

THE OPPORTUNITY PROJECT

2022 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Supporting Workforce Development in Puerto Rico

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Puerto Rico Department of Economic Development and Commerce (DDEC)

THE CHALLENGE – Develop digital tools to help job seekers find, train for, and succeed in jobs within high-growth industries, with particular focus on individuals in marginalized communities (i.e. youth, people experiencing homelessness, recent immigrants, families with housing choice vouchers, underemployed individuals, and NAP and TANF recipients).

EXECUTIVE CHAMPION –

Debora Johnson, Deputy Assistant Secretary for External Affairs, Administration for Children and Families, HHS

Patty Bennett, Regional Administrator, Mid-Atlantic Regional Office, Food & Nutrition Service, USDA

THE PROBLEM – Puerto Rico and its 3 million residents have faced the layered challenges of natural disasters, including the devastating Hurricane Maria in 2017, earthquakes, the COVID-19 pandemic, and high overall and child poverty rates (43% and 57%, respectively), underscored by a waning economy. These challenges complicate recovery efforts, and will require a well-trained workforce to overcome. Unfortunately, [studies](#) suggest that outmigration, labor shortages, and skill gaps prevent progress in critical, high-growth industries including technology, health, construction, and management. Yet PR also faces an increasing unemployment rate (6.5% unemployment as of March 2022), signaling a mismatch between job seekers' skills and labor needs in the industries that could catalyze much needed community recovery and development.

THE OPPORTUNITY – The scale of the workforce currently required in high-growth industries (estimated at 185,000 in the construction and healthcare industries alone) requires purposeful skills development and matching between jobs and job-seekers. Otherwise, industries may need to import labor from the continental United States, which comes at significantly greater expense, deepens the existing infrastructure burden, and leaves Puerto Rico dependent on outside labor. Additionally, programs such as the Nutrition Assistance Program (NAP) present an opportunity to better align workforce development services with training and employment requirements of high growth industry jobs.

The thousands of Puerto Ricans ready to enter the workforce could be mobilized with the help of data and digital tools. For example, tools such as resource maps, data visualizations, training aids, and tools to support job seekers, could address these challenges. This data may also help target employment and training services made available through NAP by highlighting the gaps between the workforce's current skills and those needed to meet Puerto Rico's recovery and development needs.

VISION FOR SPRINT OUTCOMES – Puerto Rican job seekers will be able to more easily identify employment and training opportunities to successfully find, secure, and retain jobs in high-growth industries. Local

officials and program designers will be able to provide appropriate, in-demand skill training to best align with labor demand and skills gaps.

Digital tools and resources created through this sprint can bridge the sometimes disparate worlds of business, service provision, and individual job seekers for the benefit of all. These benefits will be greatest if tools are designed for populations least served by available services and most in need of job skill matching. This focus ensures that Puerto Rico's economic growth is equitably distributed among all regions, populations, and sectors.

TARGET END USERS – Youth, job seekers, business owners, and municipal government leaders in the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

RELATED DATA SETS

- ↳ [Office of Socioeconomic and Community Development of the Government of Puerto Rico](#)
- ↳ [Puerto Rico Department of Education](#)
- ↳ [Puerto Rico Department of Labor and Human Resources](#)
- ↳ [Información de Mercado Laboral de Puerto Rico \(pr.gov\)](#) (LMI)
- ↳ [Puerto Rico State Integrated Workforce Plan - Departamento del Trabajo y Recursos Humanos \(pr.gov\)](#)
- ↳ [Instituto del Desarrollo de la Juventud](#)
- ↳ [U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey](#)
- ↳ [U.S. Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey](#)
- ↳ [University of Puerto Rico](#)
- ↳ [Puerto Rico Statistics Institute](#)
- ↳ [U.S. Department of Labor reports \(payrolls; occupational statistics\)](#)
- ↳ [Puerto Rico Department of the Family](#)

SPRINT LEADERS

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- ↳ Carlos Ortiz-Medina, Director Caribbean Area Office, Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), USDA
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