$2.9 million, respectively).⁷

Baltimore entrepreneurs, particularly those of color, often lack access to affordable financing options and technical assistance that could support them in launching and growing strong businesses — including the social and business connections necessary to attract investors and build and grow staff.

Barriers to Employment

“You need a job to financially stabilize and get to the career. You can have a vision, a dream, but if you don’t have the avenue to get there, you’ll never get there.”

In addition to low salaries, lack of supportive services to complete further education and workplace discrimination issues, participants described five primary barriers to finding work and staying in a job. Many of these align with existing research on barriers to youth employment both in Baltimore and across the nation.

1. Lack of information about jobs, job resources and who is hiring.

Many young people do not know about existing workforce development, educational and training resources that are already in their communities. Employers and workforce-training organizations must strengthen their community-based outreach efforts.

“Certain companies come out, but most will send someone that we don’t trust and that we don’t see.”

“A lot of times people just don’t know. It’s been situations where I’ve learned there’s a lot of free money out here and they are paying for certain programs but it’s not being broadcast.”

2. Lack of reliable access to phone and internet. Several young people reported using prepaid phones for job searches. When minutes run out on these phones and young

people cannot afford reloading them, potential employers have no way to get in touch. Similarly, a lack of internet access prevents some young people from using the job services that are available online.

“You need a laptop or phone with enough data to access a lot of the sites or social media groups.”

“Minimum wage barely pays enough for the phone bill.”

3. Discrimination against young people with criminal records.

Young people said job prospects for those who were formerly incarcerated are slim. Even after getting a job, participants with felony convictions reported being underpaid because of prior convictions. While job seekers with criminal records often try to get their convictions expunged, the process is complicated. Free expungement programs take time, and certain types of felonies are ineligible. What can and cannot be accomplished through the expungement process often is not clear, and some young people reported that the programs gave them false hope.

“I got fired on my first day in orientation. I was actually in orientation and they came to me and told me, ‘We just got your background check.’ And we’re talking something from 11 years ago — I was 18 when it happened.”

“They have you thinking you can expunge your whole record, but it’s not true. Only certain offenses. Why try if I can’t get it all done? I know a whole lot of guys that feel like that.”

4. Lack of transportation. Transportation costs can be prohibitively expensive for those working minimum wage jobs, young people said. Central Maryland’s public transportation system provides inadequate access to economic hubs, requires long commutes and is generally unreliable.⁸ Several young people explained that transportation costs keep them from community college and other educational programs. One described taking one-hour bus rides each way to reach a part-time job.

“Transportation — if you could get a whole bunch of tokens and give them to people, that would help. Just protect against misuse.”

“Go to the mall, have free shuttle rides to go look for jobs. A lot of people aren’t determined to go get it unless they see someone else do it.”

5. Living and growing up in an unstable environment. Many participants referenced chronic stress as a barrier to obtaining a job or getting on a career path. Family instability, neighborhood violence, poverty and homelessness can interfere with a young person’s consistent attendance and performance at work. The overwhelming responsibility of being a primary provider at a young age can also take a toll on mental health and well-being. Many young

people mentioned using marijuana to cope with this stress, and cited drug screenings as a barrier to employment.

“If I leave, there won’t be anyone to take care of my mom. If I leave, then the food won’t be there.”

“I have to have a plan, but I don’t have a plan right now. A better job would be nice. All I need is a safe place to sleep, then I’ll be good.”

“I been to too many funerals. As I go through life, I realize my grandma, others, they are still broke. I look at younger people dying, don’t want that path either.”

“What about someone who smokes [marijuana] a lot — what does he do?”

Employment Resources

Young people in Baltimore primarily learn about jobs from family and friends.

“You gotta know somebody who knows somebody. But it shouldn’t be like that.”

“You know how they say it’s a food desert down here? It’s a work desert, too.”

Most young people said they learn about job openings from friends and family members who are already employed in the company or who heard about the job from their own networks. Some participants described members

of their communities who serve as informational hubs or devote themselves to connecting youth with opportunities, including one man in his 80s, who participants said has spent decades driving kids from his Baltimore neighborhood to recreational programs.

“For years, he’s been picking kids up in his van and teaching [us] — all on his own.”

While parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts and other older relatives were sought for job advice, young people said they relied on peers for life advice or support. Young people engage with those they trust. In the words of one young man who provides mediation in his community: “You have to be a certain type of man to do this job — street credibility — people have to know you, respect you and have love for you.”

Some participants reported learning about jobs from listservs, online searches or employers directly. While young people use free internet at public libraries for job searches, they noted that libraries do not have additional support services for job seekers.

While several workforce development programs are viewed positively in the community, some are seen as offering empty promises.

“It feels like they are doing it on purpose to trap you. You are vulnerable, so they are going to tell

you 97 percent [job-placement rate] and you are like, ‘I’m going to do this because I need a job.’ Then you come up and it’s like ‘not only did you not get a job, now you owe us money.’”

While some focus group participants had never been involved in workforce development or job-placement services, others had used a variety of services. Those named include: the One-Stop Career Center, Job Corps, JARC Baltimore, Kidz Table, St. Ambrose, Safe Streets, Second Chance, Civic Works, Turnaround Tuesday, YO! Baltimore and the Center for Urban Families.

Despite noting the downfalls of several existing programs, participants described positive workforce development experiences. The Center for Urban Families in particular was cited as a supportive environment with programs that inspire, uplift and instill a sense of accountability and trust. More of these types of resources are needed for widespread change, young people said. As one participant noted, “You’re talking about a whole city in poverty; this one place can’t really save them.” Based on the number of young job seekers with children, on-site child care would also enable more parents to access these types of programs.

While some centers and programs have a good reputation in their communities, unfulfilled promises at other centers, associations and schools led young people to have generally low expectations

for job-training and educational programs. Some participants reported paying for programs or devoting time to obtain certificates, only to find that the certificate did not help them secure a job. These disappointing experiences have created an air of suspicion around job-training, workforce development and educational programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations emerged from the consultants' findings. By listening to the voices and experiences of young people in Baltimore, workforce practitioners, funders and policymakers can strengthen their efforts to engage youth and provide the tools and resources they are looking for to pursue their passions and develop meaningful careers.

1. Provide wraparound services to mitigate the participation barriers young people face. Youth and young adults face a multitude of barriers — including unreliable transportation, mental health and substance abuse issues and unstable housing arrangements — that hinder their participation in workforce development programs. Providers can help mitigate these challenges by intentionally partnering with other community-based organizations to ensure young people can access housing, child care, transportation, legal, financial coaching and other

related services in addition to job training.

2. Make job opportunities, including training and placement resources, more visible through social media, at the library and on street signs. Young people overwhelmingly referenced social media as their preferred outlet for hearing about jobs. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat are all heavily used by young people in Baltimore. Public libraries are used for free Wi-Fi to access search engines for information about jobs, but are an untapped resource for directly providing job information. Posting information in shop windows around high foot-traffic areas is likely to draw the attention of young people.

3. Invest in and use under-resourced community centers that are already reaching young people. Community centers like the Chick Webb Recreation Center have historical significance in their neighborhoods and are trusted, non-threatening environments for youth. Several participants mentioned that their friends go to Chick Webb for the free basketball, and it would be easy to engage them in job opportunities within the center. Workforce development programs that are grounded in strong community ties and effectively serve otherwise disconnected populations should see continued — and increased — investment.

4. Provide resources and information to mentors who are already working in communities. Most young people already have mentors in their community, but these mentors need to be better resourced. Coaches, parents and older adults in communities were commonly referenced as trusted sources of advice and information. For example, mediators at Safe Streets, youth leaders at the Ingoma Foundation and other dedicated community members volunteer full time to improve the lives of young people in Baltimore. Funding for salaries and stipends for these community mentors will increase their capacity to provide these services.

5. Support entrepreneurship with an explicit focus on black, low-income youth and young adults. Young people in Baltimore have ideas and fledgling businesses, but need education, mentorship and access to capital to start successful businesses. Entrepreneurship skills training and financial education should be provided in high schools and in trusted community centers. Seed funding and low-interest loans should be made available to young entrepreneurs — particularly those with poor credit.

6. Create opportunities for young people to train or study and earn at the same time. Paid vocational programs would allow young people to earn an income while also learning a family-sustaining skill. Part-time jobs that are flexible, pay \$10 or

more an hour and are available year-round will help more young people earn while staying in school.

7. Ensure workforce development programs are designed to meet industry demands. To alleviate young peoples' suspicion around job-training, workforce development and educational programs, providers must intentionally design programs that incorporate positive youth development principles, respond to industry demands, provide credentialing that is relevant and required by high-growth industries and result in employment.

8. Create and connect work opportunities for those with felony convictions and invest in advocacy efforts to change expungement policies and hiring practices. Hiring programs for formerly incarcerated persons must connect clients to jobs that pay a living wage. Programs that provide expungement services must better explain their process to clients. Advocacy efforts are needed to encourage providers to simplify the expungement process and to increase opportunities for expungement.

9. Engage employers to improve perceptions of youth workers. Many young people cited negative employer perceptions as a crucial barrier to work. Shifting these dynamics will require greater investment in training and education for employers to

help build cultural sensitivity and understanding of implicit bias and address discriminatory workplace practices and workers' rights violations. Additionally, workforce-training providers and other youth-serving organizations must identify employer champions who will advocate to create new opportunities for young people.

10. Follow up on investments. Knowing that some employment programs are ineffective at outreach, are disorganized and provide false promises to young people, funders should monitor and measure their investments in Baltimore. Several participants who were actively involved in community programs noted that funders visit neighborhoods to present a check but rarely return to see how the money was spent. This has resulted in the continued funding of ineffective programs and underfunding of organizations that deliver results and are trusted by the community.

11. Continue to solicit and follow up on feedback. Participants were positive about the experience of being involved in focus groups. Many asked for more engagement and regular opportunities to provide feedback. A few wanted to be convened with a wider variety of stakeholders. Young people are experts in their own lived experience and need to be regularly consulted about programming that affects them.

conclusion

LOOKING AHEAD

Opportunities for the Future

This project has presented the Casey Foundation with a more inclusive process for our work in Baltimore. The Foundation stepped outside of its normal grant-making practices and drew on the expertise of consultants who already were engaged in, representative of and developing solutions in these communities to uncover the educational and employment barriers youth face and help develop recommendations to address them.

Their insights have provided a clear blueprint of the tools and resources necessary for young people in Baltimore to thrive. The Foundation, city officials and several philanthropic and business partners are beginning to use this information to rethink workforce development and engagement strategies for citywide youth initiatives. For example, these insights are informing the city of Baltimore's newly created youth fund — a joint effort of the public and private sectors to provide \$12 million in combined grant funds to youth-serving organizations throughout the city — as well as YouthWorks, a summer employment program that provides young people with job opportunities in a variety of industries, including computer coding, media and arts, health care and culinary.

We hope that additional funders, policymakers and practitioners can learn from this process to authentically engage community voices and expertise not only for workforce, but also for health, housing, safety and many other issues that affect disinvested populations across the nation in an ongoing and intentional manner.

Residents are the true experts when it comes to what they want and need, and their voices should shape the policies and practices that ultimately affect them.

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Several organizations throughout Baltimore City provided meeting space and refreshments for the corner conversations and focus groups: the Baltimore Safe Streets Program (Eastside location); the Center for Urban Families; Chick Webb Recreation Center; Baltimore Community Mediation Program; the Ingoma Foundation; Jay's Deli & Catering; the Men and Families Center; Shareef's Grill; Terra Café Baltimore; and the Westside Youth Opportunity Community Center.

ENDNOTES

- 1 One Baltimore for Jobs (1B4J) was launched in June 2015 through an investment by the U.S. Department of Labor and partnership with the Maryland Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation. Two related grant programs were managed by the Associated Black Charities and the Baltimore City Mayor's Office of Employment Development's (MOED) Youth Services division.
- 2 Kingslow, M. (2016). *Expanding sector employment opportunities for young adults in Baltimore*. Baltimore, MD: Baltimore Workforce Funders Collaborative. And, Field Guide Consulting (2016). *Connecting Baltimore's Opportunity Youth to careers*. Baltimore, MD: Job Opportunities Task Force and Baltimore's Promise.
- 3 Baltimore Workforce Funders Collaborative, Baltimore's Promise, & Job Opportunities Task Force. (2016, February). *A call to action – Creating new opportunities for Baltimore City's disconnected youth*. Baltimore, MD: Authors. Retrieved from www.jotf.org/Portals/0/Workforce_Executive_Summary_021516.pdf. And, Field Guide Consulting. (2016). And, Opportunity Collaborative. (2015, March). *Strong workforce, strong economy: Baltimore regional workforce development plan*. Baltimore, MD: Author. Retrieved from <http://baltometro.org/phocadownload/>

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4 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2017). *Labor force statistics from the Current Population Survey: E-16. Unemployment rates by age, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity*. Retrieved from www.bls.gov/web/empsit/cpsee_e16.htm

5 Baltimore Workforce Funders Collaborative, Baltimore's Promise, & Job Opportunities Task Force. (2016, February).

6 The term “informal economy” is used here to refer to a portion of the economy that is neither taxed nor regulated by the government.

7 Baltimore Integration Partnership. (2017). *Baltimore economic census, based on U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Business Owners and Self-Employed Persons*. Unpublished raw data.

8 Opportunity Collaborative. (2014, June).

APPENDIX A

Focus Group Structure

All focus group participants were provided a meal. Participant incentives were provided for only one focus group (at the request of the program host) and consisted of a small gift card. Consultants commenced the focus group discussions by welcoming participants, introducing themselves, explaining the purpose of the project and laying ground rules. Each focus group was facilitated by at least four consultants, who took turns asking questions. Although not every question was asked in each focus group, a list of the focus group questions developed by consultants is included below. Following the conclusion of most focus groups, community participants and facilitators remained for informal fellowship, conversation and dinner. This engagement was intentional, to foster community and relationship building, and allow space for focus group participants to share follow-up questions and feedback, and process topics raised during the facilitated discussion.

Moderator's Guide

Opening

We are a team of young consultants from Baltimore who have been hired by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

- Our job is to design and carry through a process by which to engage youth and young adults at the community level and understand young peoples' perspectives on work and economic access issues in the city.
- Our goal is to help the Foundation and other stakeholder groups locally rethink Baltimore's youth and young adult workforce development system from the perspective of its target audience — young people.
- As a part of this effort, we are coordinating a series of focus groups to be hosted with youth in various communities across the city during the month of November.
- Perspectives shared through this process will be lifted up through a report that will be written to inform and drive a range of local systems-change efforts.
- We encourage you to speak honestly and candidly and think big. Though personal demographics will be captured, they will only be shared in the aggregate. And, no personally identifying information will be shared.

- If you would like more information about the project, you can contact one of us.

Section 1: Aspirations

The goal of this section is to learn about the skills, dreams and aspirations of group members. We also want to understand how group members' aspirations are shaped.

1. Think about the things that you are naturally good at and enjoy doing.

- If you could do anything and make a great income doing it, what would you choose to do?
- [For group members interested in business ownership...] If I were ready to invest in the start-up of your business right now, what would you propose to do?

2. Do you believe that the expectations of others have shaped your expectations for yourself? If so, how?

3. Who would you identify as your role models?

Section 2: Needs

The goal of this section is to learn about the current income needs and priorities of group members, and perspectives on ideal work settings/ environments.

1. What are your top priorities for earning an income?

a. What is more important to you at the moment — finding a job (a short-term employment opportunity that will address your needs now), or developing a career (finding an employment opportunity that will also build toward a long-term career pathway)?

b. What type of position would best suit your needs?

c. How much would you currently need to make in order to pay your bills and live comfortably?

i. Do you have a gap in income? If so, how do you fill that gap currently?

ii. How much would you ideally like to make in the future?

d. Do people in your family or others rely on you for income?

2. Describe your ideal work environment/work setup.

a. What type of work environment would help you to excel?

b. What is your ultimate goal and preference — to work for yourself (own your own business) or work for someone else?

Section 3: Barriers

The goal of this section is to learn about the types of challenges and barriers faced by group members as they've attempted to access work and employment opportunities.

1. Have you experienced any challenges or barriers as you've attempted to find work and make an income? If so, what types of barriers?

2. Do you believe the color of your skin can determine whether you have opportunities in school, work, programs etc.?

3. What do you think is the biggest problem the people in the city face? What do you think needs to be done in order to change that?

Section 4: Support

The goal of this section is to understand group members' perspectives on what types of support are most useful in helping them to reach their work and income goals.

1. What helps you to cope with reality of being out of work and out of school?

2. When you think about your aspirations (where you want to go, who you want to become), are there ways that others can help you? If so, what types of help would be most useful?

3. Who or what has most helped you as you've attempted to reach your goals for work and making an income?
4. Who or what has been least helpful as you've attempted to reach your goals?

Section 5: Resource Landscape

The goal of this section is to understand group members' perspectives on the current workforce development landscape.

1. Do you know the employment resources available in your community, if any?
2. What has been your experience with local job-training and service organizations?
 - a. Have any organizations engaged you through their outreach? What was your experience?
 - b. What types of approaches worked?
 - c. What types of approaches didn't work?
 - d. Are there any programs that you'd like to highlight as being particularly effective in helping young people to succeed?
 - i. What makes these programs stand out for you?

- e. If you could share 1–2 recommendations with the people running programs to help improve their approach, what would they be?

Section 6: Transformation

The goal of this section is to secure group members' recommendations for how to transform the local workforce and economic landscape. We also want to engage group members in thinking about how they can each be empowered to be agents of change.

1. Imagine a time in the future when people look to Baltimore City as an exceptional example of a thriving and cohesive community where youth and young adults are invested in and responsible for the success of the city.
 - a. What kinds of systems or structures most encourage youth pathways to jobs and entrepreneurship?
 - b. In this exciting future, what does your life look like?
 - c. What decisions were made to create this future and by whom where they made?
2. What small changes could we make right now that would connect more youth and young adults with job and entrepreneurship opportunities?

3. What kinds of programs would strengthen the connection between youth and economic opportunities?
4. Who will provide leadership in this effort?
5. What specific ways would you like to contribute to realizing this dream?
6. What is the first thing that's needed to make it happen?
7. How would you like to be involved in the design and planning of this new future?
8. In November, we will have a new mayor and new leadership on our city council. If you could share 1–2 recommendations with local decision makers about how to better connect Baltimore's young people to economic opportunity, what would they be?
9. Is there anything that we didn't ask about that you think is important to lift up?

