Transcript
Policy Summit 2023
Forward Thinking: Piecing Together a Workforce Development Ecosystem That Works for Everyone

Where are the biggest opportunities to improve labor market outcomes for individuals and communities? Panelists in this session discuss what we have learned about how to more effectively prepare job seekers for and connect them with job opportunities, what role states play in doing so, and how to embrace racial equity and data-informed decision-making principles.

Moderator

- Earl Buford, President, Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL)

Speakers

- Timothy J. Bartik, Senior Economist, W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research
- Harry J. Holzer, Nonresident Senior Fellow, The Brookings Institution; John LaFarge Professor of Public Policy, Georgetown University
- Tameshia Bridges Mansfield, Vice President Workforce and Regional Economies, Jobs for the Future

Announcer (00:00:00):
Good morning, please welcome to the stage, Tracy Mason, assistant Vice President of Community Development at the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland.
Tracey Mason (00:00:17):
Good morning. Good morning. We survived. So glad you all are back. I know I had a great day yesterday and I hope all of you also enjoyed the day and found many of our speakers in the breakout sessions to be inspiring and engaging and very informative. One way to stay connected to our speakers is to download the Policy Summit app. The instructions are on the tri fold in the center of your table, so please take the time to access our app.
(00:00:57):
Yesterday there was a lot of networking and amazing conversations taking place. I know I've enjoyed meeting a lot of new friends and colleagues across the system. We have attendees from 34 states plus Washington, D.C. and the app is another way, another tool to stay connected to each other. And once you download the app, you can add your photo because it's always nice to have a face to a name.
(00:01:28):
Thank you to our Federal Reserve Bank partners who have assisted in planning some of the breakout sessions. Thank you for your partnership. All the Federal Reserve banks are also listed in the app and it would take you directly to their website so you could access their research and other resources.
(00:01:49):
Thank you to our local community organizations who helped promote Policy Summit. We cannot do this work alone. We need you every step of the way to work towards our mission to promote economic mobility and resilience for low to moderate income communities and underserved individuals. And again, their information's also in the app and will take you to their website so you can learn about those organizations.
(00:02:21):

Today we will hear from experts on workforce development, the impact of the pandemic has had on remote work in rural and small cities, best practices for advancing racial equity, and Mayors who are prioritizing inclusion and access for everyone in their respective city. We open the summit today with a few remarks from Heidi Gartland. She is the chief of government and Community Relations Officer for University Hospital. We are fortunate to have Ms. Gartland expertise as a deputy chair of the board of directors of the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland. Let's give Ms. Gartland a warm reception.

Heidi Gartland (00:03:15):

Good morning. Well, it's wonderful to be here. I cannot see a single person, so maybe that's good. They always say you do better when you can't see who you're talking to. Thank you Tracy. And I really want to thank everyone here in the audience and those virtually for coming here to really learn about our important discussion. I want to reflect for just a minute on my service with the Federal Reserve. It started in 2018 when I was asked to be on the community advisory board of this wonderful bank here in the fourth district and it was the inaugural class and I saw some of my alumni and colleagues that still are on the advisory committee. And in that work I really learned very quickly the role of the community development department and how important it is to get that on the ground street level information about our inclusive economic environment and how we grow our economy.

(00:04:15):

We specifically, during our meetings that we had quarterly, talked about how to reach low and moderate income individuals and specifically those from under-resourced communities. When we would come to those meetings, we would give our on the ground information about credit conditions, how our consumers were able to pay bills, what their debt looked like, how people in our region were accessing employment, and most importantly the "why" and the "why not". I then got onto the Federal Reserve Bank board in 2021 and I got to watch how both our Business Advisory Councils and our Community Advisory Council information does actually inform very strategically the work that we do at the board level to make sure that we have economic conditions of full employment and keeping our inflation at 2%. I get to see how President Muster and our bank takes that information from the advisory boards from our board to inform monetary policy and that's palpable.

(00:05:24):

So this on the ground information that we're talking about today, about hiring conditions and economic climate are so important. I thought I would spend just a minute to give you a little window into the workforce development work that we do at University Hospitals. University Hospitals is a super regional healthcare center. We serve Ohio only, exclusively in northeast Ohio from the Pennsylvania border to almost under Toledo down to about the middle part of Ohio in Mansfield. And that community that we serve through 21 hospitals is an important mission-driven work that we do. And we have 33,000 employees. So we're the second-largest employer in northeast Ohio, the fifth-largest private employer in the state of Ohio. And when we think about low and moderate income folks that we can hire, you have to understand that almost 70% of the people that work for a hospital system have to have some sort of skill or degree or licensure or certificate.

(00:06:32):

So when we look to work with low and moderate income communities, especially those that are our neighbors, we work really hard in a mission-driven way to create programs to provide economic and wealth building opportunities. And I'm really proud that about seven to 10 years

ago, we started working with a whole collaboration with foundations and some of the economic workforce development agencies are Community Colleges to develop a program at called Step Up to UH. And we would work to find our neighbors literally right next to the hospital and they didn't know how to get jobs at UH, because they had digital inequity. And the way that you get a job at UH is you go online, fill out a form, and at that point our job flow was something like for every one applicant, there were hundreds of applicants for that one job. So we were funneling people out.
(00:07:25):
People that had digital inequity or work stoppages in their careers would get funneled out without some proactive workforce place-based strategy that we developed called Step Up to UH. So we worked with organizations who some of you may know like, Towards Employment, Neighborhood Connections and Tri-C to really do that up skilling and soft skills with people that wanted to work at UH but didn't know how to get in the door. That front door seemed like a steel door. And so we opened that door by having workforce people go out, find folks, train them, do soft skill, help them with interviews, and then if they made it through the program, they would get a job at University Hospitals. So it was a really wonderful funnel, a new funnel that we created rather than funneling people out, we funneled people in. Now we also attach them with a coach and we attach them with a work coach for a year because we know that cycle of churn, that when life issues, barriers come to people that haven't been in the workforce for a while, it's tough to be sticky to a job.
(00:08:30):
And so we decided that we were going to not just have a job for them, but we wanted a career path. So we opened up career pathways for these folks that came in, upskilled them while they were working with us, gave them time to do that work. And now we have created career pathways. Today it's a little different. You might have one job posted and maybe you get one person to apply. We've got lots of competition with wage growth and wage inflation, but we're still doing this work with the same sector partners, but we're doing it in a new way called Earn and Learn. So now, rather than waiting for six weeks to come through this training program, we hire them on the spot and we do that learning while they're earning and we take them through that pathway. So I'm pretty proud of some of the work that we do, listening to the community, knowing our really important obligation not only as a healthcare organization, but an economic wealth building organization for the communities that we serve.
(00:09:28):
So I want to just let you know that today and this morning, we're going to have a deeper dive into the conversations and you're going to have opportunities to learn about workforce, how the field is evolving and must evolve to meet the enormity of the challenge. And it's really a pleasure to have a friend of mine, Earl Buford, who is the president of the Council of Adult and Experiential Learning, and a member of the Business Advisory Council of Pittsburgh who is here today to moderate your session. But before he comes up, I want to tell you a little bit about Earl. Earl joined this Council of Adult and Experiential Learning as its president in April of 21, and he oversees a national nonprofit whose organization works to align the industry workforce in higher education sectors. He does this through providing solutions and improving education to career pathways.
(00:10:30):
And that's exactly what we need at places like University Hospitals for adult learners in collaboration with the workforce and economic developers in post-secondary educators and

employers of industry groups, foundations, and mission aligned groups. Before Earl was at this organization, he ran Partner for Work, which is the leader of the public workforce system in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County, and he served as their chief executive officer. He's had a number of other positions and he sits on a number of boards that I thought were very notable. He sits on the National Fund for WorkForce Solutions, Apprenticeships for America, and the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra among many others. So please join me with the warm welcoming of Earl.

Earl Buford (00:11:44):
Heidi, thank you for the introduction. And you're right, I cannot see a soul, but I think that's okay. Well, good morning.

Speaker 13 (00:11:52):
Morning.

Earl Buford (00:11:53):
Earl Buford. I'm so excited to be here. I'm excited for one this summit. It's been fantastic. The conversations and new individuals I've met over the past day and a half has been great as well. But most importantly, I get to set up on this panel with three esteemed colleagues, three esteemed friends, and three of their greatest minds in the field. So thank you all for and once use them shortly.

(00:12:17):
So we're going to do something a little different, but not take up too much time, Emily, I promise. So I'm going to introduce them, but I'm going to ask a general question to the group. I want you to use that moment to introduce yourselves appropriately, your titles and organizations, because I don't want to butcher it and say it wrong. Okay. But I'm joined here by Tameshia Mansfield, Tim Bartik, and Harry Holzer. So we'll get started.

(00:12:46):
So opening question for all of them. They'll have perspectives on it from their local and national vantage points. So based upon your perspective in work, where do you see the biggest opportunity or opportunities to improve labor market outcomes for lower income workers today? I'll start with start, Tim, come back to Tameshia and with Harry.

Tim Bartik (00:13:10):
Do you want us to go in my little talk for 10 minutes right now?

Earl Buford (00:13:13):
No, just introduce yourself and then answer the, yeah.

Tim Bartik (00:13:15):
Okay. Well, Tim Bartik, I'm a senior economist at the Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, where I do a lot of work on state and local economic development policies, local labor markets, preschool and place-based scholarships.

Earl Buford (00:13:15):
Okay. Tameshia.

Tameshia Mansfield (00:13:31):
I'm Tameshia Bridges Mansfield. I'm vice president for workforce and regional economies at Jobs for the Future where we design solutions around improving outcomes for a range of workers and also kind of catalyzing the education and workforce system towards equitable economic advancement for all.

Earl Buford (00:13:50):
Finally, Harry.

Harry Holzer (00:13:51):
Good morning. I'm Harry Holzer. I'm a labor economist at Georgetown University, affiliated with Brookings, former chief economist of the U.S. Department of Labor. Happy to be here today.
Earl Buford (00:14:02):
Okay, great. So Tim, now please.
Tim Bartik (00:14:05):
I think it's Harry who goes first.
Earl Buford (00:14:07):
Harry, my apologies. Thank you. Run a show. Harry.
Harry Holzer (00:14:09):
Should I go?
Earl Buford (00:14:15):
Yes.
Harry Holzer (00:14:15):
Okay. This logistics can sometimes be a little challenge.
Earl Buford (00:14:15):
That's why you're closest to the, yes, exactly.
Harry Holzer (00:14:19):
Waiting for the slides to. There we go. So good morning again, what I'm going to do for the next 12 minutes or so is give you a very quick overview of workforce development in the United States. A lot of this will be familiar to a lot of folks, but it's really the view from 10,000 feet what the data and research seems to be telling us. I think some of my colleagues are a little closer to the action on the ground. If we disagree, I will usually defer to them, but at least that's my aim to talk about what are the data and research seem to be showing us. So a couple of quick slides. Workforce development in the US is a little messy, a little complicated. There is no single workforce development system with really coherent programming and funding. It's an amalgam, a mix of a bunch of different things.
(00:15:07):
So for instance, if you just ask the question, who are the major skill providers? There's a whole range of colleges, private, public, for-profit, not for-profit, et cetera. Community-based organizations, other private vendors, employer groups, et cetera. Who are the funders? Well, the funders are often the employers of the workers themselves, but also public funding in higher Ed, all the different Title IV programs, state efforts that subsidize the institutions. Of course, federal money from the Department of Labor through WIOA.
(00:15:37):
This doesn't even include the major injections, the large injection, for instance, through ARPA or some of the more targeted injections through things like the infrastructure bill, the chip bill, which would be very important for work risk development, but very targeted in those sectors. And then you have a range of systems which kind of overlap that are not really coherent. The higher Ed system at the state and federal level, the WIOA system, various things employers are doing, et cetera. So it's a little messy. And of course complicating this is that the funding can be so asymmetrical across the sectors. We know funding for higher Ed, even the workforce part of higher Ed is vastly more generous than say, funding for the WIOA system, all which adds to the complication. Having said all that, there's clearly some good things happening that are going on that are worth, that give us hope and opportunity.

(00:16:33):
I've listed six of those here. First of all, it's very clear that there's a lot of credentials. Say if you focus on certificates, a great many of them have real labor market value. Not all of them, but a great many, some for credit, some not for credit, some longer term a year or more, some short term. So there is stuff out there that's really valuable to people and worth getting. Secondly, we have very clear evidence that a range of support services and guidance help people get better outcomes, help them finish the programs that are most appropriate for themselves. Third, there's a group of programs in what we now call sector-based training or sectoral training that have shown great success when evaluated, they generate large and lasting improvements in worker earnings and in the skills that businesses need. Some of the best known ones that have all been rigorously evaluated per schola, year up, et cetera.
(00:17:28):
And of course a shout-out to the Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership, which Earl ran very successfully for many years. Fourth point apprenticeship and other modes of work-based learning are growing. We have some nice evidence of positive impacts there. Fifth, there's a lot of interesting innovative activity going on in Community Colleges around the country. And I want to give a shout-out to a new book just out by Bob Schwartz and Rachel Lipson called America's Hidden Economic Engines published by Harvard Ed Press, which has a series of case studies of very interesting innovative programs, workforce programs at Community Colleges. Not evaluated yet, but still encouraging. And finally, the data are getting better. And there's efforts at the state level, at the regional level, the college center at NYU and some others that are really helping to build new state and regional data systems that I think will help the management of these programs.
(00:18:21):
And of course the tight labor market on top of all those things. And a tight labor market is always a friend to workforce development because it increases employer needs for skills. Having said all that, let's be honest about some things that don't appear to be working as well. Firstly, the for-profits, they're nimble, they're very responsive to market opportunities, but of course they're high costs. They generate a lot of default among students. And on average, I'm not saying this is true in every case, on average, their labor market value seems to be fairly low, and that's a little discouraging for people to spend a lot of money in those programs. But the Community Colleges don't have perfect track records either. The completion rates on average are also quite low in terms of the credentials they provide. The labor market value is quite mixed, not just among the certificates, but even among the associate degrees.
(00:19:12):
For instance, associate degrees in the liberal arts, if their terminal degrees have fairly little labor market value, if people don't transfer to four year, there are debts and defaults that occur at that level. And in general, there's too few student supports, too little structure, too little guidance, partly because the Community Colleges, we don't fund them enough to provide all those basic supports that people need. And of course, as Community Colleges, you always have this tension between the four credit and the not for credit programs. The not for credit programs are much more nimble. They can quickly respond to emerging regional economic opportunities, but of course they're not covered by Title IV, by Pell Grants and other things like that. Although Community Colleges are figuring out interesting ways to build the not for credit into four credit stackable pathways, and that's good to see. But there are these tensions.
(00:20:03):

Of course, the WIOA system for many years has been vastly underfunded. It's in what I call a low dollar, low impact equilibrium. The dollars are too small to generate really clear impacts, but because the impacts are small and evaluated, no one wants to put more value, more dollars into the system and that limits its possibility. The quality of the providers seems to be very uneven. The data, the employer training provider lists, I think are a bit of a mess. They're very hard to use. So there's a lot there that needs to be improved. On the apprenticeship side, you still have too little take up. It's a battle to convince employers that this is something worth investing their time and resources into. A lot of employers seem to be nervous about the registered system. Maybe their fears are exaggerated, but the view that it's a complicated process and a costly process.
(00:20:57):
So there's a growth of unregistered on top of registered, there's a role for that. And of course the Trump administration did something called the IRAP, the industry recognized apprenticeship program where the pendulum swung way to the other extreme. I don't know that there was a huge amount of employer demand for that either, but time will tell, and I think the complexity and the fragmentation across these different systems creates challenges too. But broadly, these are what I think are the four biggest challenges I think that the workforce system faces over time. Number one, take those great little sectoral programs, which are already trying to replicate themselves into many sites, but how do you scale them so they can really reach the hundreds of thousands of people who really might need that kind of training while maintaining quality and reducing costs. Each of them costs about $10,000 a year.
(00:21:45):
The only institution right now that could have that kind of scale would be the Community Colleges, and yet the quality of what they provide is not in the same ballpark. And of course, costs are key there. So that's one big challenge. Second challenge, and this will be a little controversial, I don't think training is necessarily for everyone, especially for the sector-based programs. For the really high skill, more technical programs, people have to walk in with very strong basic skills and very clear work readiness. And not everybody has that. Now, there are career pathway programs, of course, that are more developmental, start people low. Some people will emerge from those programs successfully and ready for really good training. Not everybody will. So we need to have a plan B for some folks, maybe subsidized jobs, something like that. Third, how do we really build these training systems, these training providers, into regional economic development, which I think is what a lot of this conference is about.
(00:22:41):
And I know Tim is going to talk about how do you build human capital development into regional development of distressed areas? A very important topic. And lastly, low quality jobs. Look, we all want to improve the quality of jobs that Americans face. And there's a range, I think, of public actions that can probably do that successfully. I don't believe that every single person who emerges from training or not is going to have a high paying job, say 30,000 or more. There's this new report out of Harvard that lamented that almost half of the people coming out of the WIOA system are still earning 25 grand a year or less. But if without the training they were only earning 15, that's a pretty valuable program, a pretty big step up. And especially if you think of sort of rural areas, small towns where the whole wage scale is more compressed, cost of living is lower.
(00:23:33):

It's a real stretch to get those areas everybody trained up to a high level. And let's also be honest, employers in America tend to be skeptical about the public workforce system. Maybe that skepticism is sometimes a little oversold on their part, but if you have folks who are already skeptical of the system, imposing a lot of mandates on them may not be exactly what's going to encourage them to participate more. So some of these challenges, I think, to keep in mind. So let me wrap up with a few policy implications on the federal side. What do we need? Well, first of all, since Pell grants don't cover anything that's not for credit, and since Pell Grants require at least a minimum of 15 weeks, like at least a semester of training, I think we need short-term Pell and some extension of Pell towards not for credit with appropriate guardrails to make sure a lot of the money isn't sucked up by for-profit, other programs that just aren't very good. There's three federal bills right now being debated.
(00:24:32):
I think some version of that will pass. The question is what should the guardrails look like? But that's important. And I think the gainful employment regs, the Biden administration is putting out these gainful employment rules that I think will be useful to prevent the bad programs from sucking up money. There's a bunch of different places where more federal funding would help and all these things we should only be putting in money into areas where the evidence is strong, the adult programs, WIOA, the incumbent worker programs, guidance and supports, et cetera. And finally, some federal efforts to improve job quality, technical assistance, financial incentives. I like the commerce department, good jobs challenge, labor departments, good jobs initiative. Those things deserve support and subsidized jobs. And lastly, there are important things happening at the state and especially the regional level.
(00:25:20):
And I would like to see more federal support for these efforts. Community College reforms and innovation, regional economic development, apprenticeship models, good jobs, promotion. I'd like to see more federal support and rigorous evaluation of those efforts to figure out what really works in which kinds of contexts and what doesn't seem to. And there's even interesting private things happening. We've all heard about Google's new training and things like that, interesting things to watch and encourage in the private sector to evaluate as well. But there's a lot of opportunity out there to do some interesting things and I look forward to the conversation. So thank you.
Earl Buford (00:25:57):
Thank you, Harry. So next, our other panelists are going to give perspectives from the local and national level. So Tim, we'll start with you.
Tim Bartik (00:26:12):
Thank you. So what I want to add to this discussion is that we need to do more in job training as Harry outlined, but we also need to do more to help create job opportunities in distress places. And I think we can make a real difference in distressed places at an affordable cost. So what I mean by distress places, I mean places with low ratios of employment to population, low employment rates. We have two types of distressed places in the US. We have distressed local labor markets, which are multi-county areas where there's a lot of inter commuting, things like metropolitan areas, rural commuting zones. And we also, there's a second type of distressed place which are distressed neighborhoods. Even when the local labor market is booming, frequently you have neighborhoods that are relatively low employment rates. So if you look at the statistics in the US, roughly 25%, one in four Americans lives in a local labor market that is distressed and roughly even in local labor markets that are booming, roughly 20% of Americans

live in neighborhoods, a few census tracks that have much lower employment rates than the rest of the area.

(00:27:25):

Now, why do we want to help distress places? I think there can be a lot of reasons, reasons of equity, but there's also a reason of economic efficiency. The economic and social benefits from targeting job opportunities at stress places are far greater than just trying to spread job opportunities everywhere. If you look at job creation, for example, when you create jobs in a distressed place, the economic benefits per job are roughly three times what happens if you create a job in a booming place. Now why is that?

(00:27:59):

When you create a job in distress place, there are a lot of non-employed people. Some of them get the jobs that has great economic and social benefits. When you create a job in a booming place that largely goes to fuel immigration, that dries up local prices. In terms of the Federal Reserve's mandate of trying to maximize employment while minimizing inflationary pressures, we know that basically lowering unemployment in distress places has one half the inflationary impact of lowering unemployment and booming places.

(00:28:30):

If we redistribute economic opportunity a little bit, we could increase employment in the US and yet at the same time reduce inflationary pressures. For neighborhood programs, the main social rationale for intervening in distress places has to do with the fate of children who grow up in those neighborhoods. All the research shows that children do far better in neighborhoods where more adults are steadily employed in regular good jobs. And so that promotes greater adult earnings of those children who grow up in those neighborhoods. And we know from studies that if we boost adult earnings in distressed neighborhoods, it has twice the impact on children of just boosting earnings in the average neighborhood. So in the area of economic development, the main thing we do actually in this country at scale is not what the federal government does in economic development, the main thing we do is state and local economic development policies, which are mainly, right now, business tax incentives to large corporations for investments in job creation or other types of cash incentives for firms and state, local governments devote about $60 billion a year to such programs.

(00:29:52):

Now giving cash to corporations can create jobs, but it's very costly per job created and it would be far cheaper to try to create jobs. It would have one third, the cost per job of creating jobs through providing various types of customized business services principally to small and medium-sized businesses. So what do I mean by a customized business service? That would include business advice programs such as small business development centers, manufacturing extension programs. It would include customized job training where we try to work with individual firms to help increase the productivity of their current workers or increase the productivity of their hires. It would also include making land and real estate readily available, get through the zoning, get through the permitting for business expansion. So that includes things like small business incubators, brownfield redevelopment, business parks, research parks, industrial parks, that kind of thing that has one third, the cost per job created of handing out cash. Handing out cash is easy, but providing the services is more effective.

(00:31:02):

At the neighborhood level, the main thing that non-employed people or underemployed people in distressed neighborhoods need is not necessarily more real estate investments in the

neighborhood. What they need is not only job training, but programs to increase their access to jobs throughout the local labor market throughout the metropolitan area. So that could include improving mass transit, it could include getting people reliable used cars. It could include making sure that everyone can get affordable high quality childcare in that neighborhood. It could include job retention service. Heidi mentioned earlier, job coaches, helping improve job attention through those services is very important. So what does it cost? What would it cost us to help distress places in the US? So I report you can download for free from the Upjohn Institute website on that focuses on how state governments could help distress places.
(00:31:58):
But the same would apply to the federal government. I have state by state estimates there for what it would cost in each state to help their distressed places, both local labor markets and neighborhoods. The national cost. If we devoted 30 billion per year for 10 years to helping distress places, that would roughly solve one third of the distress place problem. Now what I mean by solve one third, what I mean by that is there's a certain employment rate gap between these distressed places and the national average. That program after 10 years would lower that gap by one third. It's not a solution, but it would help a lot of people live better lives. Now that's a lot of money. 30 billion a year for 10 years is $300 billion dollars. On the other hand, it is half of what states currently devote to business tax incentives and other cash incentives.
(00:32:51):
States could pay for this by cutting, not eliminating business tax incentives, that's politically unrealistic, but by simply cutting them in half through better targeting them, limiting their term, limiting the amount per job, et cetera. The other main political barrier to doing this is that targeting distress places is difficult. Distress places by definition have low economic clout and that also translates into the low political clout. So it's hard to target. What I proposed in some of my policy ideas is to do targeting within universalism. That is let's have programs that try to help all local air markets in neighborhoods, but let's tie the per capita aid to how many jobs they're short of full employment in that area. And that would result in a situation where everyone would get something, but the distress places would get three, four or five times as much per capita. So to sum up, we not only need job training, we also need to create job opportunities in the places where people live.
(00:33:55):
This is a huge problem. Quarter of the US population is in distressed local air markets. Another one fifth is in distressed neighborhoods. It's a huge problem. It's a problem that can be solved, is better solved not through handing out cash for the large corporations, but providing the services that actually deal with the problems that prevent job creation in distress places and prevent people in distressed neighborhoods from getting jobs by focusing on the problems that impede job access. It can be done for an affordable cost, but it requires the political will to do two things that are difficult.
(00:34:33):
One, cut back on something that is very politically popular, which is handing out cash. Handing out cash wins you lots of friends cutting back on that doesn't win you very many friends. It also is very hard to target. We need to somehow find the political will both to cut back on programs that don't work, expand programs that do work or could work, and to try to make sure that when we adopt policies, we target the policies at those people who need the help the most. Thank you.
Earl Buford (00:35:04):

Thank you Tim for that state and local perspective. We'll hear from Tameshia next. She's going to give us a national practitioner perspective.

Tameshia Mansfield (00:35:11):

Hi everybody, happy to be here. It's interesting that Tim and I actually live in the same town and have to come here to Cleveland to actually meet each other. So it's always interesting whenever I say I'm from Kalamazoo, people are like, "where is that?" So at least I have someone.

Tim Bartik (00:35:26):

It does exist.

Tameshia Mansfield (00:35:27):

It does exist. It does exist. So I'm going to talk a little bit about it from the context of the organization I work for, which is Jobs for the Future. And so we are a 40-year organization that really works to drive transformation in the education and workforce system that is all around achieving equitable economic advancement for all. And so the reason why we work at the systems level is one of the things that attracted me to the work because a social worker at heart, and if you're a social worker, you're given two choices.

(00:35:55):

You either fix people or fix systems and you have people that have to work in both ends of those because ultimately how we get to the goals that I think we all care about and that we're all working towards. So at JFF, we really focus on the system level. And a lot of that has, because we know as has been pointed out here, is that the systems that people interact with, that the systems that people go to for services and support really simply don't work for many, many people and really trying to understand what it is and what is necessary to actually make those systems both the education system and the workforce system. And I would also say the economic development system really work for people. So last week at our annual summit, we unveiled what we think is a really kind of bold north star, which is, in 10 years we want to see 75 million people who face these systemic barriers to economic advancement in quality jobs.

(00:36:55):

And we see this as something that everyone has a role to play in. Those of us on this stage, the folks who work on the research side, those of you in this room and those of us that we partner with across the country. Because it really is going to take an all hands on deck to get to that goal to be able to really impact how people have access to those jobs. And so in response to that and the question that you had and kind of in response to what both Harry and Tim spoke to, I'm going to kind of touch on a couple of things. So within the practice that I lead, which is the workforce and regional economies practice, we're really focused on solutions that recognize that by and large, our workforce and economic development systems are highly, highly demand driven, right? They are about meeting the direct needs of largely a single customer, which is employers.

(00:37:49):

And that's not to say that that is necessarily bad, but we also recognize that what that does is it leaves workers and communities as merely a supply to tap into feed that demand as opposed to equal partners and stakeholders in the work. And so as we think about the solutions that need to come at play to really get to what is kind of the heart and the topic of this session and the work that you guys and the conversations that you all have been having over the last few days, is we recognize we have to move from this largely solely demand-driven system, not swing it all the way fully back to communities and workers, but how do we get to a middle ground that is demand-driven, that is community informed and that is worker centered? Because at the end of

the day, that is really the way that we get to ensuring that some of the policy solutions that Tim laid out actually will be realized and that some of the challenges that Harry pointed out will actually be addressed.
(00:38:51):
And so as I think about the work that we are involved in and the work that we are either directly involved in or that we have purview to because of the conversations and the partnerships that we're in, I think there are really kind of three things, or three or four, things I'll keep my time short, that I think we need to be kind of mindful of and aware of as we design solutions. First is that I do think that the public workforce system as much as people are, like you said, are kind of hesitant to work with it or see it as this recalcitrant system that cannot transform, I think that's a very shortsighted view. And I think at JFF and the work that we're doing, we actually believe that the public workforce system is actually poised for transformation right now and actually has an imperative to transform.
(00:39:39):
And the way we think about it is we think about what does it take for a workforce system, whether it's at the local level or at the state level to be what we call future focus. And what we think about that is that we think that those boards should be opportunity oriented, that they have to have a focus on re-imagination, not just doing work and working in the same kind of status quo way. We also think that the public workforce system, in order to have this future focus orientation has to be data obsessed and data obsessed beyond just the data that they have to provide to be compliant, but really looking at data from an outcomes' perspective, a people perspective and how things are actually working to make sure that the outcomes that they are working towards are actually helping people have economic advancement and mobility.
(00:40:30):
So kind of pushing beyond this 30, 60, 90 day outcome because no one gets to economic advancement in 90-day periods, but how do you open up the data that is already kind of coming into the system and re-engineer how they look at it? I would say another thing that we think is important for the workforce system and the public workforce system to think about is how to be more human centered in its approach to how it delivers services. So it goes back to that sense of seeing workers in communities not as simply supply inputs, but as customers that have to be served well. I know I've heard from workforce boards across the country that not as many people are really utilizing services or coming into the doors. And I think there's a whole host of reasons for that. But I also believe that part of the reason is how people are simply treated and valued.
(00:41:23):
And so what we see is that workforce systems and workforce boards who take this kind of human-centered approach and from the minute someone walks into those doors are treated with dignity, respect, and for their potential, they have better outcomes and better uptake of the services that they provide. And the third, and the fourth thing I would say for that's important for a future-focused board is that they have to be tech enabled. Technology is here. It is not going away. AI is looming and actually very present. And so how do we help the public workforce system be able to adopt new tools, new resources that allow them to use and deploy services and actually deploy training even in a way that is more responsive to how people want to learn today and frankly is also more efficient. So how do you help the system become more tech enabled and ready to kind of partner and bring in technology solutions into how they operate?
(00:42:28):

I would say another area that we see as really important is an emphasis on quality. And we think of quality in two ways. We think of quality in terms of quality jobs, but we also think of quality in terms of the quality of the training and the services that are provided to your point around the ETPL system. So as we think about quality jobs, we think about that beyond just wages. As you said, there's a lot of complicated issues that go into raising wages. And oftentimes what I've seen over the course of my career is that when you start with a wage conversation, as important as that is, it can be a blocker to progress. So we think about job quality and what a good job looks like as being focused on not just the compensation, but also looking at how a job is structured in a way that supports safe and stable environments for folks.
(00:43:23):
We also think of it as a job that provides agency for workers to really utilize their voice and their power and contribute into the job beyond just the skills that they provide, but providing input and feedback and seeing being seen as whole contributors. We also recognize that another hallmark of a good job is that it has a mechanism and a means for advancement. So that is around how employers invest in the training of their workers, not just from a compliance standpoint. I know we've all sat through HR training that we all have to take and we check the box, but we are talking about more than that, more around just skill development. What does up skilling of an incumbent workforce actually mean and those investments that employers need to put in, to their workers to be able to provide them opportunity to either move up in that workplace or move out across other employers or have access to other opportunities in their field.
(00:44:24):
So we look at a holistic view of job quality and we also think there's a lot of levers to job quality. A big piece of it is employer practice change, but we also recognize that there's a huge opportunity for policy change. We also recognize that industry has an opportunity to really be a leader in terms of setting a floor of what a good job is in a given industry. And we also think that worker led solutions are also really important. We recognize that there's power that comes from workers on the side of quality as it relates to training. We know that the ETPL lists have a whole range of providers that are on that list of varying degrees of quality. And so we think about quality in terms of looking at the quality particularly of short-term credentials is really, really important because those are often the training programs that job seekers go to often, because they're shorter term, less time investment and hopefully have good labor market returns.
(00:45:23):
And we want to look at the data around quality much more broadly. So we think about metrics related to the learning experience. We look at program completion because the training isn't good if nobody completes it. We also look at job placement and earnings, but we also look at the client satisfaction and we think all of that gives a much broader and holistic view of whether or not a training program is good. We also think that solutions need to be designed with inclusion and equity both in the process and in the outcome. I think we often think about equity and inclusion as a end goal when you have diverse people in programs or diverse people with opportunity, but that actually starts with how programs and policies are designed that pull people in from the beginning. So that's an approach that we use and that we've actually found really successful in working with communities.
(00:46:18):
And then to the point around supports, I think we often hear the term "wraparound supports", which is a piece of it, but I think those supports are actually a hallmark of a strong social safety net. So some of that you can do through programmatic changes, but oftentimes it's also a need

for larger policy investment, whether that's around childcare, whether that's around transportation, whether that's around housing, but it's both programmatic investments. But how do we think about making sure that communities and locations have a strong safety net that is embedded and a part of the policy mechanism and advocated for it that level. So I will stop there and I know we have some more questions that'll help us have a richer conversation.

Earl Buford (00:47:05):

Thank you, Tameshia. Well, thank you. Thank you all for a great variety of perspectives. So here's how we're going to spend the next 30 minutes. We are going to discuss a series of questions with the panelists, and then we're going to open up for Q&A with you all. So get your questions ready and I won't be able to see you, so hopefully the runners can help me point that out. So let's work together on this one. All right, so we're going to start with a question for Tim and Tameshia together. And so what evidence have you seen, if any, that systems and organizations are emphasizing the quality of a job, which Tameshia just touched on as an increasingly integral part of workforce development and not just about jobs, so a holistic approach to what evidence have you seen systems organizations? Tim, we'll start with you if you have any.

Tim Bartik (00:47:56):

Well, I think there's been some increase. I focus a little more on economic development than workforce development per se, though economic development integrated with workforce development. And it's certainly true that over time I think more state and local economic development agencies have said had minimum wage standards for jobs before they provide a subsidy, but that's only a partial solution because a lot of times the wage standard they set is pretty low. When I think about what it means to create a good job, it's frankly all relative to who you're hiring. I mean, if you're bringing some software firm and they're paying a hundred thousand dollars, that's a good job. But if no one in the area can access it, they don't have the right credentials, the right education to access it, so what? There has been some increase in interest in trying to do things to try to, with firms you're trying to attract to an area to try to encourage them or require them to do more local hiring.

(00:49:08):

There are community benefit agreements that have been done. Now the reality is the places that actually impose community benefit agreements that actually really have mandated hiring tend to be booming areas, they feel they can get away with us, that basically they have plenty of employers trying to locate there. So they're quite willing to say their employers, if you want us to strike some economic development deal with you, hand out a few incentives, whatever, you'd better agree to these various benefit things, including who you hire. Other places do somewhat softer or more carrot based approaches. I think it was mentioned yesterday at one session I was at, some places do first source hiring agreements, which is a softer form of requirement. It usually requires that employers consider folks referred via the local workforce system. You don't have to hire them, but you need to at least be involved with the local workforce system.

(00:50:07):

And finally, one reason I push customized job training so much is that's a carrot approach that if run well, if you say to a firm you don't get cash, what you get as assistance is we will help train your workers. If you do that in the right way, the local workforce providers who are doing that can try to get people into that job stream. We talked about funnels, try to get people into that funnel, into those jobs who might otherwise be not employed or be employed in a much worse job. So I think one important reform that I would propose for any state is push your state to replace some of its current cash incentives with customized job training. I think it would result in better policy outcomes and would be more effective in creating jobs and would create jobs for the people who need them the most in a better way.

Tameshia Mansfield (00:50:59):

Great. So I'm going to give an example, and this is one that goes back to my time when I was in philanthropy that I found really exciting. In Austin, Texas, there's a program called the Better Builder Program. And that came about after looking at some of the data around construction jobs in Texas and in the Austin area, largely residential construction jobs that are non-unionized and have a lot of egregious, to say the least, action and activity. And they found that people were dying in those jobs. There was a high level of wage theft. It was a largely immigrant and migrant worker population that in many ways I think employer saw as expendable and easily exploitable. And what happened in Austin that I found really encouraging, and it speaks to what a lever is as it relates to job quality, is that the workers and the community through a organization called Workers Defense Project really organized and figured out what a solution could be.

(00:52:03):

And they developed what was called the Better Builder program because they recognized there was a backlog in permits for large scale housing and development projects. And they went to the city and said, well, if you could create an incentive around fast tracking permits and attaching it to some standards related to job, would you try that out? And the city and county said yes. And now they have what's called the Better Builder Program Standards, which set standards around wages, around salary, around safety, around training. And for developers and construction companies that meet those standards, they get extra points in their permitting process. And then as a result, through this program, they also have folks that are on the ground doing monitoring to ensure that the standard happens. So I think that's actually a really good example of a worker led solution that also partnered with a policy solution that didn't have to really pass.

(00:53:08):

I don't remember if they passed a law or ordinance, I think they got around that, but it was something that is actually creating better quality jobs for folks largely who get shut out and left out of those opportunities in this region. And they're doing additional work in other parts of Texas to replicate that. So I think that for me is a really shining example. I would say another area that I have hope for is that most of the dollars that are on the streets right now, whether it's through AILLA or CHIPS or all the kind of alphabet soup of federal dollars that have come down, have some type of requirement as it relates to equity or job quality. And so the Department of Labor is actually running what are called job quality academies. We at JFF are actually the entity that's actually building and running those, and it's actually pretty exciting.

(00:53:58):

Because we'll be launching them next week and there's going to be actually 16 teams from across the country that are going to go through this process of, how do they actually operationalize their job quality plans in their local communities. Those are teams that are led by the workforce board, which is pretty surprising. I can't say I often hear workforce boards over the 15, 20 years I've been in this space wanting to do job quality work, but they're bringing together teams that include labor, that includes educational institutions, not just Community Colleges, but the actual public school system and community-based organizations to really design and deliver solutions. So the fact that there's 16 communities across the country that want to dig in and actually do the work and not just come up with a definition of job quality, but dig into it also gives me some hope as well.

Earl Buford (00:54:51):
That example is a great example of especially how to integrate working with higher education institutions and their role and willingness to do that. I'm going to stick with the job quality just for a second. I'm going to bring it back to Harry. You've all touched on this, but I want to go back to Harry on the role of employers when it comes to job quality aspects and are they leading it? Are they supporting it? What are thoughts on that?

Harry Holzer (00:55:14):
I think, employers are very, very heterogeneous across sectors, within sectors, large employers, small employers, and certainly in a tight labor market, there's a stronger incentive for all these employers to pay a little more attention to what workers need and what's reasonable. And economists have known for a long time that even in the same narrowly defined sector and region, you can have a whole range of employers. And we sometimes use the shorthand of High Road and Low Road, the employers who are absolutely obsessed with minimizing costs versus those who pay more attention to the quality of the output, the quality of the worker that are willing to make some good investments. And I think we all believe that if there's public dollars on the table, it's right to expect employers to put some skin in the game and to make some changes. I think that's a good thing.

(00:56:05):
But I guess the question of what will it take for the employers whose natural instinct is to go low road, what will it take to really incentivize them, assist them, tell them, educate them. There is in fact another way to do business and there is a way to get more productivity out of your workers. And when you lose the incentives of a really tight labor market, and of course some of our friends at the Fed are determined to weaken the tightness of that labor market, we understand why, then it makes it a tougher sell.

(00:56:39):
On the other hand, the fact that these federal resources are on the table right now that we've all alluded to, that does create some leverage. And again, a difficult, it's an interesting dance. If you look at, for instance, there's a great book by Nicola Lowe on the partnership in North Carolina between the Community Colleges and the biotech firms. And they did have to bring more to the table. They did have to improve job quality. It was a reasonable thing to do. But there's always a question of not pushing too far. Earl and others who have run these successful sectoral training programs know that you have to maintain the confidence of the employers, that you're going to send them really well-trained employees to make this work as well. So it's challenging. There's a lot of different views out there, possibilities to make some progress.

Tim Bartik (00:57:30):
And I guess I would say you need to, well first, a higher minimum wage would help. Second, I would add to what you're saying about tight labor market. In line with my early remarks, we need to tighten the labor market in all places in the country because even though the overall economy is doing well throughout, on average in the US, that doesn't mean there aren't places in the US right now that lack jobs. So the extent to which we can tighten up the labor market, not just overall, but in those places that lack jobs, it dramatically changes who employers hire, what they pay, how willing they are to do training, how willing they are to work with the worker and overcome various problems that may impede job retention.

(00:58:17):
So I think we need to, if we end up going into a recession too, we need to keep in mind that there may be some hesitance based on recent events in the Federal Government intervene in this and

trying to help alleviate the pain of the recession. I think we need to politically work on overcoming that. We need to think about when the next recession comes, what kind of political pressure can people put on Congress to make sure there's an effective job creation response that targets the people who need the jobs.

Tameshia Mansfield (00:58:47):

And I would also add, I think one of the things we see as part of our work at JFF is around employer mobilization, both largely at the corporate sector, but also doing some more work with employers, is that what we see is that when employers have a safe space to experiment and to name their pain points through cohort learning, cohort experimentation, they're more likely to do different things. And so I think that type of network opportunity for folks to try new and different things is actually a good thing. And I also think that, and I think we've seen this, but I think there's been a lot of clamoring about, well, "why don't people want to take a job? There's all these jobs out there". And I think that is also forcing employers to be like, "huh, I wonder what is going on". And I think that is part of why you are seeing more conversation, more adaptation, even if it's at the margins around job quality, which I think is a good thing.

(00:59:49):

When you have corporations getting curious about worker voice beyond a touchpoint survey that they do every quarter, that's actually a good thing. And it's the beginning of starting to move the needle. So I don't think that it's like all hope is lost that employers aren't doing anything. But I think it's a carrot and a stick situation. It's about what are the right external incentives that can be in to compel action, but also around employers really paying attention to what is happening in their culture and the satisfaction and the productivity of their business. And that creates a different level of curiosity and an incentive to work towards solutions on the inside.

Earl Buford (01:00:29):

So although we're in a tight labor market and currently black-white unemployment gap, gaps are historically low, however, it doesn't mean that racial disparities are no longer a concern. So I want to touch base on what are some of the ways and perspectives from the panelists to the audience, how do you continue to work to grow that, progress that and continue to get past where we're at presently, although there are some advancements how to move forward. So I'm going to start with Tim just a bit on what you're seeing.

Tim Bartik (01:01:02):

Well, I think that I can think of at least two things that could be done. One is a program that I know is operating in West Michigan, but actually both these are sponsored by the Kellogg Foundation that the Options Institute we sometimes do some work with. One is an alternative, is an attempt to get employers to change how they go about doing hiring. So they've worked with a large healthcare employer in the Grand Rapids area on trying to do a variety of things, looking at their jobs and seeing well, what credentials are actually required for this job as opposed to what credentials we may have in the past stuck in there as a requirement that maybe isn't really needed. And then they do some other things like name blinding the initial screening of resumes, which you might think wouldn't make a difference, but it actually does make a difference if you can't identify from the cues in the name what the race and ethnicity of the person is.

(01:01:57):

The other thing I'm going to list, which kind of goes back to something Tameshia said, is one program, the option is kind of an unusual place. I'm in the research division, but we have an operations division that runs the job training programs in a four county area around Kalamazoo. And one program they run in Battle Creek, which is just down the road from us, which is where

the Kellogg Foundation is with funding from the Kellogg Foundation, is a neighborhood employment hub program where they take the workforce programs and move them out of some in personal downtown office building and put them in trusted neighborhood institutions.
(01:02:37):
So they put them in places such as churches, subsidized housing projects, community acts agencies, the local jail. And this has several advantages. One, we're talking about quality of workforce programs gets the workforce workers are in the neighborhood, which makes a difference in their knowledge of neighborhood institutions. And then in practice they can work with these institutions and say, well, here's a childcare center that I know of that I can get the person in. And then they also can do various services, try to get, here's someone I know has a used car that we can get for this person. Whatever that helps. Now why is that relevant to racial equity? Well, the reality is the neighborhoods that they're targeting are predominantly African-American neighborhoods in Battle Creek. And so I do think we need to think about targeting places that have experienced disadvantage, which are sometimes simply low income neighborhoods, but sometimes they're low income neighborhoods that are predominantly persons of color. And that seems to me will help deal with racial equity and gaps and people being able to access jobs.
Tameshia Mansfield (01:03:53):
I would say in having used to work at Kellogg Foundation, I'm familiar with both of those. And I think kind of what spurred that was that whether it was the health system or the local workforce system in southwest Michigan, folks looked at their data. And I think we have this tendency to look at race at a very macro level and look at the broad number of black unemployment. And then we don't drill it down in our programs, in our institutions, in our own employment settings.
(01:04:24):
One of the things that we stress is that institutions have to look at their data and have to look at their data with an eye and really be willing to be vulnerable about what that data tells you because it probably isn't going to look very good. And I bet you're going to see a lot of occupational segregation that you're going to have to confront and ask questions around why are all of the entry entry-level jobs, black and brown folks and women, and what can we do to design and create a solution that can help those populations of folks advance and move on? Or within the public workforce system, you see disparities in terms of the types of training and programs and outcomes that black and brown folks get into and complete often at a higher level than their white counterparts, but still have suppressed employment outcomes in terms of wages and employment outcomes. So I say looking at your data and then being compelled to move from that data is super important.
Harry Holzer (01:05:23):
So just to build and maybe generalize a little bit from what both Tim and you said, two broad categories of approaches. One is on more on the supply side, people can sometimes know remarkably little about what's in the labor market and what opportunities are there. And I think especially when they're young, I mean our schools don't do a very good job of giving people career knowledge, career education at a fairly early age. Middle school people ought to be have some sense of why that algebra class really matters. And if they understood that, it's like, oh, you can get these good paying jobs if you can do some algebra if you want to be a machine tool person or precision welder or a tech job requiring some higher ed, the relevance of that early learning, but people need more information. People at Community Colleges have no sense

oftentimes about what jobs are available in their region that might require different kinds of programming.
(01:06:20):
They get very little counseling and guidance number one, and that's a data issue as Tameshia keeps saying that we got to do better. But the other thing on the employer side, employers, if they don't have information about individual people, they're going to fall back on their stereotypes, their generalizations, they're going to fear people who have a criminal record, even if it's one nonviolent felony conviction and the person actually has good skills that fit that job. So now the good news is that there's a movement towards what's called skills-based hiring that maybe we'll talk about a little more where employers are saying, not just looking at the credential, but trying to look underneath that. What skills do people bring to the table? What relevant work experience, what prior learning experiences? The key there is figuring out how to do that, right?
(01:07:08):
If you're going to rely less on the credential, you have to have other pockets of data or information that are illuminating. We don't know exactly what works in that context, but I think there's good work going on by opportunity at work, some other organizations to really try to figure out what other data about people and their skills and their experiences could be good predictors of their skills on jobs. And let's put some money and effort into figuring out in that area what works and where.
Earl Buford (01:07:37):
Great. We have a couple of minutes before we turn over to our audience. So Harry, I'll come back to you. You talked about skills-based hiring, so I'm going to ask you this way, degrees or credentials?
Harry Holzer (01:07:46):
I'm sorry?
Earl Buford (01:07:47):
Degrees or credentials. What's more important?
Tameshia Mansfield (01:07:48):
Is that what we're going to do?
Harry Holzer (01:07:51):
Well, they're sort of the same thing.
Earl Buford (01:07:51):
Exactly.
Harry Holzer (01:07:53):
I think credentials matter. I'm not one of these people that says credentials, because in a world where there is so little information, credentials often tell people, tell employers some sense of what someone knows. Now on the other hand, sometimes people talk about there's so many credentials out there, and some people talk about the wild west of credentials. There's so many credentials that employers can't keep up with them and trainees and workers can't keep up with them. But the credentials matter, just this balance of trying not to rely on them exclusively. And again, in the title labor market, employers have more incentive to test other pieces of information and see how predictive they are.
Earl Buford (01:08:29):
And that was a setup. I knew what Harry would say. Anyone else want to answer that? Nope. Okay. Okay. And whenever I'm ask that question, I always say yes, I want all of it for workers

and learners. So we're going to turn it over to the audience and then we're going to conclude with the panel on your optimism forward. One minute. Of course. So yes, here.
Speaker 8 (01:08:53):
We have a question from the Zoom chat.
Earl Buford (01:08:55):
Okay, thank you.
Speaker 8 (01:08:56):
So the question is from Mary in Erie, Pennsylvania who says "access to transportation for people to get back and forth to work has been a tremendous barrier in Erie County, which has an urban core as well as a mix of suburban and very rural communities. Are you aware of any place in the country that has successfully addressed access to transportation as it relates to workforce and any examples that we could learn from?"
Tameshia Mansfield (01:09:22):
I can go.
Earl Buford (01:09:22):
You can.
Tameshia Mansfield (01:09:23):
So this is where I said social safety net and policy is super important because you don't solve a transportation issue and a spatial mismatch issue by giving folks a voucher to get their car fixed or gas vouchers. So the example I'll use is an example in New Orleans with, I think it was Ochsner Health System, and this was one I heard years ago where they realized that they were having a lot of no call, no shows for their entry level healthcare workers. And they went through a period of time where they didn't immediately write folks up and discipline them, but they asked questions to figure out, well, what's going on and why? And what they found out was that the bus system in this particular parish and area in New Orleans had hours that were not serving their workers well, so they could not get to work on time and at a certain time.
(01:10:20):
And what happened was is that health system as a major employer used its civic empower and capital to go to the public transit system and make a workforce argument for expanding bus lines sounds really simple, was probably complicated, but it took an employer making a workforce argument for why changing that bus line became really important. And I think that's actually instructive because right now the workforce system is out of a lot of policy conversations, whether that's about childcare, whether that's about transportation, whether it's about housing. And the more I think that the workforce system can get involved in those policy conversations and be able to articulate why solving those issues actually helps workers and a local economy, I think that can actually help move the needle to figuring out solutions that are not programmatic, but are actually about addressing the underlying system problem for why that barrier exists in the first place.
Tim Bartik (01:11:28):
I guess I would just add that although I agree that if you can develop a mass transit or a more systemic solution, that's great. However, large parts of the US, does not really have the population density that can necessarily support that. And certainly in those areas, yes, you need to get people reliable used cars or need to figure or figure out some kind of shared transportation option. People can carpooling or whatever. So we do need to think creatively the US whether for a good or ill, a lot of it is not set up well to run mass transit efficiently.
Speaker 9 (01:12:12):

Good morning, my name is Eric Johnson with the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority. So to your point, I just want to point out a program we have called Commuter Advantage, which is a pre-tax pay system that employees employers use to help their workers pay for public transit service. So that's something you might want to look up.
(01:12:33):
Also, I encourage you to look at the American Public Transit Associations programs on micro transit, which are more adept to dealing with the situation you have where mass transit can't necessarily go that far and deal with an infrastructure that they just aren't built to deal with. We just don't have the capacity to go that far. But I encourage you to look at micro transit and some of the solutions that they have regarding that because there's collaborations that are being used with private sector providers as well.
(01:13:05):
I had two questions. The first question is if one in four Americans live in an area of distressed labor markets, what are potential impacts for population decline, as you just discussed with population density? And then the second question is there more data or information regarding the success of workforce training participants by age or circumstance of participation like career transition out of school, young adult or reentry?
Tim Bartik (01:13:36):
Well, I guess I'll try to address the first one. I mean, certainly one thing that does happen in distressed places both rural and urban is people do leave. So rural areas have lost population and, Flint, Michigan for example, has lost population people. Somebody say, "why don't people leave?" Well, the answer is actually people do leave. Unfortunately, that doesn't help those left behind because sometimes people have a model of the world where if we could just get people in these distressed places to move to the booming places, that would solve all the problems. Well, when people leave at distress place that population outflow. For every X percent of people who leave at distress place jobs in the distress place go down by X percent. So essentially the employment rates unchanged and among the people left behind it might even get worse. Why does that occur? Because when people move out of an area that eliminates demand, all of a sudden restaurants close down.
(01:14:38):
So jobs are lost in the local retail sector. It also depresses the local housing market. Housing values drop, it affects people's wealth. That affects what people buy. You're also tending to remove the younger people who tend to be the more entrepreneurial from the economy. Older people stick around. So basically the notion that population decline is part of the problem of distressed place, it is in no way a solution to the problem of distressed places. I suppose you can theorize some authoritarian government that would force everyone in Flint, Michigan to move out everyone there or force everyone really. But that's not realistic, it's not humane. We have to come up with realistic policy to say, look, people have attachments to places they value it. We need to try to deal with that and try to help those places compete. But the second question that I think someone.
Harry Holzer (01:15:30):
So I'll take a crack at the second question. If you look at the standard data sources that we have relied on traditionally, they don't get to the kind of cuts in the data that have been suggested. They don't have the kind of granularity you really need. The optimism is that there's a lot of ferment going on in the data world right now. A lot of efforts, first of all to make administrative data a lot more available. And when you're using administrative data, you can link across these

different systems to try to make those data sets more illuminating to get to certain parts of the population like returning citizens and other groups. There's a lot of, I think NASWA, the National Association of State Workforce Agencies is doing a very nice job, often at the state and regional level to try to improve the availability of data to try to provide these linkages that don't exist. So I'm hopeful that the data will get better and of course other advances like big data, open up all kinds of new possibilities in that area as well.
Tameshia Mansfield (01:16:25):
Yeah, and I would also say, I mean workforce programs have a ton of data. I mean, you ask most workforce boards and they are swimming in data. Do they know what to do with it? Do they know how to cut it? Do they have the systems in place to be able to do that? Not necessarily. So I think part of it, and that's why part of one of the things that we say around what makes a future focused workforce board is around embracing technology and being data obsessed is like how do you introduce new technology tools and AI tools and things like that that can help systems make sense of the data that they already have? We had a project called Outcomes for Opportunities where we work with about six workforce boards across the country to take their existing compliance data and make it make sense.
(01:17:13):
And we were able to help them cut that data so they could see by demographic, by training program, by industry, by occupation, where people were going and what the outcomes were. So there is data, how do you unlock that data from a compliance perspective to an actual use and program improvement space?
Earl Buford (01:17:36):
We have time for one quick question.
Speaker 8 (01:17:38):
Great.
Earl Buford (01:17:39):
Young lady.
Speaker 14 (01:17:39):
Hi, how are you?
Speaker 15 (01:17:40):
Can you hear me? Hi, my name is Rashi Mahalha. Tameshia, Tim, Harry, thank you so much. Great. Very insightful. Right here, right over here. Back in the back. All the way in the back.
Tameshia Mansfield (01:17:50):
I'm just going to look out because.
Tim Bartik (01:17:50):
I can't really see it.
Speaker 15 (01:17:51):
Doesn't matter. Thank you so much. Really great presentation. My question has to do with economic cycles. Seems like the world in which we live, given the global interconnectedness of our economies and the susceptibility of whatever happens in Indonesia and UK affects local economies, there's a certain pace and cycle to it. And that cycle seems to be moving at a faster pace. And at the same time you have economic workforce, community development initiatives and programs and funding that has a different pace. There are guardrails that prevents those programs to react and behave and adapt to these economic cycles, and as we look forward, I imagine those cycles will just be moving at a faster pace, whereas our programs are not able to keep up with those fluctuations. So the question is, what guidance, thoughts, ideas would you

have in terms of how we address that, whether it's a federal, state, local philanthropic funders, and how do we influence that conversation? Thank you.

Harry Holzer (01:19:04):

I'll take a first crack at that. I mean, I think even besides the cycles you mentioned, there's all kinds of the world changes. Automation is going to change a lot of the jobs and what looks like a good job today and where there's system set up to train for that good job tomorrow could be automated and the people whom we've invested in training for that job might need to get something else.

(01:19:25):

So that dynamism in the world is likely going to increase. And it's problem for people like us because we like to do these careful evaluations, these RCTs that take years and years and years, my time, you figure out what works. It's at risk of becoming obsolete again. So I think we do have to work harder at first of all making sure that employers are communicated to the training providers, how they view the nature of their jobs changing in the near future. And if a set of jobs look like they're going to get automated or offshore or something like that, that information has to come out. And then we do need more responsiveness from the institutions to more dynamism. It's easy. And again, a lot of the public institutions move at a slow pace. It's a challenge.

Earl Buford (01:20:13):

And I apologize to the other audience members. This clock is staring at me. It says four minutes, so I apologize, we won't get your questions. I want to end with one minute each, your optimism about workforce development moving forward. So I'll start with Tameshia and move over.

Tameshia Mansfield (01:20:30):

So if I did not have optimism, I probably would not do this job. I don't believe in spinning my wheels in mud for no reason. So where I see opportunity for optimism, I mean, one I think it's both optimism and caution. So I think that with all of the money that's on the street right now related to all of the federal investment, I think that is actually a real opportunity to make sure that those dollars are spent in service of the initial aim of how they were supposed to be spent. And I think that I talked to enough people in the system who know that things need to be different.

(01:21:12):

And I think for me, coming off of the Horizon summit last week, there's enough people across the ecosystem who really want to try new and different things. And actually it's that energy and that resistance to the status quo. That actually is a big piece of what gives me hope. I think people are itching for action to get at what you said, that we just can't kind of sit and study our way through things, but we have to actually be bold and be willing to experiment. And I see enough people in these spaces on the ground, whether that's workers in communities or ecosystem leaders who actually are trying and wanting and be nimble to do new things. So that actually it's the people that give me hope.

Earl Buford (01:21:53):

That's awesome. Thank you. Tim. Please.

Tim Bartik (01:21:55):

I guess I would say, okay, you want me to end on optimism, which I will, I promise. But I'll start out with pessimism. Just as contrast. I'm not sure I'm tremendously optimistic about federal government long-term being really what it needs to be in this area. Harry talked about the lack of funding for job training in the US, which is ridiculous. It's gone on for years. I don't want to get too much of the politics to this, but with the federal gridlock and everything else, it is very, very hard to do things at a large scale with the flexibility and the way they should be done. I do think

that there's potential more than people realize for state governments being very creative in this space. So there's nothing really prevent, I mean California and New York for example, are supposedly very progressive states. They actually have a lot of resources. They also, for example, I'm interested in distressed places in the problems and trying to solve those problems.
(01:22:58):
California has huge number of distressed places when you get outside of the coastal cities and you go inland a little bit. I mean both rural and urban, very, very low employment rate places. Why isn't California doing more in that area? They could, and I think in fact they may do more in the future. Similarly, New York. New York does a lot of subsidies for real estate investment. New York City, they do a little bit in upstate New York. There's been a few initiatives, but frankly it's kind of small potatoes compared to what they do in New York City. If they just open up their housing and zoning codes a little bit in New York City, they could take some of the money they're currently using to subsidized real estate investment in New York City, move it upstate, put in some workforce economic development efforts that be far more productive. So I'm optimistic that the states need not be gridlock long-term and that we can really get some real action at the state level if we lobby them properly.
Earl Buford (01:23:50):
Thank you, Tim. Harry.
Harry Holzer (01:23:52):
I get more hopeful when I look at a whole range of innovations that are taking place on the ground. First of all, innovations in the data space that, and I have mentioned secondly, when you see Community Colleges figuring out all kinds of new ways of engaging with their regional industries and regional employers and new partnerships for work-based learning, for curriculum development, things like that. I get encouraged when I see these really great sector programs, sectoral programs like Per Scholas in Europe and WTRP, creating partnerships with a whole broader range of workforce institutions and to try to see can you take the essence of their model and plug it into a different context to see if you can really start to scale those really, really successful programs. And lastly, we've talked about technology and technology in the data sense. It's important. Technology is going to play an increasingly important role in the training itself.
(01:24:52):
Now, our experience during the pandemic with online education was not great. It's not for everybody. It's got to be done the right way. On the other hand, there's a lot of programs. Community Colleges sometimes had decent experiences with the online education. What you really need is the optimal mix of online and human touch. But there's intelligent tutoring systems being developed, this and this is the upside of artificial intelligence where it can be built into the training, into the tutoring, the mentoring, et cetera. So I'm hopeful when I see all those informations, we have to work hard to see exactly what works and what doesn't. But those are the things that gives me most hope.
Earl Buford (01:25:30):
That's, thank you for ending that way. A couple quick things and then we are close out. The common theme I heard today was really about alignment. Employers, their industry association chambers, working with colleges, university, every level, and how do those two work very closely with workforce systems and practitioners and really start to align those pieces to make the work that you all do in the field much easier on behalf of learners and workers, et cetera. So that's what I heard today. I appreciate the perspectives, appreciate your time. Thank you all for the questions and for listening.

(01:26:10):
With that, I'm going to say two things. One, it is now time for those that are here in person to head to the breakout sessions directly across the hall, which will begin promptly at 10:35 AM. For those participating virtually, please plan on coming back at 12:20 PM for the remaining plenary recession and close remarks. So with that, please thank the panelists. Thank you all for getting up early this morning and joining us. Bye-bye.