



Quality Workforce Partnerships

Strategies To Create a More Equitable Workforce

By Livia Lam and Karla Walter April 2020

Center for American Progress



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Introduction and summary

Americans face a host of challenges navigating their careers in the 21st century. Corporations increasingly eschew workforce investments that fostered economic stability in previous generations, failing to provide health and retirement benefits as well as on-the-job training. Meanwhile, global competition, app-based technology, and the potential for accelerated automation and the rise of artificial intelligence threaten workers' ability to stay in a single field over the course of their careers. Yet women and people of color face the greatest obstacles navigating the labor market, as steep gender and racial pay gaps as well as occupational segregation persist, making it difficult for them to find good jobs.

Policymakers, workforce intermediaries, employers, and worker advocates continue to debate how to correct existing labor market disparities and ensure that 21st century American workers are able to reach the middle class, successfully navigate their careers, and balance work with other responsibilities.¹ Advocates across industries and ideological spectrums point to high-quality training and a nimble workforce investment system as essential components in ensuring that all workers across gender and racial lines are prepared for emerging jobs. Yet today's public workforce system is ill-prepared to fill this role, and even in forward-looking conversations, the role of the workforce system is relegated to responding to the changing labor market rather than imagining a role for intermediaries in shaping the jobs of the future.

Policy proposals often lack details on how new investments in workforce development will differ from existing interventions that have failed to support equity or real advancement opportunities. Too often, job training programs put the onus on workers themselves to respond to the changing labor market and navigate the increasingly complex workforce system while ignoring the reality that the very training devoted to these fast-growing fields often results in low-paying jobs with poor working conditions.

Workers in many of the fastest-growing occupations in the United States earn poverty wages.² Meanwhile, corporations frequently classify workers in emerging fields such as ride-sharing as independent contractors. While many of these workers are likely misclassified, independent contractors are not covered by workplace standards laws—laws that, for example, ensure that workers are both paid the minimum wage and are safe while on the job and not discriminated against—as well as broader protections such as the Americans with Disabilities Act.³

Women and people of color account for a disproportionate share of workers in many of these low-wage occupations, and there is little guarantee that training opportunities in sectors with higher pay and better working conditions are accessible to workers across racial and gender lines. Racial and gender disparities exist in jobs, wages, benefits, and other measures of job quality.⁴

Moreover, training alone will never be enough to ensure that all U.S. workers are successful, and especially not sufficient to achieve gender and racial equality for women workers and workers of color. Data analysis from the Economic Policy Institute shows that no matter their education level, African American women are paid less than white men.⁵ More precisely, two-thirds of African American women have some amount of postsecondary education but are nonetheless paid 67 percent of white men's pay, on average.⁶ Yet the public workforce system—a network of training and employment services for workers and employers—is not even required to provide metrics that ensure that newly trained workers enter into family-supporting jobs. Assessing job quality would be a means to achieving racial and gender equity in the workplace.

In order to ensure that future jobs are good jobs with real pathways to economic mobility for all Americans, workforce intermediaries must not only react to changes in the market but also use their role to reshape labor markets to be more equitable for women and people of color. Indeed, a 2019 report from the Center for American Progress, “A Design for Workforce Equity: Workforce Redesign for Quality Training and Employment,” detailed essential policy reforms to achieve these goals.⁷

Elements of successful partnerships between workforce intermediaries and employers

- Workforce intermediaries connect workers to jobs and require adherence to job quality standards—including wage standards—in their engagement with employer partners, as well as adherence to other mechanisms to shape labor market conditions and raise standards in the workplace. Workers and their representatives have a role in designing training and job quality standards to meet their current needs and support ongoing career development.
- Workforce intermediaries intentionally build client-centered partnerships with employers that reshape industry practices based on the strengths of workers across racial and gender lines—as opposed to only responding to industry change.
- Workforce intermediaries consistently engage in partnership development with their employers by providing trainees personalized support and strategies that help strengthen networking and other skills required for reaching individual professional goals after program completion.

This report examines two job training approaches in fast-growing sectors: The Per Scholas model in the information technology (IT) sector and the SEIU 775 Training Partnership model in the home-care industry. Using a case-study approach, the authors conducted interviews with staff at both organizations to help examine how particular features of institutional partnerships with employers can facilitate a process for quality training and ensure that all workers have fair access and the support they need to achieve upward mobility and economic security.⁸ Taken together, these two programs provide an ecosystem model that workforce intermediaries such as labor-management training partnerships, community-based training providers, and the public workforce system can adopt. Indeed, by centralizing equity and investing in job quality, policymakers, employers, and worker advocates can ensure that investments in workforce development shape 21st century labor markets in ways that lift all working Americans.

Fostering social and economic equity: The Per Scholas model

Per Scholas is a national provider of free employment and training in the IT sector, emphasizing relationships through accountability to its students and employer partners. At a time when diversity, inclusion, and retention of women and people of color remain some of the biggest challenges facing the industry,⁹ Per Scholas has helped bring equity and innovation into the tech ecosystem.

Equity Gaps in the IT sector

For all of the economic hype that technology jobs bring, only a select few are benefiting from the so-called tech boom.¹⁰ When looking at workforce composition in the tech industry, its fortunes are unevenly distributed.¹¹ Representation of women, as well as Black and Latinx representation, remains especially poor.¹² And despite some recent improvements in diversity rates, the sector continues to struggle with gender and racial equity.¹³

For example, software developer jobs in the industry are among the fastest-growing occupations today.¹⁴ The average salary for software developers in 2017 was \$109,309, well above the average national salary of \$53,888.¹⁵ Yet white men are greatly overrepresented in this field: Of the 1.8 million workers employed as software developers, more than 80 percent are men and 54 percent are white.¹⁶

Even entry-level IT jobs tend to pay better than the average entry-level U.S. job. But similarly, the overall workforce overwhelmingly comprises white and male workers. For example, opportunity gaps exist among computer support specialists despite a faster-than-average job outlook and a higher-than-average entry-level annual salary of \$53,470 per year.¹⁷ Of the approximately 547,000 workers employed as computer support specialists, only about one-quarter are women. And in terms of racial distribution, Asian American and Pacific Islander workers make up just 12 percent of computer support specialists, while Black and Latinx workers combined account for approximately 11 percent of the workforce.¹⁸

While the effects of this lack of diversity are numerous and beyond the scope of this report, increasing job quality for women and people of color as a practice of fostering workforce equity through skills training is central in this report’s focus on the Per Scholas model.

A brief history of Per Scholas

With an original mission to close the digital divide, Per Scholas was founded in 1995 as a social venture that refurbished “end-of-life” computers and donated them back to schools in the Bronx, New York, as well as offered digital literacy classes to unemployed and underemployed residents living in the South Bronx.

By the early 2000s, the organization had fully pivoted to a technology training organization that created opportunities for communities previously overlooked by business. Per Scholas is now a premier technology and placement organization, and as such, its model has evolved from providing computer repair and maintenance services to filling staffing needs for a growing number of businesses in need of tech talent.

Now a provider of high-quality technology training and career development services in 12 metropolitan areas across the United States, Per Scholas is a proven means of improving the career trajectories of workers and meeting the needs of industry. It is able to provide training and employment services to individuals at no cost through financial support from foundation and corporate philanthropy, industry, and the government, as well as revenue from a customized training model that directly partners with employers to build training solutions matched to business needs. Research confirms the model’s success: Per Scholas has notably undergone two randomized controlled trials (RCTs), the first conducted by Public/Private Ventures in 2010¹⁹ and the second conducted by MDRC in 2016.²⁰ With a combined sample of 1,143 individuals, the two RCTs found that two to three years after graduating from Per Scholas training, individuals increased their annual earnings by \$4,000 to \$5,000 more than the control group—about a 30 percent increase. In a 2020 report, MDRC found increased average earnings in both follow-up years—2017 and 2018—reinforcing the body of evidence on the Per Scholas model’s effectiveness at increasing quality employment.²¹

Whereas the design of these evaluations was randomized at the individual level, this case study aims to showcase in an organizational context how the model fosters social and economic mobility through a focus on developing mutually beneficial relationships between Per Scholas and its employer clients.

Per Scholas fosters equity with business solutions

Although Per Scholas has phased out its computer recycling operation, the organization continues to innovate in practice, not only adjusting and adapting its approach to meet IT industry staffing needs based on both market trends and specific customization, but also providing women and people of color with access to high-quality certification training, job placement, and career development services in the technology sector.

Throughout its 25-year evolution, Per Scholas has launched multiple workforce initiatives aimed at fostering workforce equity, including efforts to advance gender parity in the tech sector by committing to training more women to work in the field.²² In addition to expanding its training for entry-level IT jobs to other cities, the Per Scholas training module now includes courses aimed at preparing students for midcareer technology jobs.

To date, Per Scholas has trained more than 10,000 individuals nationwide—90 percent of whom are people of color and one-third of whom are women. The program boasts a graduation rate of 85 percent, and of those who graduate, 80 percent attain employment, with 75 percent of those individuals staying employed for at least one year. Graduates' earnings have increased, nearly quadrupling after placement in IT jobs; after one year of employment, graduates saw their wages go up by 15 percent.²³

Per Scholas partnerships with major tech sector employers

Per Scholas has partnered with Barclays, Capital One, TEKsystems, and numerous other employers to help supply well-qualified workers with skills customized to fit partner needs.

- **Barclays:** The evolution of Per Scholas in sustaining robust relationships with employers is evidenced by its strong partnership with Barclays, with which it has launched and invested in cybersecurity training programs in New York City and Newark, New Jersey. Specifically, Barclays helped create the curriculum—and has even provided some instruction. As a result of this partnership, Barclays has hired 55 graduates to date through full-time employment, apprenticeship, and internship opportunities.
- **Capital One:** In the Washington, D.C., region, Capital One has made investments to support the building of its cybersecurity training facility and has even provided hands-on training at its Education Security Operations Center. While Capital One is not a hiring partner, its relationship with Per Scholas signals an investment that produces needed quality training in a growing field.
- **TEKsystems:** Another type of national partnership is Per Scholas' relationship with TEKsystems, a full-stack talent and technology provider that offers IT staffing solutions. At the beginning of 2019, TEKsystems had already hired more than 400 individuals from Per Scholas nationally. As part of the 2019 partnership agreement, Per Scholas has scaled training tracks across four markets tailored to meet the hiring demands of TEKsystems and its clients. Per Scholas develops types of training tracks specific to the employer partner, seeks the partner's input on curriculum, determines the location for training, calculates enrollment rates and hiring needs, and outlines pay structure.

The success of the Per Scholas model largely depends on its ability to build and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with employers. In particular, Per Scholas specifically devotes staff resources to cultivating partnerships with employers, developing an industry network, and identifying new markets for its training and employment services.

In doing so, the Per Scholas Business Solutions team engages in three equity-enhancing practices to help break down barriers to IT employment for women and people of color, helping them secure well-paying jobs. These practices include integrating job quality metrics to guide partnership engagement, embedding awareness and prioritization of workplace culture early into the training curricula, and investing in professional development to improve training.

Integrating job quality metrics to guide partnership engagement

To make sure these relationships stick, Per Scholas applies rules to supply students with a good job match. It also employs a robust team of Business Solutions staff who develop and manage corporate engagement and hiring, helping establish standards and expectations for workers and employers.

Specifically, Per Scholas requires employer partners to pay a minimum initial wage of \$18 per hour for occupations in its most entry-level tracks and a starting wage of \$21 per hour to \$25 per hour for its cyber or software engineering track. In addition, Business Solutions is structured so that each team and individual employee is required to meet a set of key performance indicators (KPIs), such as maintaining a job placement rate of 70 percent for its students within 120 days after graduation and placing 80 percent of all graduates in employment within six to nine months afterward.

Embedding awareness and prioritization of workplace culture early into the training curricula

The Per Scholas model engages students with employers early into the training module—as soon as three to four weeks after courses begin. Students gain experiences that help them develop a familiarity with and understanding of the norms, values, and beliefs of workplace culture. This mutually beneficial practice not only helps students but also provides a service to Per Scholas' employer partners. The reason for such early engagement is to help expose employers to the type of student development that is taking place, which may benefit employers by giving them meaningful contact with students throughout their learning process. In other words, the Per Scholas approach offers students a glimpse of what they can expect in the workplace after completing their training, while employers get a chance to engage with students earlier in the training module. Because employers come to know the students by name, these relationships add to the students' social capital and extend their social networks.

Investing in professional development to improve training

Per Scholas builds its capacity to mutually engage the employer by providing coaching to students during training and after graduation, including by helping students practice for job interviews as well as helping them problem-solve if they are experiencing challenges on the job. Here, the purpose of providing coaching for one to two years after students graduate from the program is to continue to develop graduates' leadership skills while they are active in the workforce. This is another example of the types of services that benefit alumni—but perhaps more importantly, it is a useful innovation for employers.

Continued coaching for alumni has been so successful that Per Scholas is developing an alumni leadership academy focused on building its employer partners' understanding of the uniqueness of the Per Scholas model, further developing these qualities rather than only focusing on increasing technical skills. Each of Per Scholas' 11 training sites operates using this model, and their onsite career coaches work closely with the Business Solutions teams to match students with jobs based on their technical and professional skills.

Per Scholas leverages mutual benefits to advance equity

By building business teams into the model, the development of employer relationships is guided by job quality metrics. Emphasizing workplace culture and providing further professional development efforts help sustain these strong partnerships. Together, these practices characterize a unique partnership model that aims to both reduce the employment risk that individuals take on when participating in job training and respond to employers' labor market needs.

For Per Scholas, it is important that employer partners not only feel invested in hiring but also deepen their engagement by helping the organization develop the actual training approach, including through curriculum development; engaging onsite visits; and employers' participation in the training process in the form of guest teaching, lunch and learns, mock interviews, and even hiring fairs. Over time, employer partners have come to serve on Per Scholas' local site advisory boards as well as its national board as a result of these deepening relationships.

These three strategic practices demonstrate how Per Scholas takes a more holistic, all-hands-on-deck approach with employer partners who are also invested. From C-suite executives to hiring managers who oversee the budget for their business operations, employer partners must be prepared to provide the necessary resources to help inform curriculum development, match training with actual hiring needs, and articulate a deep overall understanding of their own business goals to the training provider. Strong partnerships between the workforce intermediary and its employer partners—such as in the Per Scholas model—show that partnership performance increases accountability for generating good results and therefore adds value to the quality of the training program. For women and people of color, this means that quality partnerships lead to better training that is connected to good jobs.

Boosting job quality: The SEIU 775 Training Partnership model

The SEIU 775 Training Partnership—a partnership between Washington state, private sector employers, and Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 775—is improving job quality and care outcomes in the fast-growing home-care industry. Home-care workers—the majority of whom are women of color—are typically paid low wages. The SEIU 775 Training Partnership, however, prioritizes training to help make home care a destination career, working in tandem with policymakers to raise pay, improve health and safety conditions, provide health care, secure retirement and job-matching benefits, and increase standards across the home-care industry.

Caregiving work—and particularly home care—is one of the largest and fastest-growing fields in the U.S. economy.²⁴ While these jobs face little risk of being offshored or automated, they provide little opportunity for advancement. As a result, home-care workers are too often ignored in conversations on training and the future of work. Yet this innovative SEIU 775 training initiative is attracting thousands of well-qualified workers annually while raising standards across the state.

Home care is a high-skill, low-wage sector dominated by women and people of color

Home-care workers perform tasks that are essential to ensuring that aging clients and clients with disabilities can live independently in their communities. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics found that there were 3.3 million home health and personal care aides in 2018 and estimated that the number of jobs in the field would grow by 36 percent from 2018 to 2028.²⁵ The largest portion of this sector is made up of home-care workers.

The need for direct-care workers is growing as Baby Boomers age and they and Americans with disabilities are increasingly able to exercise their choice to receive care at home. The population of adults who are ages 65 and older is projected to

nearly double from 2016 to 2060,²⁶ and nearly 90 percent of Americans in this age category report that they want to age in their current home, according to a 2014 AARP survey.²⁷ Moreover, many of the 1 in 5 Americans who live with a disability rely on home care in order to live and work independently.²⁸

Yet despite this obvious demand for home care, the sector is experiencing a massive shortage of workers. As a result, more than 650,000 people with disabilities who qualify for Medicaid are stuck on waitlists to receive critical home- and community-based support services.²⁹ And because traditional health insurance and Medicare typically do not pay for long-term services and supports, only 30 percent of noninstitutionalized seniors who require long-term services receive paid care; the rest rely on unpaid family caregivers.³⁰ And while Medicaid does cover community-based care, Social Security Insurance limits eligibility to only Americans living in poverty who would have no means to pay for home-based care on their own.³¹ Research shows that in the next decade, as the Baby Boomer generation ages, the number of family caregivers available to provide unpaid care will fall sharply.³²

While rapidly increasing demand certainly contributes to caregiver shortfalls, the industry also has difficulty attracting and retaining qualified workers due to the difficulty of the work and abysmal wages. In 2017, national wages for home-care workers were \$11.52 per hour—and typically just \$16,200 annually due to part-time and unstable scheduling.³³ As a result, approximately half of all home-care workers rely on public assistance, with 1 in 5 living in poverty.³⁴

Home-care workers are predominately women and people of color: Nearly 90 percent are women, 28 percent are African American, and 23 percent are Hispanic or Latinx.³⁵ In addition, approximately one-third of home-care workers are immigrants, and the workforce is almost evenly split between workers who have a high school degree or less—54 percent—and those who have at least some college education—46 percent.³⁶

Although home-care work is typically low wage, it is high skilled. On a daily basis, based on their clients' individual needs, home-care workers perform physical labor—including personal hygiene care, moving and lifting, household cleaning, and meal preparation as well as higher-level critical thinking and interpersonal skills. This can include problem-solving to help shift client schedules to account for sudden illness, weather conditions, changing client preferences, and unexpected resource needs; conducting a range of informal to formal reporting tasks as well as acting as advocates with their clients by communicating their preferences to various

health care and support providers; and assisting clients in staying socially connected. Increasingly, home health aides work with clients with more complex needs, including dementia complications, behavioral health issues, and other physical health issues such as diabetes.

Policymakers at all levels of government must intervene to ensure that these jobs are structured in ways that raise standards for workers and clients and that meet rapidly increasing demand.

The SEIU 775 Training Partnership creates conditions for improving job quality

In order to stabilize the workforce and raise care standards, the SEIU 775 Training Partnership is structured as a labor-management partnership, an independent organization that the union and employers jointly control. Through this structure, the partners collaboratively design and manage workforce training, professional learning, and apprenticeship opportunities that improve standards and safety for workers and increase the quality of care provided to clients.³⁷

The SEIU 775 Training Partnership was established in 2010, after the Washington state legislature enacted comprehensive legislation to expand the state's long-term supports and services to meet the needs of all Washingtonians. These reforms included the creation of a task force charged with making occupational training recommendations as well as provisions to increase home-care workers' wages and benefits.³⁸

Pairing training with job quality standards to professionalize the labor market
The SEIU 775 Training Partnership structured training standards to improve recruitment, retention, and professionalization in the state's home-care industry. For these reasons, the partnership prioritizes training to help workers—84 percent of whom are women, 18 percent of whom are Asian /Pacific Islander, 9 percent of whom are Latinx, and 7 percent of whom are African American—who want to stay in the field, rather than programming to provide pathways to related occupations.³⁹

Home-care workers must complete 75 hours of training, pass the state's Department of Health exam, and comply with ongoing continuing education requirements in order to become certified to provide care.⁴⁰ The SEIU 775 Training Partnership trains about 50,000 workers annually—a level just below the number of students enrolled each year at the University of Washington.⁴¹ The training program has also

created opportunities for career progression within the field, including an advanced home-care aid specialist course with tracks focused on behavioral and holistic health; a registered apprenticeship program; and peer mentorship opportunities.⁴²

In order to achieve its goals of raising standards and professionalizing the industry, the training partnership functions within a larger ecosystem of policies that support home-care workers. Since 2001, the state has recognized the right of home-care workers who are paid through state Medicaid funds to organize into unions and collectively bargain, which helps ensure that training is linked to wage differentials that encourage and reward growth and expertise.⁴³ Additionally, collective bargaining ensures that workers have a voice in shaping the training to meet their needs; for example, workers employed by participating employers can attend training for free and receive pay while doing so, which allows these workers to focus on successfully completing the program.

In addition, the requirement that Medicaid-paid home-care workers become certified ensures that untrained workers cannot erode industry standards—and therefore helps attract more workers to the field since the training is helping raise standards throughout the industry. This sort of occupational credentialing has increasingly come under scrutiny. Among equity advocates in the public workforce space, there is growing concern that too many credential requirements do not translate to good jobs.⁴⁴ In addition, several research and advocacy groups are advancing reforms to limit the use of occupational certification and licensure—arguing that the barriers to entry created by these sorts of requirements should be employed only when consumer health and welfare benefits outweigh consumer costs.⁴⁵

Yet in the home-care industry, occupational certification plays a central role in stabilizing wages, improving outcomes for workers and, as a result, providing meaningful benefits to consumers. Moreover, since the certification was developed by workers and employers in partnership, the credentials reflect the genuine needs and expertise of the industry. For example, the SEIU 775 Training Partnership delivers its certificate training in 11 different languages and the certification test itself in 13. More broadly, research has shown that these sorts of licensures or certifications can ensure that workers earn higher wages and enjoy longer job tenure—and even help foster entrepreneurship.⁴⁶ At their best, they can reduce racial and gender wage gaps by helping signal high skill levels. A 2018 Brookings Institution paper found that occupational licensing provides a relatively small wage premium to white men—2 percent—when compared with women and people of color: 8 percent for Black men, about 11 percent for Hispanic men, 11 percent for white women, 6 percent for Black women, and 11 percent for Hispanic women.⁴⁷

Finally, the training partnership functions within the larger SEIU 775 Benefits Group, which provides additional benefits that help support workforce stability. This includes health and retirement benefits as well as occupation-specific benefits such as discounts on work shoes and Carina, an app-based hiring platform that matches workers with high-road employers.⁴⁸ While it would be difficult for a single employer to offer this large menu of benefits to its employees, the partnership leverages economies of scale to reduce costs and improve benefits and supports. Moreover, it offers benefits portability for workers who may frequently migrate between employers.

Prioritizing client control and quality of care

Washington's training and certification requirements for home-care workers have helped raise standards for workers while still affording clients sufficient control and independence to ensure that their specific needs are met. Although these workers are mainly paid through federal and state Medicaid funds, they are employed by clients who retain the ability to supervise, hire, and fire them. The partnership is successful, in large part, because it has raised care standards without limiting consumer control and therefore won the support of disability rights and worker advocates. Among states, Washington ranks highest in quality of long-term health care services and supports, according to a 2017 report from the AARP Public Policy Institute.⁴⁹

Similarly, California has experimented with advanced training models for home-care provision to ensure that workers in the industry receive specialized training to more fully integrate them with clients' care teams. The program—which provided 60 hours of advanced training for home-care workers employed by Medicaid recipients—included clients in the training and covered topics such as symptoms of common health conditions; health and medication adherence monitoring and communication; health coaching; and health system navigation. One study found that the vast majority of home-care workers and clients reported high levels of satisfaction with the training. Moreover, emergency room and hospitalization visits had declined by approximately 40 percent two years after the training.⁵⁰

These examples suggest that when employed within an ecosystem of policies that work to improve job standards, home-care workers' ability to obtain licensure or attain an educational credential serves as a job market signal for quality.

Centralizing worker outcomes through cooperative partnerships

By structuring training programs through joint labor-management partnerships, workforce advocates across the country have helped ensure that workers are empowered to design high-quality training to meet their needs. Indeed, studies confirm that

not only are unionized workers more likely to receive training but that training is also more often of high quality and connected to good jobs.⁵¹

Like the Washington state example, the California initiative discussed above provides training through a joint labor-management training partnership.

Moreover, a 2017 report from the Midwest Economic Policy Institute found that completion rates among construction apprentices trained through a joint labor-management partnership in Ohio were 21 percent higher than completion rates for those trained through nonunion programs.⁵² And a 2003 study examining five years of survey data found that unionized workers in Great Britain were not only more likely to get training and receive more days of training than nonunion workers but also had higher wage growth than those nonunion workers who received training.⁵³

This approach can be particularly powerful in raising standards and providing a voice to workers in industries dominated by women and workers of color. The SEIU 775 Training Partnership has been so successful that the state recently adopted a similar training partnership to improve the job standards and quality of state-supported child care. After the state enacted legislation to create an early care and education substitute pool, the state partnered with SEIU 925—another SEIU local representing 17,000 workers in education, local government, and non profits—to ensure that workers in the pool were well-qualified, offering training modules in English, Spanish, and Somali.⁵⁴ Moreover, cities and states are increasingly supporting the creation of labor-management partnerships in other fast-growing fields—such as health care and IT—with a specific focus on boosting equity and ensuring that workers from diverse backgrounds are connected to relevant jobs.⁵⁵

While executing these sorts of strategies is difficult and requires partnership with worker organizations, doing so can help increase job quality across some of the largest and fastest-growing sectors of the U.S. economy, support career advancement, and improve outcomes for consumers. Workforce advocates who want to ensure that equity and job quality are central to the future of work conversations must not only focus on ensuring that these workers are provided opportunities for career development that take them into higher-paying occupations but also support policies to ensure that work in caregiving professions and similarly fast-growing industries is good work.

Conclusion

Per Scholas and the SEIU 775 Training Partnership provide helpful lessons for workforce intermediaries seeking partnerships that foster equity and improve job quality. Both partnerships improve workplace conditions and fairness for women and people of color by implementing training designs that aim to meet the needs of all workers and employers. Furthermore, the partnership features between the workforce intermediary and its employer affirmatively mitigate unnecessary burdens linked to racial and gender bias against women, people of color, and other underrepresented voices. Put differently, these quality partnerships ensure all workers free job training and increase their earnings while continuing to provide them needed supports throughout their careers, which helps increase the representation of women and people of color in good jobs.

For policymakers, the two case studies showcase key design features and demonstrate how shared responsibilities between intermediaries and employers enable continuous learning and quality improvement are essential for improving workplace conditions and fostering equity in the labor market. These design features include:

- Application of business development practices
- Early integration of students into the work culture
- Provision of on-the-job coaching for graduates
- Joint cooperation between labor and employers
- Linking workforce strategies to policies to raise industry standards

Quality partnerships structured in this way not only help workers access a job but also help restructure the entire labor market so that jobs of the future are good jobs for all workers.

Together, these practices for establishing quality partnerships have implications for education and skills training policy: Ensuring workforce equity for women, people of color, and other underrepresented voices in a changing world of work would improve industry behavior to ensure high-quality jobs are equally available to all

workers. Placing greater emphasis on the role that quality partnerships play between intermediaries and employers by restructuring the public workforce system would not only help expand representation but would also provide policymakers with best practices to improve job quality and create a sustainable workforce equity structure.

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