

Partnerships for Opening Doors

Idea Presentations

The Partnerships Summit concluded with presentations made to the Secretary of the Department of Labor (DOL) Tom Perez, Secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Julián Castro, and Executive Director of the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) Laura Zeilinger. The aim of the presentations was to provide concrete and actionable recommendations to leaders of these Federal agencies that would improve employment and earnings of homeless job-seekers. Eight recommendations were presented. The recommendations below reflect the community perspective and input from Summit participants. DOL, HUD, and USICH are reviewing the recommendations and, subject to allowable authority and resources, will implement and promote these policies and practices to states and communities.

1. Work Across System Silos to Support Access to Employment and Opportunity for Homeless Job-seekers

Multiple agencies and systems comprise the full spectrum of the United States' public workforce services and supports available to individuals and families in crisis; in addition to workforce system services administered under DOL, HUD's and the Department of Veteran Affairs' (VA) mainstream and targeted resources, employment and education services through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, SNAP Employment and Training, Community Development Block Grants, criminal justice and juvenile justice systems, foster care and Veteran employment services can be leveraged to fund and administer housing and employment services for individuals experiencing homelessness. Unified state planning as well as combined state planning among multiple public systems has the potential to bolster state and local efforts to serve a greater number of adults and youth with barriers to employment, efficiently use resources and align and layer employment programs and support services, foster the development of coordinated intake and referral processes, and meet several public system goals. The mandatory and optional partnerships outlined in WIOA can also create opportunities for multiple public systems to meet the common goals.

While progress at the Federal level has been made, the programs and systems that make up this broad array of programs under the umbrella of the public workforce system are not sufficiently coordinated to meet the diverse needs of people experiencing homelessness. No single Federal, state, or local agency or system has the capacity, knowledge, or resources to increase economic opportunity for jobseekers experiencing homelessness on its own. However, Federal systems can and should take steps to coordinate systems in order to ensure that individuals experiencing homelessness access and maintain permanent housing while also receiving supportive services – including employment services – to be successful.

RECOMMENDATION:

In order to leverage all available mainstream and targeted Federal resources to prevent and end homelessness, we recommend that USICH, DOL, HUD, VA, the Departments of Health and Human Services, Education, and others work together to support a continuum of career pathways and supports for people experiencing homelessness, including but not limited to, ensuring that system and program performance measures are outcome-oriented, aligned when appropriate across multiple programs and systems, and focused on supportive services as an essential component of a career pathway continuum. We also recommend that funding within these agencies and others bridge silos to make it easier to serve job-seekers experiencing homelessness.

2. National Demonstration: Combine Rapid Re-housing Plus Employment

Program models combining rapid re-housing and employment interventions have shown promise in both stabilizing individuals in housing and creating pathways to employment. Indeed, if the investment in rapid re-housing is to succeed, individuals and families need to increase income to access and maintain permanent housing. The Student Family Support Services Initiative (SFSI) in Chicago provided intensive case management and housing assistance to families with children who were identified as residing in “doubled-up” living situations and considered to experience homelessness by Chicago Public Schools (CPS). One of the unique features of the project was the blending and take-up of Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program (HPRP) services with the city and state’s subsidized employment and transitional jobs programs, Put Illinois to Work and the Chicago Neighborhood JobStart program. Over 93 percent of heads of households used employment services, and nearly 40 percent participated in a subsidized or transitional employment program, which provided immediate earned income and real work experience with public, private, and non-profit employers. As of December 2010, participants had secured an estimated average annual income increase of around \$16,000 per year. In addition, the Gates Foundation is currently funding pilot interventions in Washington State focused on rapid re-housing and employment interventions.

RECOMMENDATION:

In order to promote adoption of rapid re-housing and employment, we recommend that HUD and DOL work together to spearhead a national demonstration project focused on combining rapid re-housing and employment interventions. We recommend that employment interventions such as transitional jobs, subsidized employment, IPS Supported Employment or others that blend wage-paid real work and experiential work and learning be prioritized in order to get much needed income into the hands of individuals and families and promote work-based skill building. We also recommend that philanthropic organizations participate in such projects to support the evaluation and technical assistance aspects of the demonstration.

3. Prioritize Culturally Sensitive Employment Services and Supports

Research demonstrates that issues of race, ethnicity and culture as well as socio-economic status and physical and mental health disabilities affect where job-seekers live, the schools they attended, which levels of academic and technical skill individuals attain, and other factors that influence competitiveness in the labor market. There is ample research demonstrating that employers, perceptions of race, ethnicity and culture influence decision-making regarding hiring, wages and earnings, retention and career advancement. Culturally competent workforce strategies have been designed and implemented in some targeted interventions, but more needs to be done to prioritize and advance interventions and strategies.

RECOMMENDATION:

We recommend that Federal systems prioritize and issue guidance and messaging to local grantees to infuse culturally sensitive practices into employment and training services.

4. Ensure Career Pathways Programs Include Rapid Attachment to Work and Onramps to Opportunity

The recent passage and signing of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) ushers in a new legislative framework to guide America’s public workforce system. WIOA prioritizes and acknowledges the need for workforce services and supports for adults and youth facing barriers to employment to a

greater degree than its predecessor, the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), and provides greater flexibility to implement promising practices for connecting chronically unemployed individuals to work. WIOA prioritizes the implementation of career pathways models, work-based learning models, and integration of contextualized education and training.

RECOMMENDATION:

We applaud the DOL's vision for prioritizing career pathways programs and services. In order to ensure that career pathways programs truly create pathways to good jobs for all workers, including people experiencing homelessness, we recommend that career pathways programs include strategies that create opportunities at the front end for lower-skilled, barriered job-seekers like transitional jobs, subsidized employment, social enterprise, and supported employment that offer wage-paid, real work opportunities for individuals to gain hands-on work experience while earning a paycheck to meet basic needs. We also recommend that the DOL prioritize blending contextualized education and training in career pathways to equip job-seekers with the education and math skills necessary to qualify for meaningful and sustainable jobs.

5. Understand and Address Safety Net Cliffs

Public benefits and income supports such as housing, child care, transportation, nutrition, cash assistance and other work supports decrease at different points as individuals and families' earnings increase. For individuals and families experiencing homelessness, this can create "cliffs" at points in time when earnings may be too high to allow them to access public benefits or income supports but fall short of allowing them to meet basic needs such as housing or food. Such cliffs can create disincentives to engaging in work opportunities and can also force low-income individuals to choose between basic needs such as paying the rent, buying groceries, or paying heat or cooling bills.

RECOMMENDATION:

We recommend that Federal agencies issue guidance and messaging on policies that states can take to decrease the cliff effect for individuals and families by changing the sliding scale and adopting earned income disregards.

6. Prioritize Serving Homeless Job-seekers with WIOA Governor's Discretionary Funds

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) allows the ability to reserve 15 percent of WIA funds for discretionary workforce investment activities. Allowable activities have been expanded to include incumbent-worker and customized training, sector strategies, career pathways, layoff aversion activities, employer engagement strategies, innovative services to individuals with barriers to employment, nontraditional employment programs, increased technology access, coordination with programs from other agencies (child welfare, economic development, Department of Agriculture, adult education and literacy, Corrections, financial literacy), labor market information, research/demonstration projects, implementing promising practices, performance incentive grants, adopting an economic self-sufficiency standard, developing common intake procedures, and technical assistance to local areas on pay-for-performance contracts.

RECOMMENDATION:

We recommend that the DOL issue guidance and messaging to states to utilize Governor’s Discretionary funds to support the implementation of employment interventions targeted at homeless jobseekers. We recommend that DOL and HUD issue a challenge grant to encourage states to fund projects using Emergency Shelter Grant funds and leveraging philanthropy to support evaluation and technical assistance.

7. Operate Within an Employer-Driven System

Employers are a central part of any effort to support the employment and earnings trajectory of individuals. That said, employers often do not have a good sense of the strengths or the needs of individuals experiencing homelessness.

RECOMMENDATION:

We recommend that DOL spearhead employer engagement and education efforts focused on illuminating the strengths and realities of individuals experiencing homelessness as well as the challenges these job-seekers face in getting and advancing in employment. We recommend these efforts be done in tandem with organizations with experience serving the employment needs of homeless job-seekers and individuals experiencing homelessness.

8. Incentivize Local Hiring of Homeless Job-seekers

Federal provisions such as the Davis-Bacon Act require Federal contractors to compensate workers equal to the prevailing local wages and fringe benefits for similar projects when performing work on Federally funded contracts. Contracts such as construction, alteration, or repair of public buildings or public works fall under these categories. Provisions such as this can “raise the floor” on earnings and benefits for workers in specific industries. Currently no provision exists for local hiring decisions pertaining to homeless job-seekers. Such a provision could pave the way to create greater opportunity for homeless job-seekers.

RECOMMENDATION:

We recommend that Federal agencies issue guidance and messaging to states and local jurisdictions to create incentives within public sector hiring contracts to hire certain percentage of employees who are or have experienced homelessness.