

Barriers to Employment:

A Comparison Between WIOA Title I Customers and the Philadelphia Labor Force

September 2022 | Sam Fraley and Max Robinson

In Philadelphia, the overall labor force consists of a diverse population, including individuals who face barriers that may hinder their ability or opportunity to find and keep a job. [WIOA, or the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act](#), provides funding for programs that work to serve target populations, which include individuals with barriers to employment, to find and maintain jobs with family-sustaining wages.

In this report we focus on select barriers and analyze both program and Census data to not only assess program outcomes by barrier, but also to compare the customer population to that of the Philadelphia labor force in general. The barriers we will focus on, as defined by WIOA, include:

- **Basic Skills Deficiency and Low Levels of Literacy**
- **Disability**
- **English Language Proficiency**
- **Homelessness**
- **Justice-Involvement**
- **Long-Term Unemployment**
- **Low-Income**
- **Single Parents**

Policy Background:

For the Adult program in WIOA Title I, which serves individuals over the age of 18, funds used for individualized career and training services must be prioritized for those who receive public assistance, are low-income, and/or who are basic skills deficient or have low levels of literacy. At least 75% of participants receiving these services in the Adult program must face one of the above barriers. The Youth program, which serves individuals aged 16-24 and is also in Title I, additionally requires the presence of one or more barriers to be considered eligible for services. Those aged 18-24 can be co-enrolled in both programs. ¹

Basic Skills Deficient/Low Levels of Literacy

For the Adult program, customers are considered basic skills deficient under WIOA if they are unable to compute or solve problems, or read, write, or speak English at a level necessary to function on the job, in the participant's family or in society. Customers in the Out-of-School Youth program are considered to have low levels of literacy if they have English, reading, writing, or computing skills at or below the 8th grade level on a generally accepted standardized test.

14%

66%

16%

Percentage of the Philadelphians over 25 that do not have a HS diploma

Philadelphians with this barrier do not participate in the labor force

The unemployment rate for Philadelphians over 25 without a HS diploma

Individuals with this barrier who identify as Hispanic or Latino of any race are slightly overrepresented in both the customer and Philadelphia populations, and most individuals in the Philadelphia population with this barrier are not participating in the labor force.

This barrier is calculated differently depending on which program the customer participates in. It is also possible to be actively enrolled in both programs, so those who are included in this measure may be in either or both Adult and Youth programs. For Program Year 2021, roughly 15% of all customers faced this barrier, and about 83% of customers included in this measure were enrolled in the Out-of-School Youth program.

About 23.5% of all customers who were basic skills deficient or had low levels of literacy identified as Hispanic or Latino of any Race, while under 15% of all customers reported to

be in this demographic group. Those with this barrier mostly identified as female (59%), which was slightly higher than the overall share of customers identifying as female (52%).

In the overall labor force, roughly 14% of Philadelphians over the age of 25 do not have a high school diploma. While this may not inherently indicate a person has a basic skills deficiency, it suggests a lack of education that could make a person more vulnerable to experiencing this barrier. Just over 63% of individuals over 25 that lack a high school diploma were not in the labor force, and the unemployment rate of these individuals was also much higher than the metro area average. Around 28% of Philadelphians with this barrier are Hispanic or Latino, which aligns with the number of customers identifying as Hispanic or Latino with this barrier from Program Year 2021.

Disability

According to WIOA, an individual with a disability is someone whose disability is a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. The Census defines a disability as being either physical, cognitive, visual or auditory.

7%

Of the Philadelphia labor force has this barrier

76%

Philadelphians with this barrier do not participate in the labor force

18%

Unemployment rate for disabled Philadelphians

Overall, WIOA customers with a reported disability were mostly older than those without one, and more customers who identify as Black or Hispanic or Latino of any Race reported to have a disability than in the Philadelphia labor force.

The prevalence of customers disclosing a disability was small, with only 3.5% of customers in Program Year 2021 reporting this barrier and another 2% who chose to not disclose an answer. In the Philadelphia area, 76% of individuals with this barrier did not participate in the labor force, however of those that did participate, 44% identified as Black or African American, 15% as Hispanic or Latino or Any Race, and 33% as White alone.

For the self-reported disability barrier, there was not any disproportionate representation among customers by gender identity. However,

a greater share of those reported to have a disability are Hispanic or Latino of any Race (24%) compared to around 14% of all customers. In addition, 15% of Hispanic or Latino Philadelphians in the labor force have a disability, which is lower than the 24% from customer data. Thus, customer data might suggest a slight overrepresentation of individuals who identify as Hispanic or Latino when comparing to individuals with a disability in the labor force in Philadelphia.

There is also a greater representation of older customers with a disability. Customer data is mostly aligned with the Philadelphia labor force, as a large share of both customers and those in the labor force with a disability in general are over the age of 45. However, customer data does reveal a sizeable share of customers aged 17-24 with a disability.

English Language Learner

Under WIOA, a customer who is an English language learner is someone who has limited ability in speaking, reading, writing or understanding the English language and also either has a native language that is not English, or lives in a family or community environment where a language other than English is the dominant language.

5%

Of the Philadelphia labor force has this barrier

51%

Philadelphians with this barrier do not participate in the labor force

9%

Unemployment rate for Philadelphians with English barrier

WIOA customers with an English language learner barrier mostly identified as Hispanic or Latino of any race, and a greater proportion of those identifying as Asian experience this barrier in the Philadelphia labor force when compared to the customer population.

In Program Year 2021, there were 115 (4.5%) customers who were reported to be English language learners. English language learners primarily identified as Hispanic or Latino of any Race (45%), while only about 14.5% of all customers were included in this demographic group. Customers identifying as female were also slightly overrepresented as a reported English language learner (59%) compared to all customers in the program year (52%).

In 2019, 5% of the Philadelphia labor force spoke English “not well” or “not at all”

according to PUMS data. Philadelphians identifying as Hispanic or Latino made up almost 41% of the labor force that had this barrier, which lines up with reported customer data. While those identifying as Asian made up about 35% of the Philadelphia labor force with an English barrier, only 8% of customers that had an English barrier identified as Asian. The large gap between customer data and Census data in this measurement might indicate that the individuals who identify as Asian and have an English barrier is a population that could benefit from expanded services.

Compared to other barriers, the unemployment rate was relatively low for Philadelphians with an English barrier, but the labor force participation rate hovered just under half.

Homelessness

WIOA considers an individual to be experiencing homelessness if they lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, and if their primary nighttime residence is a public or private space not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.

Migratory children who in the preceding 36 months were required to move from one school district to another due to changes in their family’s seasonal employment in agriculture, dairy or fishing work may also be considered to be experiencing homelessness.

4,302

Homeless Philadelphians counted in a Point-in-Time (PIT) analysis, 2021

14,849

Philadelphians served by the Office of Homeless Services in fiscal year 2021

Ultimately, WIOA has not recently served many individuals experiencing homelessness, but Philadelphia population data suggests more individuals with this barrier could be reached.

A small proportion of WIOA customers were reported to be experiencing homelessness, with just under 2% of customers reporting to be facing this barrier in Program Year 2021. Although these small numbers make it difficult to conclude any significant results, there are still some interesting trends that may merit further exploration. Those reported to be experiencing homelessness were mostly female (65%) and over half were youth or young adults (55%). This contrasts with the overall numbers

of females in Program Year 2021 (52%) and the total number of customers aged 16-24 (30.5%). Of the 40 customers reported to be experiencing homelessness, 11 also reported to be a single parent.

Like the justice-involvement barrier, the homeless population in Philadelphia is a challenging one to analyze due to limited data availability. The Philadelphia Office of Homeless Services conducts “Point in Time” counts, where they attempt to measure and analyze the unhoused population in Philadelphia. As of the last point in time count in January 2021, there were 4,302 Philadelphians experiencing homelessness observed. This is a decrease in the previous year’s counts, which had remained

Detailed Guidelines for Homelessness Barrier

Lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence includes sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason, living in a motel, hotel, trailer park or campground due to a lack of alternative accommodations, living in an emergency or transitional shelter, being abandoned in a hospital, or awaiting foster care placement. Unsuitable primary nighttime residences may include a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, airport or camping ground. Additionally, an individual who may be sleeping in a temporary accommodation while away from home should not, as a result of that alone, be recorded as homeless.

steady around 5,600 since 2017. However, almost 15,000 individuals received services from the Office of Homeless Services in the 2021 fiscal year, showing that homelessness is

a problem experienced by a number of citizens beyond just those observed in the point in time count.

Justice-Involved Individuals

Under WIOA, someone with prior justice system involvement is defined as an individual who either has been subject to any stage of the justice process for committing a status offense or delinquent act, or who requires assistance in overcoming barriers to employment resulting from a record of arrest or conviction.

4,198

Total Philadelphians incarcerated in June 2022

72.3%

Prisoners were Black as of June 2022

A majority of both WIOA customers and Philadelphians with justice-involvement identify as Black, while customers with this barrier experience the lowest rate of successful outcomes after receiving services among all other barriers.

In Program Year 2021, around 11% of WIOA Title I customers who received services self-reported this barrier. Those reported to have this previous history were disproportionately male (81% compared to 48% of all customers) and Black (72% compared to 65% of all customers). Customers self-reporting prior justice system involvement were mostly at or over the age of 25, with only around 10% of those with this barrier being in the 16-24 age range, despite this age range accounting for over 30% of all customers in the program year. Customers with justice-involvement were also concentrated more heavily in certain zip codes, mostly in North, Northeast, and West Philadelphia. Additionally, as noted earlier,

outcomes for this group were much less successful than for those experiencing other barriers, further showing how this population of customers illustrates some unique trends.

Data surrounding formerly incarcerated individuals is extremely limited, which presents a challenge in analyzing the work force status of this population. We instead use prison data to analyze the demographics of those who are currently incarcerated. According to the [MacArthur Foundation](#), as of June 2022 there are almost 4,200 individuals in Philadelphia prisons, with almost 3 out of every 4 identifying as African American. These 4,200 individuals- who are overwhelmingly Black or African American- could potentially reenter the workforce when released. According to the National Institute of Corrections, [over 80% of formerly incarcerated who are rearrested were unemployed after being released](#). Formerly incarcerated people thus represent a part of the Philadelphia population that would greatly benefit from targeted workforce services.

Long-Term Unemployed

A customer is considered to be experiencing long-term unemployment under WIOA if they have been unemployed for 27 or more consecutive weeks at program entry.

54%

The percentage of unemployed Philadelphians who have not worked in the last 12 months

24%

Of Philadelphians unemployed for longer than a year lack a HS diploma

24%

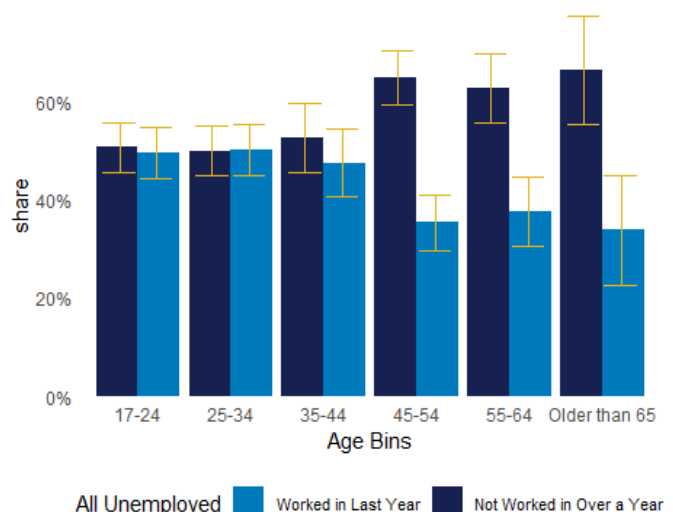
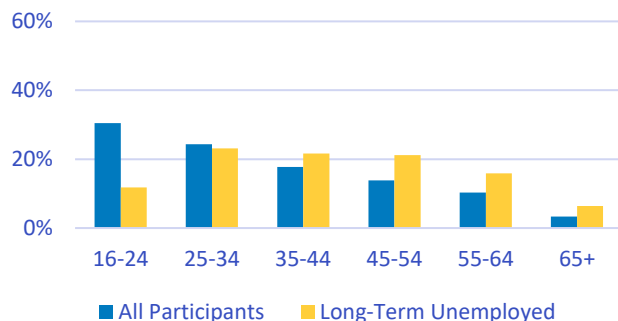
Of Philadelphians unemployed for longer than a year are aged 14-24

Both WIOA customers and individuals in the Philadelphia labor force facing the barrier of long-term unemployment tended to be older, and many of these individuals in the labor force have not worked for some time.

In Program Year 2021, over 18% of all customers who received services were reported to be unemployed for this length of time. Customers reported to be experiencing long-term unemployment tended to trend upward in terms of age. While 16–24-year-old customers accounted for over 30% of all customers, only around 12% of those in this age range faced long-term unemployment.

For the 2019 Philadelphia labor force, about half of all individuals who were unemployed did not work for over a year. Almost a quarter of these long-term unemployed Philadelphians were aged 16-24, which is much higher than the 12% of long term unemployed aged 16-24 observed in customer data. For all unemployed individuals, the percent of those not working in over a year increases past age 45. This suggests that older individuals who are unemployed might be at a higher risk of long-term unemployment, which corresponds with customer data.

Long-Term Unemployed vs All PY21 Customers by Age



Low-Income

WIOA considers a customer to be facing a low-income barrier by meeting one of six factors, including receiving social assistance, having a total annual family income below the poverty line or no more than 70% of the LLSIL, youth eligible for free or reduced price lunch, foster children, youth living in a high poverty area, and individuals who are runaway youth or experiencing homelessness.

28%

Of Philadelphians in the labor force live in a household that receives food stamps or is below the poverty line

58%

Philadelphians in households that receive food stamps are not in the labor force

20%

Unemployment rate for individuals in households that receive food stamps or are low income

Most customers served under WIOA have low-incomes and concurrently experience other barriers, and many individuals with this barrier in Philadelphia do not participate in the labor force.

This barrier is one of the few given priority of service under WIOA, and a great deal of customers served in PA CareerLink® centers report low-incomes. Individuals qualifying as low-income made up nearly 79% of all customers who received services in Program Year 2021. Since customers who met one or more of the above conditions accounted for nearly 79% of customers, there are few significant differences between this individual barrier and all participants. This allows for overlap between the low-income barrier and other barriers. Over 90% of customers who reported to be either experiencing homelessness or be basic skills deficient or

have low levels of literacy, also faced the low-income barrier. There is further overlap for about 80% of customers with either justice-involvement, those who are experiencing long-term unemployment, or are single parents, showing how common it is for customers to face multiple barriers simultaneously.

Additionally, youth and young adults seem to be slightly overrepresented, with 36% of customers aged 16-24 facing the low-income barrier, while this age range accounted for about 30.5% of all customers.

In Philadelphia, a sizeable portion of the labor force lives in a low-income setting- either in a household where someone receives food stamps, or with a household income below the poverty line. 28% of the Philadelphia labor force lived in a low-income household as of 2019, and over half of these individuals were not in the labor force. Over 45% of individuals

Detailed Guidelines for Low-Income Barrier:

Individuals with this barrier are those who are themselves or a member of a family who:

- Received or in the six months prior to application has received assistance through SNAP, TANF, SSI, General Assistance or Refugee Cash Assistance
- Have a total annual family income that does not exceed the higher of the poverty line or 70% of the LLSIL (Lower Living Standard Income Level)
- Have a disability and whose own income does not exceed the higher of the poverty line or 70% of the LLSIL

in the labor force who identify as Hispanic/Latino lived in a low-income household as of 2019, along with 37% of those who identify as Black or African American in the

labor force living in low-income households as well. Both measures are above the total labor force presence of 28%.

Single Parent

Under WIOA, a single parent is a single, separated, divorced or a widowed individual who has primary responsibility for one or more dependent children under age 18.

43%

Percentage of heads of households with children that are single parents

30%

Single parents are not in the labor force

87%

Single parent households are headed by women

Whether served by WIOA or in the general Philadelphia area, individuals who are single parents tend to identify as female, participate in the labor market, and face a low-income barrier as well.

Slightly over 21% of customers in Program Year 2021 faced this barrier. Single parents were disproportionately Female (76%) and Black (75%) as about 52% of all customers were female and roughly 65% identified as Black. For the single parent barrier, there is an option to not disclose an answer, which was selected by 52 customers. Interestingly, the vast majority of those who did not disclose a response to this barrier were aged 16-24, with 52 of the 64 responses that did not disclose an answer coming from this age group.

Additionally, there is overlap between customers who report to be a single parent and

qualify as low-income, as nearly 82% of all customers with a single parent barrier were also reported to be low-income.

In Philadelphia, single parent heads of households make up just under half of all heads of households with children. Almost 70% of single parents participate in the labor force, with many of these households being headed by women. Almost 64% of single parent households are low income, showing that even employed single parents might benefit from resources to help them upskill or access higher quality jobs. Only about 4% of single parent householders were aged 16 – 24, with the majority being aged 35 -44. Like the customer data, most single parents identified as Black or African American, accounting for over 60% of all single parent heads of households with children.

Appendix

Methodology Overview

To better understand which barriers are reported by customers, data from all customers in Program Year 2021 and exit outcomes from all closed cases over the last two program years were analyzed. In Program Year 2021, roughly 2,540 individuals received services under WIOA Title I in Philadelphia, while 2,573 cases were closed between 7/1/2020 and 7/1/2022.

These barriers are reported to workforce advisors in PA CareerLink® Philadelphia centers when WIOA customers are registered and help to illustrate the characteristics of the populations served in the Philadelphia area through workforce activities.

In addition, data from the Census American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) 5-year Estimate is utilized to compare the Philadelphia labor force to program data. PUMS data is a sample of individual or household level observations that allow custom tabulations that are unavailable in the regular American Community Survey. Comparing program and population data aims to show how the population served by WIOA compares to the size and demographics of that population in the general labor force. Due to variations in the way the Census collects its data, the Philadelphia level barrier definitions may vary slightly from the WIOA definitions, but regardless address the same populations.

Limitations of Reported Outcomes

Although we were able to utilize a great deal of customer information for this report, some limitations of this data are noteworthy. In general, all barriers, customer information, and outcomes are either self-reported by the customer or entered in by a caseworker. Due to the nature of how this information is entered into the state database, the numbers reported may not be a completely accurate reflection of the customer population and how they engaged in services. For example, some customers chose to not disclose an answer for certain barriers, such as for the disability or single parent barrier, and so it is difficult to know how much this would impact the results.

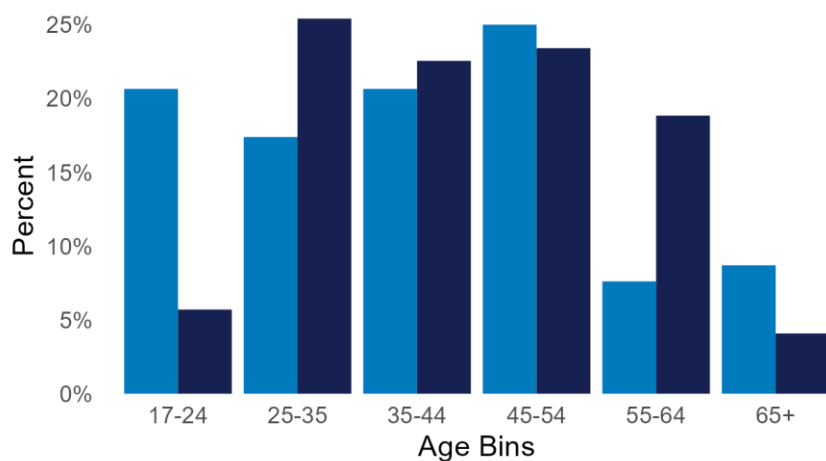
Additionally, certain fields do not allow for greater flexibility in choice, namely with how gender must be reported on the application. Only Male, Female and “does not self-identify” can be chosen, with no specific options outside of the gender binary available for customers to select. This binary gender limitation is also true for the PUMS data. The limitations of how questions like this are worded, along with potential worries in disclosing sensitive information, may lead to inaccurate customer data.

Reported Barriers not Analyzed in this Report	Definition
Cultural Barriers	Participant perceives self as possessing attitudes, beliefs, customs or practices that influence a way of thinking, acting or working that may serve as a hindrance to employment
Displaced Homemaker	has been providing unpaid services to family members in the home and who – (1) has been dependent on the income of another family member but is no longer supported by that income, OR (2) is the dependent spouse of a member of the Armed Forces on active duty and whose family income is significantly reduced because of a deployment, a call or order to active duty, a permanent change of station, or the service-connected death or disability of the member, AND is unemployed or underemployed and experiencing difficulty in obtaining or upgrading employment
Foster Care Youth	Youth in or aged out of foster care system
Individuals within 2 years of Exhausting Lifetime TANF Eligibility	TANF eligibility limits currently cannot be exhausted in PA
Migrant & Seasonal Farmworkers	<p>Seasonal Farmworker: low-income individual (1) who for 12 consecutive months out of prior 24 months has been primarily employed in agriculture or fish farming labor that is characterized by chronic unemployment or underemployment; & (2) faces multiple barriers to economic self-sufficiency</p> <p>Migrant & Seasonal Farmworker: seasonal farmworker and whose agricultural labor requires travel to a job site such that they are unable to return to permanent place of residence within same day</p>

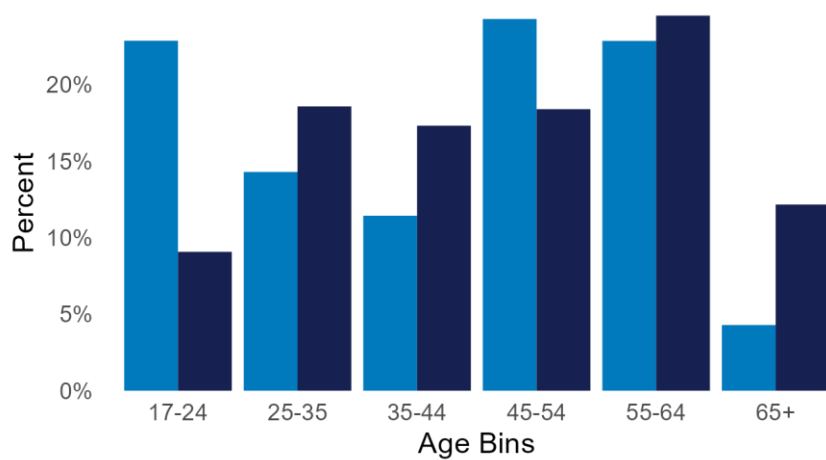
Runaway Youth	Under 18 years of age and absents self from home or place of legal residence without the permission of family

Barriers by Race or Ethnicity -Program Year 2021 Customers

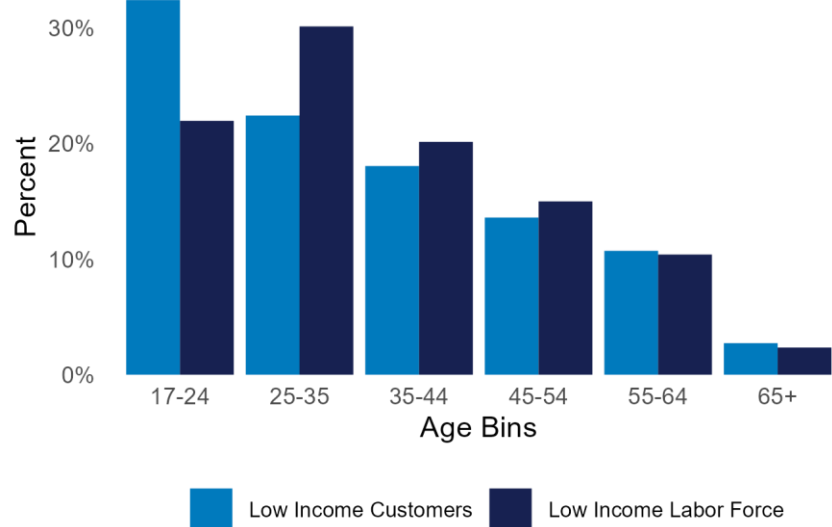
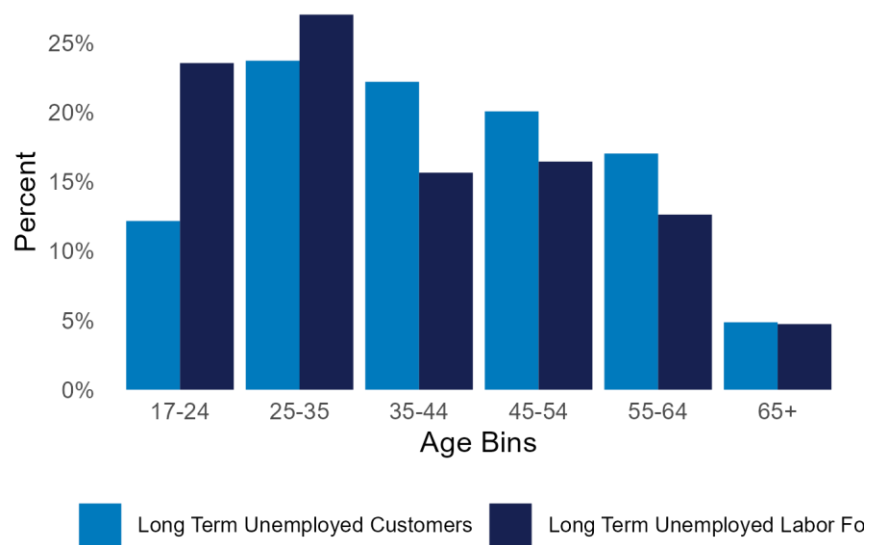
Barrier	% of Total	American Indian/Alaskan Native	Asian	Black	Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	Hispanic or Latino of any Race	Multiracial	White	Not Reported
All Customers	2536 (100%)	13 (0.51%)	53 (2.09%)	1,651 (65.10%)	2 (0.08%)	367 (14.47%)	42 (1.66%)	244 (9.62%)	164 (6.47%)
Basic Skills Deficient/Low Levels of Literacy	391 (15.42%)	4 (1.02%)	2 (0.51%)	249 (63.68%)	0 (0%)	92 (23.53%)	5 (1.28%)	8 (2.05%)	31 (7.93%)
Disability	89 (59 DND) (3.51%)	1 (1.12%)	2 (4) (2.25%)	48 (36) (53.93%)	0 (0%)	22 (9) (24.72%)	2 (1) (2.25%)	11 (8) (12.36%)	3 (1) (3.37%)
English Language Learner	115 (4.53%)	0 (0%)	9 (7.82%)	27 (23.48%)	0 (0%)	52 (45.22%)	1 (0.87%)	16 (13.91%)	10 (8.70%)
Homeless	40 (1.6%)	1 (2.50%)	0 (0%)	25 (62.50%)	1 (2.50%)	6 (15%)	1 (2.50%)	1 (2.50%)	5 (12.50%)
Justice-Involved	290 (11.44%)	3 (1.03%)	0 (0%)	210 (72.41%)	0 (0%)	31 (10.70%)	8 (2.76%)	17 (5.86%)	21 (7.24%)
Long-Term Unemployed	467 (18.41%)	1 (0.21%)	11 (2.36%)	284 (60.81%)	1 (0.21%)	92 (19.70%)	4 (0.86%)	45 (9.64%)	29 (6.21%)
Low-Income	1,995 (78.67%)	11 (0.55%)	37 (1.85%)	1,370 (68.67%)	2 (0.10%)	272 (13.63%)	37 (1.86%)	138 (6.92%)	128 (6.42%)
Single Parent	541 (52 DND) (21.33%)	2 (0.37%)	4 (0.74%)	407 (31) (75.23%)	0 (0%)	80 (3) (14.79%)	8 (1) (1.48%)	17 (2) (3.14%)	23 (15) (4.25%)

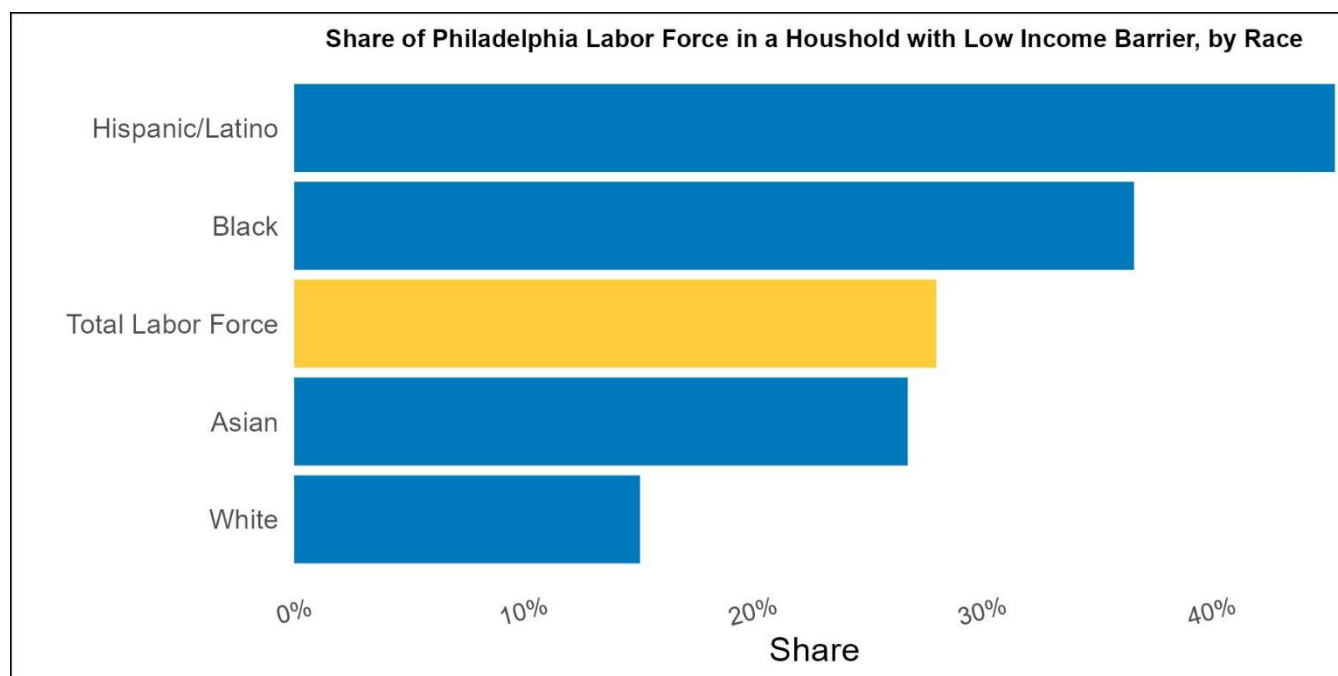
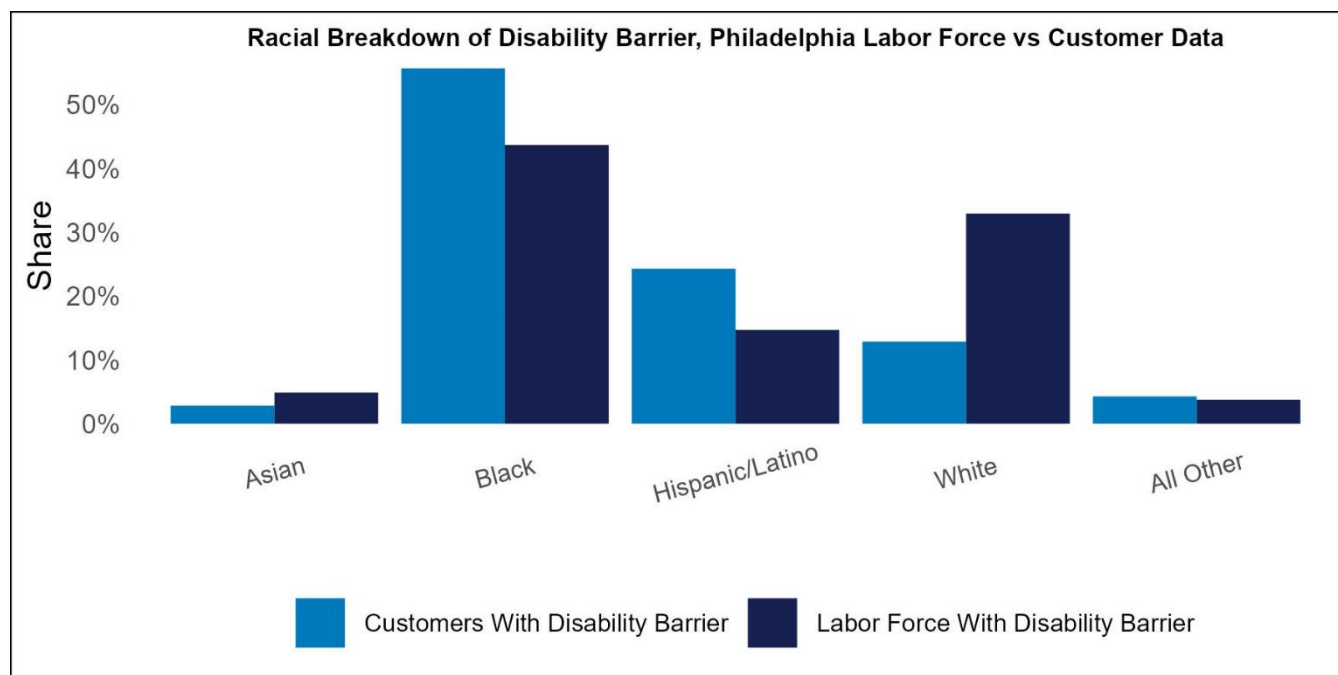


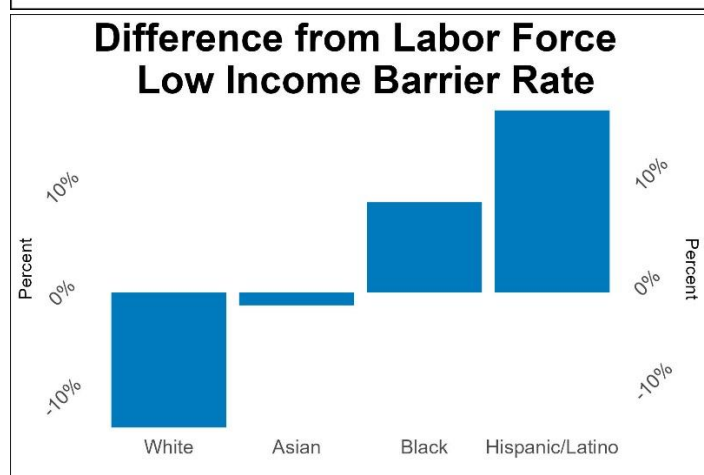
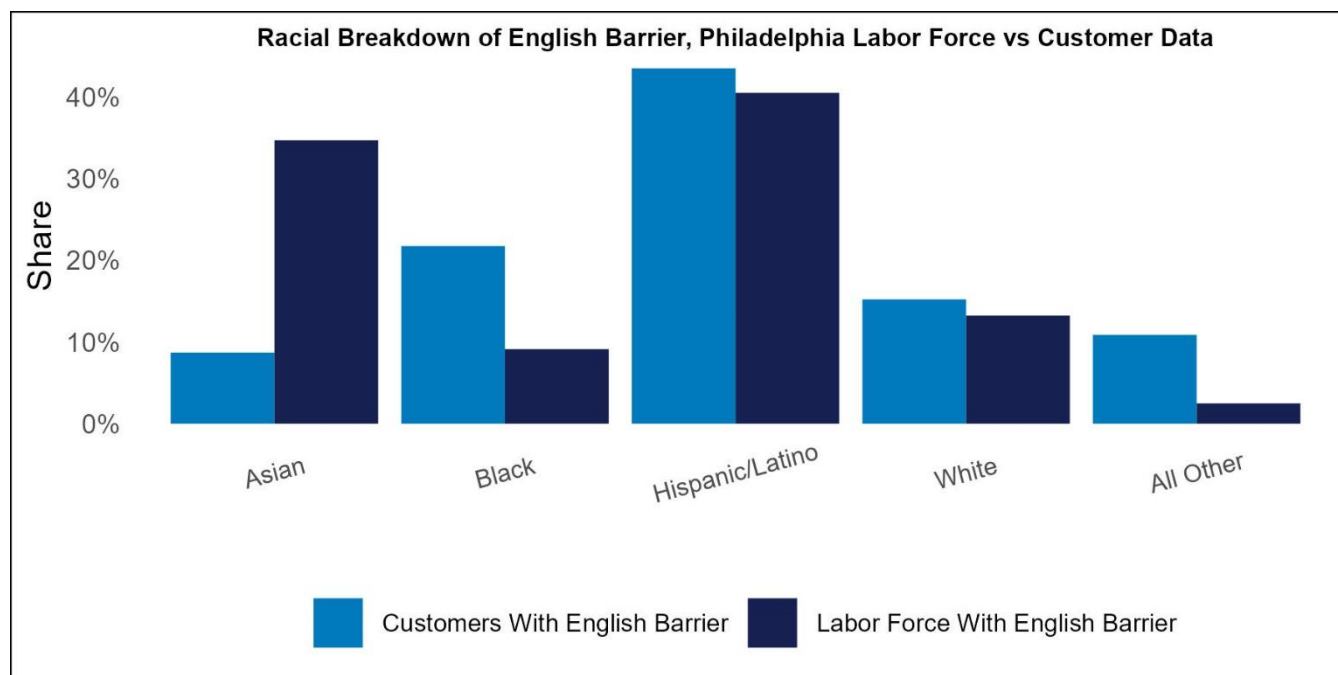
English Learner Customers English Learner Labor Force



Disabled Customers Disabled Labor Force







¹ Priority of service under WIOA Title I, from Training & Employment Guidance Letter #19-16.
https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ETA/advisories/TEGL/2017/TEGL_19-16.pdf