

THE CATAPULT PAPERS



ESSAYS ON THE FUTURE OF WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

ESSAY FOUR:

Tapping the Untapped Workforce:
How Next Generation Workforce Development Organizations
Can Help Employers Recruit and Retain the Talent They Need

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The Boston Foundation, Greater Boston's community foundation, brings people and resources together to solve Boston's big problems. Established in 1915, it is one of the largest community foundations in the nation—with net assets of \$1.3 billion. In 2018, the Foundation and its donors paid \$129 million in grants to nonprofit organizations. The Foundation works in close partnership with its donors, with more than 1,000 separate charitable funds established for the general benefit of the community or for special purposes. It also serves as a major civic leader, think tank and advocacy organization, commissioning research into the most critical issues of our time and helping to shape public policy designed to advance opportunity for everyone in Greater Boston. The Philanthropic Initiative (TPI), a consulting unit of the Foundation, designs and implements customized philanthropic strategies for families, foundations and corporations around the globe.

About JVS

Jewish Vocational Service in Boston (JVS) was founded in 1938 during the Great Depression to assist Jewish immigrants struggling to enter the American workforce and support their families. Today, JVS is among the oldest and largest providers of adult education and workforce development services in Greater Boston, serving a diverse clientele representing over 90 nations and speaking 50 languages, and helping people secure financial independence through educational and employment services. With over 75 years of demonstrated excellence in workforce development, JVS has a reputation for continuous innovation, building person-centered and performance-based models to improve outcomes and increase programmatic effectiveness.

About Catapult

Catapult is a project of the Boston Foundation in partnership with SkillWorks, a nationally recognized workforce funder collaborative within the Foundation. Catapult invests in the exponential growth of Greater Boston's most effective, market-driven training and education organizations in partnership with the region's most savvy businesses. Its goal is to help build a robust, "next generation" workforce development solution that can launch our untapped talent into new opportunities at a much faster, more sustained rate while also supporting and leveraging the long-term success of individuals and their employers via advancement, retention and strong employment practices. Catapult is driven by the knowledge that our current labor market's unprecedented tension between the high demand to fill jobs and the low supply of workers ready to fill those jobs requires bold new approaches.

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INTRODUCTION

THIS ESSAY CALLS FOR AND DESCRIBES HOW NEXT GENERATION WORKFORCE ORGANIZATIONS CAN HELP EMPLOYERS ACCESS THE "UNTAPPED WORKFORCE" IN OUR CURRENT TIGHT LABOR MARKET CONDITIONS.

Jewish Vocational Service (JVS) is an 80-year-old workforce intermediary with roots in the Depression-era period of Jewish immigration and anti-Semitic employment discrimination. Since 1938, the organization has been working to enhance the education and skills of working-age adults—who often have limited English language, skills and income—and meeting the hiring, retention and talent development needs of employers. Over the past several decades, the organization has grown to be one of the largest and most important providers of high-quality workforce development services in the region.

As the Boston regional economy explodes and the labor market tightens, JVS is growing rapidly, refining its workforce development model to more effectively meet the needs of employers and employees. The strategies, organizational culture and specific practices we have adopted, and continue to refine, represent what we believe are the core features of “Next Generation” workforce development organizations that can effectively meet the challenges and opportunities of our new economy, and can offer a road map for other organizations seeking to play this role in their regions.

This essay, the fourth of four, calls for and describes how Next Generation workforce organizations can help employers access the “untapped workforce” in our current tight labor market conditions. The essay is based on the innovative and field-proven practices of JVS Boston’s transition to a “Next Gen” workforce organization, which is rooted in decades of field research, experimentation, evaluation, failure and success. This essay also draws on the experiences of Resilient Coders, a workforce intermediary that is helping to connect young adults of color to coding opportunities in the Boston-area technology sector. These reflections will allow us and others to sharpen our strategies and practices in response to unprecedented economic growth and income inequality.

HELP WANTED

We are experiencing the tightest job market in decades. Many major metropolitan areas, Boston included, have unemployment rates under 3.5 percent, becoming what many economists consider full-employment economies. Employers are feeling the pressure and are having increasing difficulty recruiting, hiring and retaining talent. While still largely anecdotal, Boston-area employers are experiencing business growth constraints driven by hiring challenges, and new store locations, restaurants and even research labs are being delayed because of limited hiring options.

While many employers are responding to these labor market conditions simply by poaching from each other, some are beginning to improve job quality (*see Catapult Paper #3*) and change their recruitment and hiring practices, including looking to organizations like workforce intermediaries to assist them. In some cases employers have responded by adjusting their hiring requirements and expanding the pool of people they will consider to fill openings. Recent research suggests that employers are reducing their reliance on credentials and even moving away from using credentials as proxies for skills.¹

The current tight job market is generating improvements for workers and job seekers in two ways. Job quality is increasing, and job seekers who might not have been previously considered for open positions—what we’re calling the untapped workforce—are now being considered. This dynamic presents an enormous opportunity for Next Gen workforce organizations and the individuals they serve.

The Untapped Workforce

In a near full-employment labor market, who makes up the untapped workforce? Our definition of the untapped workforce includes individuals who are not

working and those who are substantially underemployed. The untapped workforce includes many individuals and populations that employers have ignored, particularly in periods of higher unemployment, as well as individuals who have opted out of the workforce. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the underemployed segment of the untapped workforce has similar characteristics to the unemployed segment.

According to one recent data analysis by the Brookings Institute, “The adult out-of-work population (age 25–64) is disproportionately composed of people with low levels of education, limited work experience, limited English proficiency, and other well-recognized barriers to employment.”² While solid data is surprisingly scant, evidence suggests that the untapped workforce consists significantly of four major groups:

- Adults with limited English language ability and education (immigrants). Of the total adult out-of-work population, Brookings estimates that the largest grouping, or 38 percent of the total, are English language learners or immigrants.
- Young adults with minimal prior job experience. Numerous labor market analyses have highlighted the historically low labor market attachment levels of young adults, particularly those between 16 and 24 years of age, both during the Great Recession, and during the recovery.³ The causes of this phenomenon are hotly debated, but there is little doubt that young adults, whom some call “opportunity youth,” are a significant component of the untapped workforce.
- Individuals with disabilities. Unemployment among individuals with disabilities is historically more than double unemployment among the general population.

- ▶ Long-term unemployed adults. This group can overlap with some of the above but includes adults who have experienced chronic unemployment due to barriers such as criminal justice experience, drug dependencies, having young dependents, etc.

This paper highlights the strategies and operational elements that Next Gen workforce organizations will need to adopt in order to successfully take advantage of this labor market both for their clients that make up the untapped workforce and their employer partners. It also examines in more detail the strategies and operational elements they will need to adopt in order to successfully tap two of the largest components of the untapped workforce: immigrants and young adults.

In our hyper-competitive hiring environment, Next Gen workforce organizations have the opportunity to leverage their connections with the workforce that employers and traditional staffing organizations don't typically have and connect this untapped potential talent pool with increasingly desperate employers. If Next Gen workforce organizations are to be successful in taking advantage of this market environment and securing their connections to the untapped workforce they will need to adopt five key strategies and operational elements:

1. Adopt a "talent pipeline" strategy and culture.
2. Effectively recruit and screen promising candidates from key segments of the untapped workforce in close cooperation with employer partners.
3. Work closely with employer partners to identify specific job skills and competencies required of new hires in place of proxy certifications and traditionally stated job requirements.

4. Create training, placement and retention models that can effectively and efficiently prepare recruits from the untapped workforce to succeed in their new positions.
5. Make "bad" jobs better jobs.

I. ADOPT A "TALENT PIPELINE" STRATEGY AND CULTURE

Traditional workforce development practice is dominated by two approaches that are baked into the culture to the detriment of effectively tapping the untapped workforce. First, traditional workforce development too often begins with a liability perspective relative to clients and a charity perspective relative to employer partners. This perspective, reflected in language, marketing materials and deeply held staff beliefs, presumes that clients face major barriers to employment success that need to be overcome and that employers should sympathetically assist in that process by hiring clients. Next Gen workforce organizations need to change this perspective so that they truly believe and clearly state the belief that their clients represent talent that employers desperately need in order to succeed in the marketplace.

Secondly, traditional workforce development puts the employer at the end of the process. Next Gen workforce organizations need to place employers at the beginning of the process. Traditional workforce development models recruit clients, provide some type of training, and then place graduates in jobs. A "talent pipeline" approach starts with the employer, who will help identify hard-to-fill positions, work closely with the organization to identify specific job skill requirements rather than proxy hiring screens (such as automatically requiring a bachelor's degree), help screen promising candidates, commit to hiring successful candidates or hire them during training,

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and work closely with the organization to implement effective retention strategies.

Perhaps most important, employer partners will need to pay for this service, because it is valuable, it requires financial resources, and payment will ensure full engagement and quality service delivery from all parties. JVS's recent experience suggests that if high quality services are provided, particularly in a labor market such as we have now, employers will pay for Next Gen workforce organizations to reach into the untapped workforce, screen candidates, prepare them, place them in open positions and support them after placement. (*See Catapult Paper #1 and Catapult Paper #3 for more detail*).

2. EFFECTIVELY RECRUIT AND SCREEN PROMISING CANDIDATES FROM THE UNTAPPED WORKFORCE

In this tight job market the most valuable asset that Next Gen workforce organizations have is their access to communities that make up the untapped workforce. During the recent recession and periods of softer job markets in general, employers found themselves awash in highly qualified and often over-qualified candidates, and traditional hiring patterns that favor white, more highly educated candidates dominated. In a tight job market, employers and traditional staffing organizations that don't have relationships

and networks in communities that make up the untapped workforce are unlikely to be able to establish those networks and relationships quickly, but Next Gen workforce organizations already have those connections and thus a huge opportunity, if they are able to leverage it well.

Effectively connecting with the untapped workforce requires Next Gen workforce organizations to adopt several key tactics. First, they need to be able to effectively and efficiently identify and engage clients that they already have some contact with. This may be more challenging than one might imagine. At JVS, we typically recruit for individual programs, and are not yet able to effectively recruit candidates who are not a good fit for one program but who may be a good fit for another. This internal inefficiency is the legacy of a siloed culture and inadequate technology, but it will have to change if we want to respond effectively to employer demand. This challenge is not uncommon, particularly for larger organizations.

Secondly, Next Gen workforce organizations will need to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their partnerships with organizations that have deep connections into communities that make up the untapped workforce. Typically, partnerships of this type rely on word of mouth, personal relationships, and primitive if any technology solutions. Several steps need to take place to improve these potential pipelines of talent.

Next Gen workforce organizations must make much more transparent their program requirements in order to meet employer partner specifications so that community based partners can match the right candidates with the right opportunity. Next Gen workforce organizations will need to improve systems for clear information flow and referrals, including using technology solutions to improve efficiency. In our experience, grass-roots community-

based organizations (CBO), which may have the best channels into untapped labor markets, often lack the sophisticated systems and staff capacity to effectively recruit, screen and refer appropriate candidates to a Next Gen workforce organization like JVS. Helping to build this capacity, paying for the referral service and holding the CBOs accountable for the results is critically important to achieving success. Investors, whether public or private, must be willing to spend the resources that are needed to create these effective partnerships and efficient pipelines of untapped talent.

3. WORK CLOSELY WITH EMPLOYER PARTNERS

In soft labor markets, employers and their human resource departments may focus as much on narrowing the pool of potential candidates as on finding the right talent to fill their openings. We know this from direct experience. During the Great Recession, new online candidate screening technologies exploded as employers were flooded with job applicants. Required credentials, often serving as proxies for required skills, proliferated.⁴ As the job market continues to tighten, employers are beginning to re-consider these approaches as increasing numbers of job openings remain unfilled for longer periods of time.

Next Gen workforce organizations are presented with an important opportunity in this environment, as employers are open to but struggle with how to effectively identify actual job skill requirements so that sufficient candidates can be recruited and trained. For Next Gen workforce development organizations to successfully meet employer hiring needs and tap the untapped workforce, they will have to apply their extensive experience understanding specific job requirements and translate those requirements into both candidate screening and training curriculum.

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The opportunities for this important work abound, and will likely continue to grow in the coming years. JVS has had several recent experiences in which employers have hired us to recruit and train employees for them and were willing to adjust some long-standing hiring requirements. In one case, a major hospital that experienced significant challenges recruiting for a position with relatively high English language competency requirements was willing to reduce the required English level when they were shown that the job did not actually require the level that was set. Once the actual job requirements were clearly understood and documented, through extensive job shadowing, JVS was able to use the information to develop an effective candidate recruitment profile and an appropriate training curriculum to maximize success in moving promising candidates to the required skill level in the available time and under the available budget.

In another case in which JVS is playing a contracted recruitment and training role, a major Boston employer was willing to change its current policy and consider hiring individuals who did not already have direct experience in their field, relying instead on demonstrated transferable skills. As in the first example, extensive job shadowing allowed us to understand and document the actual required job skills, which were then used both to identify candidates with transferable skills, and to develop an appropriate training curriculum.

This type of service, which has very high value both for employers and clients, is expensive

and requires experienced staff. Public and private investors who are seriously interested in leveraging this job market on behalf of the untapped workforce should commit to investing in this capacity for Next Gen workforce organizations.

4. CREATE EFFECTIVE TRAINING, PLACEMENT AND RETENTION MODELS

This fourth strategy is perhaps where traditional workforce development has the most experience and capacity, as the vast majority of the work in this field has concentrated on training and placement. However, in a tight job market, when Next Gen workforce organizations put employers at the front end in the Talent Pipeline model (*see Catapult Paper #3* for more detail), traditional training models will also need to change. First, Talent Pipeline training programs will need to be based on a careful and sophisticated analysis of job requirements and the technical and softer skills that are required for a candidate to be successful. This requires that Next Gen workforce staff spend significant time at the workplace, observing and talking with current employees and managerial staff, and fully understanding actual work processes. Employer partners will need to commit the time and attention to make this possible.

Secondly, effective programs may be even more effective if they are delivered on site at the employer location. This allows for real time interactions between students and current employees and supervisors, and makes it possible to introduce the third critical element of work experience. Effective training models should, whenever possible, incorporate a work experience element, whether an internship or a longer-term apprenticeship model, if financial resources allow it.⁵

Finally, effective programs should include both an instructional and job coaching/job development component. JVS typically pairs skills training students

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with a coach, who faces both the student and the employer, to effectively match the right individuals with the right job openings, and to be available for retention support after the initial hire. Post-placement retention services are critically important, as employers will want to measure both how quickly they fill open positions, and their retention rate, when they calculate the value of the service.

5. MAKE “BAD” JOBS BETTER JOBS

In a tight job market, perhaps the most effective way of tapping the untapped workforce is to improve the quality of jobs that are hard to fill (*see Catapult Paper #3*). Several barriers discourage potential workers from applying for jobs that do not make economic sense for them. With rising housing costs in major metropolitan areas like Boston, low-income individuals have been forced to live further away from the largest concentrations of jobs, making their commutes expensive and time consuming and impacting their job value calculus. The “cliff effect” that many public benefits like housing and child care subsidies pose to low-income individuals substantially impacts the job value calculus, since they may lose more money in benefits than they can gain in job earnings as their income rises.

The most obvious and immediately effective changes in job quality are for employers to raise wages, improve benefits and offer predictable and guaranteed schedules. As employers find it increasingly challenging to hire the employees they need, Next Gen workforce organizations have an important opportunity to help promote better job quality in order to draw on the untapped workforce and help fill hard-to-fill positions for their employer partners. JVS has successfully worked with several employers implementing our Talent Pipeline model to make improvements in wages, benefits and schedules in order to improve recruitment and hiring results.

Immigrants and Young Adults: Tapping the Largest Elements of the Untapped Workforce

LEVERAGING THE UNTAPPED IMMIGRANT WORKFORCE

Immigrant workers are the largest single component of the untapped workforce. Immigrants make up nearly 17 percent of the U.S. workforce. In some regions, as in Boston, that number is much higher, or nearly 30 percent of the workforce.⁶ Immigrant workers face similar barriers to other sub-segments of the untapped workforce, but they face some unique barriers as well. Obviously, English language proficiency is one major unique barrier. Nearly 40 percent of immigrants have low English language proficiency. Immigrants also tend to have lower than average educational attainment; 26 percent of immigrants nationwide have less than a high school diploma, compared with 5 percent of native-born workers. Twenty-one percent of immigrant workers have some postsecondary education compared with 36 percent of native-born workers, and often their postsecondary degrees are from their native country and have limited applicability in the U.S. job market.⁷

In some regions of the country with shrinking native-born birth rates, like New England, immigrants have been the only source of labor force growth over the past three decades. Population and labor market data, as well as personal experience in key sectors such as healthcare, hospitality and retail tell a clear story that employers are highly dependent upon immigrants to fill vacancies and this dependency is growing.

The unique and common barriers to job success for immigrants and their preponderance in the untapped labor force suggest several important strategies for Next Gen workforce development organizations. First and foremost, particularly in regions with a high percentage of immigrants in the workforce, Next Gen workforce organizations that are not already working with this population should seriously consider it. Those that are considering undertaking this work and those already working with immigrants will need to incorporate three important strategies and operational elements into their service delivery in order to be successful.

First, in keeping with the Talent Pipeline framework, Next Gen workforce development organizations should fully understand and leverage the multilingual aptitude of many immigrants and know how valuable that is in the marketplace. In JVS's Retail Banking training program, for example, the typical student speaks two languages, and many speak three or more languages. Given the enormous diversity of retail banking customers, our graduates are very attractive to employers, and this asset is highlighted and marketed to employer partners.

Secondly, English language speaking and writing skills should be fully integrated into job-specific skills training programs and other employment services. For too long, due largely to siloed federal funding streams, English language services (ESOL) have been

delivered separately from employment services. This is in spite of the data that clearly demonstrates that most ESOL students want to improve their job and earnings prospects and that employers require some level of English language proficiency.

This integration should take place on multiple levels. Curricula should fully integrate English language learning with general and specific job skills, so that the English that students are learning is contextualized with general employability skills and draws from specific industry materials and language when focusing on specific job skills. Services should be fully integrated as well, so that English language learners have access to individualized coaching, in which the coaches face the student and prepare them for securing a job, and face the employer and act in a staffing role.

Finally, Next Gen workforce organizations need to understand and deliver services that recognize that not all immigrants are the same. The preponderance of traditional workforce development services for immigrants tends to focus on lower-level service jobs. Yet, a significant percentage of immigrant workers arrive in the U.S. with extensive work experience and education from their native country. The immigrant workforce ranges in skill level from very low (no English language competency and native language illiteracy) to very high (advanced degrees from the native country).

Next Gen workforce organizations should aspire to offer a continuum of services that “ladder up” and provide education and skills development and employment in lower-skill service sector positions up to education and skills development for those that can attain “knowledge economy” positions, but are likely now underemployed in the service sector. Services should be structured so that immigrant students can start as high as is practical and realistically attainable

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and have the opportunity to engage in higher level services as they are able in order to move into higher quality jobs and greater earnings.

At JVS, we offer four tiers of progressively higher level education and training services for our immigrant clients: English for Employment, which focuses on a first job for a new arrival; English for Advancement, which helps immigrants with some U.S. work experience move into higher quality jobs; Vocational English, which integrates English language skills with job-specific training and certifications; and Bridges to College, which prepares more highly educated or experienced immigrants for jobs in STEM and other professional fields. With this type of approach, Next Gen workforce organizations will also be much more likely to meet the multiple requirements of their employer partners.

LEVERAGING THE UNTAPPED YOUNG ADULT WORKFORCE

When we first enter the job market, we are primarily sorted based on our education level. Which degrees have we obtained? From which schools? What were our grades? And yet, among people between ages 18 and 24, 7 percent have not completed high school, 22 percent only have a high school diploma, and 11 percent have some college experience but no degree. Altogether, that means 40 percent of young people are not in school and do not have a college degree—which is too significant a portion of young adults with little-to-no access to good jobs. Indeed, among 23- and 24-year-olds with a high-school diploma or less,

only 60 percent are employed. And the trend is only increasing, as “jobs requiring a graduate degree are expected to grow twice as fast as those requiring only a high school diploma or less.”⁸

Two solutions present themselves. First, increase access to and success in postsecondary education. Second, create alternative pathways to employment. Boston-based Resilient Coders, which trains young people of color as software engineers, decided to follow the second path, believing college completion in itself fails to appropriately address the racial wealth gap. For even if black and Latino students graduated from college at the same rate as white students, the median wealth gap would be reduced by only 1–3 percent.⁹

Resilient Coders also believes our education system tends to rely too strongly on testing and fails to account for the tacit advantages granted those who already hold privilege. These practices, which align along class, gender and racial lines, carry into the labor market. When only 60 percent of young adults succeed within our current system, it becomes essential to focus on how to serve the remaining 40 percent. Central to the work of Next Gen workforce organizations serving young adults is this core question: How can we assist employers in hiring for potential rather than pedigree? We believe the answer is by developing strategies to detect potential, communicate it to employers, and then to help employers activate that potential.

Identifying potential requires that we understand and remove barriers faced by young adults, and that we create an environment that brings to light their often overlooked talents. At a time when academic success is increasingly correlated with affluence rather than ability, organizations that propose alternative pipelines to employment must overhaul the way they assess talent and skills in the populations they serve.¹⁰

CENTRAL TO THE WORK OF NEXT GEN WORKFORCE ORGANIZATIONS SERVING YOUNG ADULTS IS THIS CORE QUESTION: HOW CAN WE ASSIST EMPLOYERS IN HIRING FOR POTENTIAL RATHER THAN PEDIGREE?

For example, Next Gen workforce organizations should re-evaluate their overreliance on testing as a way to determine ability, given the ever mounting evidence that tests tend to penalize women and racial minorities.¹¹ Instead, we must develop a deep understanding of the aptitudes necessary to be successful in a particular field—and then recruit and train for those aptitudes.

For example, Resilient Coders has found that for software engineers the capacity for quick and consistent learning is crucial in an industry where the technology is constantly evolving. This is why Resilient Coders’ intensive coding “bootcamps” do not test students on how well they have retained the content of lessons. Instead they evaluate the students’ capacity to deliver projects that integrate new concepts, frameworks and knowledge throughout the program. In addition, Resilient Coders couples new quality-assessment techniques with barrier-removal strategies, such as adequate stipends that allow low-income young adults to fully immerse themselves in their learning, as well as strong partnerships with community based organizations to provide efficient wraparound services.

Even after generating a qualified talent pool, the challenge remains to communicate graduates’ potential to employers whose traditional hiring and on-boarding processes are still geared toward attracting, evaluating and grooming talent from

university-to-employment pipelines. The role of Next Gen workforce development organizations here is twofold: First, to articulate a new narrative about young people, shifting from charity to investment, from risk to promise. Resilient Coders graduates have not simply completed a 14-week bootcamp; instead, we emphasize how much they were able to learn in such a short amount of time. Employers are presented with the following insight: If Resilient Coders' students can grow this much in 14 weeks, imagine where they will be in a year.

Second, at a time when human capital represents a significant competitive advantage in business, grooming a young and diverse pool of talent becomes a strategic imperative for companies.¹² This has introduced Resilient Coders to a new role: acting as expert consultants to companies on how to adapt their hiring practices to engage non-traditional talent pools. As noted earlier, a historically tight labor market now offers the ideal conditions to build that expertise and establish Next Gen workforce organizations as leaders in human capital development and retention, which in turn requires developing the capacity to analyze the employment needs of a company, its culture and the demands of the job.

Beyond placement, Next Gen workforce development organizations also have the responsibility to fully unlock the potential of their talent. Therefore, Resilient Coders does not separate hiring from on-boarding since so much of the learning happens on the job. While the 14-week bootcamp serves to demonstrate its graduates' potential, Resilient Coders' on-boarding services allow them to deliver on that promise. Historically, on-boarding services have taken the form of individual case management, where a staff member facilitates the development of the newly placed graduate on the job based on a learning plan that enunciates clear

milestones and is jointly designed with the graduate's manager. However, this approach is hard to scale.

For this reason, Resilient Coders is now piloting a hybrid online and in-person bootcamp model with employers who wish to hire and on-board more than five employees at a time. For two weeks, a few graduates of the Resilient Coders bootcamps undergo a training program that prepares them specifically for an entry-level job at a target company. The curriculum is developed in collaboration with the employer and delivered by its Managing Director of Engineering. This enables current and future employees to work side by side and for the employer to develop mentorship capabilities within its teams. Creating a model that accompanies graduates on the first few months in their new job while at the same time orienting employers in how best to develop young professionals of color—all in a sustainable manner—is crucial to building a complete employment pipeline.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Almost every day we see headlines that hint at economic storm clouds on the horizon. While many economists say that we are due for a correction and perhaps another recession is around the corner, it is difficult to know what lies ahead. Though most demographic data suggests that tight labor markets are in our future for some time to come, this super-charged job market will not last forever. Does that mean that the opportunity for Next Gen workforce organizations and untapped workers is a fleeting one? Absolutely not.

As reiterated in this series, a full employment economy is a rare moment that should not be wasted by Next Gen workforce organizations as they seek to refine and expand their role and open up opportunities for their clients. But, the more important opportunity is to use this moment to change the rules of the game, now and for the future. For far too long, workforce development has been tangential to the real action in the economy and job market. Millions of talented Americans, with the desire and need to advance their job, career and economic opportunities, have been either fully locked out, or dramatically underutilized.

Next Gen workforce organizations have the opportunity in this moment to prove their relevance by tapping the untapped workforce that employers need so desperately, by helping employers embrace new strategies to recruit, retain and advance workers, and by helping employers improve their overall competitiveness. If we can demonstrate this value now, we will be well positioned to have a meaningful and valued seat at the table for years to come. And, more importantly, if we can help change how employers think about and tap untapped workers, as talent that they can't succeed without, we can help move the needle on inequality and economic opportunity.

The challenge of drawing upon the untapped workforce also presents important public policy opportunities that Next Gen workforce organizations may want to consider engaging in, as they have a great deal to add to those debates. One obvious area is immigration policy. Upcoming federal actions such as ending Temporary Protected Status will significantly impact labor supply in key sectors such as healthcare, which rely on immigrant workers. Proposed changes in "Public Charge" regulations, designed to eliminate access to public benefits for documented immigrant workers, will likely further diminish the immigrant workforce. Proposed changes at the federal level for public benefit work requirements and at both the federal and state levels to address the "cliff effect" of public benefits could also significantly impact the untapped workforce.

These are audacious goals, and our window may be small. Next Gen workforce organizations should feel an acute sense of urgency, and a compulsion to step up our game.

Our partners and investors should feel the same sense of urgency. Investing in organizational capacity, developing new recruitment and training models, building effective pipelines from CBOs to Next Gen workforce organizations, and changing public policy will require substantial resources and long-term commitment from the philanthropic community and the public sector. Next Gen workforce organizations will require equity-like capital at a scale and level of "patience" appropriate to meet the challenge and need. The opportunity to make a real difference and the risks of missing the moment are too great to let it pass us by.

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