**Meet the out-of-work:** Understanding the key features that differentiate them and identifying ways to help them find jobs

Introduction

Even in the midst of a prolonged economic expansion with a low national unemployment rate, jobs are not always available and not everyone who wants work can find it. Both job availability and demographics vary markedly around the country, yielding diverse local populations wanting and/or needing work.

This analysis aims to deepen the conversation about out-of-work Americans, and support local officials in their effort to help these individuals find jobs. We provide a unique perspective on adults aged 25 to 64 who are out of work in each of 130 large cities and counties across the United States, using cluster analysis to segments the out-of-work population into distinct groups based on factors such as educational attainment, age, work history, disability, English language proficiency, and family status.

We present detailed information on these groups accompanied by information on appropriate and effective workforce development programs in order to help local officials, funders, and other stakeholders develop, strengthen, or diversify strategies to connect their residents to employment.

Defining “out-of-work “

See Natalie’s 6/9 email

Place matters

Cities and counties do not all fare equally in the global economy, nor do their residents. Local conditions and interventions play a pivotal role in connecting job seekers to employment opportunities, and most of the responsibility for executing on this goal rests with local officials and leaders in the public, private, and social sectors.

The 130 jurisdictions included in the analysis collectively account for nearly half (47 percent) of the nation’s population aged 25-64. The study jurisdictions include large cities with populations upwards of 1.5 million, such as Los Angeles, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Phoenix; mid-size cities such as Albuquerque, Milwaukee, Louisville, and Nashville; and high-density counties with populations over one million near the core of large metropolitan areas (Alameda, CA; Fulton County, GA). They also include lower-density counties with populations under one million (Montgomery County, OH; Anne Arundel County, MD), including some with rural characteristics (Lancaster County, PA; Fresno County, CA).  Although they all pass the 500,000 population threshold, in other words, they show substantial variation in size and other characteristics.

Segmenting the out-of-work into groups based on shared characteristics

The question of what works best in workforce development is more usefully conceptualized as a narrower question: what works best *for whom?* While successful programs have common elements, they typically tailor key components—the intensity, length, and specific focus of services—to the needs and circumstances of the people they are serving.

Someone with less than a high school diploma needs a different educational program than someone who enrolled in college but dropped out without a credential. Someone with relatively steady work experience probably does not need an orientation to the culture of work as might someone with a sporadic work history; and factors such as limited English proficiency, child-care responsibilities, and criminal backgrounds are issues that programs must address to help participants successfully increase their skills, find a job, and chart a path to higher earnings.

We used a cluster analysis to segment the out-of-work populations into groups of individuals with similar attributes in order to better identify what kind of help they might need to find employment. We identified 828 clusters across the 130 study jurisdictions, which together roll up into 7 major groups.

Effective practices to connect out-of-work groups to employment

Based on a review of the research literature, we identified workforce development programs suitable for people with differing levels of education and work-readiness and varying barriers to employment.

**Bridge programs** prepare people with low academic skills for further education and training, sometimes in combination with occupational skills training

**Transitional job programs** provide short-term subsidized employmentand supportive servicesto people with limited work experience and barriers to employment, and help participants find unsubsidized jobs

**Social enterprises** are mission-driven business enterprises that hire people with limited work experience and barriers to employment to carry out the work of the business. The enterprise also provides supportive services to workers and helps them find other employment opportunities.

**Job search assistance and counseling** is a central feature of the public workforce system’s American Job Centers and other employment programs. It consists of in-person and individualized assistance, including skill and interest assessments, career and training planning, case management and referrals, and help with resume preparation and interviewing skills.

**Sector initiatives** identify employers’ skill and workforce needs in a given industry and region and develop recruiting, assessment, and training strategies to help employers find workers with right skills.

**Two-generation programs** link education, job training and career-building for low-income parents with

early childhood education for their children, thus building human capital across generations.

**Apprenticeships** combine paid employment with on-the-job training and related classroom instruction.

**ASAP (Accelerated Study in Associate Programs)** was designed by the City University of New York to increase the graduation rate of low-income community college students seeking an associate’s degree. The program requires students to attend full-time and provides a range of academic, financial, and person supports.